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Boyfriend, formerly of South Bend, mom charged in beating of boy

Florida detective calls boy's injuries 'disturbing.'

By **JEFF PARROTT**
Tribune Staff Writer

A former South Bend man who has compiled a long criminal record but has not served much prison time over the years is being held in a Florida jail without bond for allegedly abusing his girlfriend's 12-year-old son.

Police say Thomas R. Betty recently beat the boy with his belt and fists severely enough to leave large bruises over all parts of his body. Prosecutors this week formally charged Betty, 54, with felony child abuse.

The boy told police that on March 9, a larger boy at school had threatened to beat him up and shoot him with a pellet gun at the bus stop. Fearing he would follow through, the 12-year-old had two friends stay at his house after school for protection, he told police.

One of the friends used the toilet without flushing it, and the other spilled a drink. When his mother, Amy Wojciechowski, arrived home later, she discovered he had had company when neither she nor Betty had been home, a violation of a house rule.

She told the boy that Betty would punish him when he arrived back in town four days later.

On March 13, when the boy came home from school, Betty took off his belt, dragged the boy into his bedroom and told him to climb onto the bed, the boy told police. He then hit him with his belt and fist for roughly 35 minutes, the boy told police.

At one point Betty left the room, saying, "I'm not through with you," and he returned 10 minutes later to resume the beating, the boy told police.

The following Monday at school, a student noticed the bruises and told a teacher, who filed a report with DCF, which called police.

The boy was treated and released at a hospital and then placed into protective custody with a foster family, said Port Orange Police Capt. Frank Surmaczewicz. Police arrested Betty on suspicion of child abuse, and Wojciechowski, 32, on suspicion of felony child neglect.



Betty

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"The amount of bruising this child had, it was definitely disturbing," said Surmaczewicz, who heads the department's detective unit. "Physically he's doing better. Mentally, I definitely don't know."

Betty was ordered held without bail, and Wojciechowski was released on \$20,000 bond. Police decided to arrest her because she was home during the alleged abuse and did not try to protect the boy.

Before taking the boy to the hospital, they showed Wojciechowski his injuries. She showed no emotion and denied knowing about them, police said. She said she had been sleeping all day Friday when the beating occurred and never went to check on him all weekend.

5 OWIs, no prison

The threesome lived in South Bend before moving to Florida late last year, police said.

Betty operates a Daytona-area business that contracts for the manufacture, sale and distribution of LED lighting.

Betty in the late-1990s operated the Lydick Hideout, a bar in Warren Township, in western St. Joseph County. He has multiple drug and alcohol convictions over the years but has received little prison time.

In St. Joseph County, he was convicted of misdemeanor operating while intoxicated in 1984 and 1987, and felony OWI three more times, in 1999, 2004 and December 2008.

He has received no prison time for any of the OWI convictions. In the most recent case, Superior Judge John Marnocha sentenced him to one year in the Indiana Department of Correction, but suspended it and ordered the time served on probation. Because Betty already had moved to Florida by the time of his sentencing Dec. 18, Marnocha allowed his probation to be transferred to Florida.

Because of the child abuse arrest, Indiana law would allow St. Joseph County Prosecutor Michael Dvorak to file a petition to revoke the probation, which could lead Marnocha to make Betty serve that suspended year in prison. But because he would be free in six months with good-time behavior, the cost to transport Betty back to South Bend probably would not be worth it, Dvorak said.

In 2000, a jury convicted Betty of felony promoting professional gambling, as part of then-Prosecutor Chris Toth's crackdown on video poker machines in bars. Marnocha fined him \$2,500 and sentenced him to a year of probation, along with 100 hours of community service.

Criminal history factor in Florida

Betty has twice gone to federal prison on drug convictions but won early release both times. In 1980, he received a two-year sentence in federal court here for conspiracy to distribute cocaine.

He was released after serving nine months at the low-security Federal Correctional Institution in Sandstone, Minn., a prison official there said.

In 1993, U.S. District Judge Robert L. Miller Jr., also in the South Bend federal court, sentenced Betty to four years in prison for possession of marijuana with intent to distribute. But he was released on parole 15 months later from the federal prison in Terre Haute, said a U.S. Bureau of Prisons spokeswoman.

But in Florida, Betty has landed in a state where criminal history weighs heavily in sentencing. Judges have less discretion than in Indiana and must base sentences on a point system comprising various factors.

Because of his December OWI conviction, Betty has been convicted of a crime within the past 10 years. So if Betty were to be convicted, the judge must factor in all of Betty's prior convictions and set a minimum sentence accordingly, unless he finds it should be reduced by mitigating factors, said Chris Kelly, assistant state attorney in Volusia County, Fla.

Under Florida law, child abuse is a third-degree felony punishable by up to five years in prison. Staff writer Jeff Parrott: jparrott@sbtinfo.com (574) 235-6320

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Joseph Barnes Jr. Posted: Apr 04 2009 8:59 am
Subject: Re: Boyfriend, formerly of South Bend ...

Joined: Apr 25 2008
Posts: 64

This man had no business beating a child. Do you all agree? This man is no example of a good role model. If anybody should have understanding and mercy about discipline is Tom Betty--maybe he should be beat in the exact manner is the boy was.
Such harsh discipline is nothing but mental illness. All it did was make the boy more harder and maybe lead him down the road to being a criminal. " Makes ya wanna throw up both ya hands and holla, what's go'in on?"

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Linda Dekka

Posted: Apr 04 2009 9:38 am
Subject: Re: Boyfriend, formerly of South Bend ...

Joined: Aug 14 2008
Posts: 64

Makes me want to kick his ***!! Explain why tax dollars get to be spent to housing this abuser?? That poor boy, couldnt even count on his own mother for protection. She deserves the same as Betty. I am trying to keep my language at a minimum... its really hard when you see a story like this. I am sorry I read the news, because this makes me THAT angry. No child deserves to be treated like this, and I hope beyond all hope that he gets EXACTLY what he deserves!!!
Grrrrrrr....

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bremenreader

Posted: Apr 04 2009 9:46 am
Subject: Re: Boyfriend, formerly of South Bend ...

Joined: Jan 07 2009
Posts: 8

This story makes me cry. I love all children so much and I know that there is abuse out there and it breaks my heart, especially the abusers who are never caught or punished.
I pray that this little boy will be ok. There is never any reason or excuse to harm a child in this manner. I hope and pray that he does not have to return to this dysfunctional mom and her boyfriend. I also pray that there is someone out there who will watch over him and be his protector and friend.

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Kevin Bradley

Posted: Apr 04 2009 10:49 am
Subject: Re: Boyfriend, formerly of South Bend ...

Joined: May 20 2008
Posts: 106

Oh God, what next in addition to pedophiles. I hope this 12 year old boy gets some good counseling and an understanding foster family. If his mother also took beatings, she too needs counseling but I also hope the mother sees some jail time for being an accomplice. Who sleeps all day and does not know what is going on with a boyfriend beating your son, unbelievable

Perhaps Indiana should review the system more, RIGHT NOW, and adopt Florida's point system. Betty's history makes me want to throw him in the mouth of an active volcano, so he can never harm another person. Is there anyone out there that children can trust in time of need.

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deanna miller

Posted: Apr 04 2009 11:22 am
Subject: Re: Boyfriend, formerly of South Bend ...

Joined: May 03 2008
Posts: 213

What mother could allow this to happen? He would go to sleep ONE more time!

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rednasor-werD

Posted: Apr 04 2009 12:05 pm
Subject: Re: Boyfriend, formerly of South Bend ...



Joined: Mar 10 2008
Posts: 452

I wish I could wipe the smirk off this evil man's ugly face. Stick him in a prison where they like rough barebacking.

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SunshineDayDream

Posted: Apr 04 2009 12:41 pm
Subject: Re: Boyfriend, formerly of South Bend ...

Joined: Sep 16 2008
Posts: 44

I hope the boy gets the help he needs, not only for the beatings, but for knowing his mother was there and did not save him, that has to be more of a nightmare. I hope the mother has to do time as well.
I hope Betty becomes great friends with Bubba and is traded for smokes constantly...

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Erin P

Posted: Apr 04 2009 12:47 pm
Subject: Re: Boyfriend, formerly of South Bend ...

Joined: Apr 02 2009
Posts: 3

lol @ barebacking... This sounds like another disgusting case of a neglectful pig of a mother being lazy, and her idiot boyfriend taking his "short"comings out on a

defenseless kid. A public caning might be in order.

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Maeve

Posted: Apr 04 2009 1:25 pm
Subject: Re: Boyfriend, formerly of South Bend ...

Joined: Nov 08 2008
Posts: 4

I think our legal system needs a serious overhaul here. 5 years? That's it? That's the MAXIMUM sentence for 3rd degree felony child abuse?! This man malevolently beat a child and the most he can get is 5 years?! We put people in jail for up to 15 years for being caught with a small bag of pot and these violent, vicious a**holes only get 5 lousy years. What is going on here?

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Linda Parent

Posted: Apr 04 2009 1:36 pm
Subject: Re: Boyfriend, formerly of South Bend ...

Joined: Jan 06 2008
Posts: 43

I have a son this same age and it just breaks my heart to read about what that man did to this boy. And for his mother to be there and allow it happen?? What a betrayal of the bond between a parent and child. If you can't depend on your mother (or father) to look out for you, who in the world can a child rely on?? Very sad. I hope this boy gets the help he needs to heal his emotional wounds and I hope both of these people go to prison for this crime. Children are undervalued in our society. It is time to send the message that society will not tolerate this type of behavior and if you abuse a child, you will suffer harsh penalties.

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Abby Wojciechowski

Posted: Apr 04 2009 1:40 pm
Subject: Re: Boyfriend, formerly of South Bend ...

Joined: Feb 06 2009
Posts: 1

Thank you all for your support! I am this child's maternal aunt. I am completely disgusted with my sister and DO NOT support her in ANY WAY!!!! We are desperately trying to get my nephew back to Indiana to live with his biological father, who his mother has moved him away from. Florida DFC will NOT release him until after her court date. I believe he will be reunited with his mother in Florida. Please express community support to get this child aware from an uncaring mother!!!

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blondieangel

Posted: Apr 04 2009 2:18 pm
Subject: Re: Boyfriend, formerly of South Bend ...

Joined: Jan 17 2009
Posts: 12

first of all no parent should allow another person (especially wone not married to the family) to punish a child four days after the incident. The mother should have punished the child the day the event occurred. Although if the mother would have talked to the child about why the events occurred...there shouldn't have been any punishment. if there are threats against my child and he/she felt more comfortable not being alone...you better believe that he/she would have friends over. Or to call an adult. I believe that the mother as well as the boyfriend should be punished. If the mother can't discipline the son the biological father should have a chance to be a father rather than the foster system. As long as he is up for a long haul...because once a child is abused it will be hard work to deal with the child. He will always be afraid to trust again. May God bless this child.

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Richard D Wood

Posted: Apr 04 2009 3:02 pm
Subject: Re: Boyfriend, formerly of South Bend ...

Joined: Mar 19 2009
Posts: 113

When Betty gets to the Bighouse I am sure Betty will get Wife status real fast. This man is nothing but a punk. Him and his worthless woman both need 20-40 years at least.Karma is a Bi**h.

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Karen White

Posted: Apr 04 2009 3:05 pm
Subject: Re: Boyfriend, formerly of South Bend ...

Joined: Jan 08 2008
Posts: 37

How sad that this boy could not count on talking about his fear of getting beat up to his mom! He violated a family rule by having two friends come over as protection - big deal! What else was he supposed to do if he can't count on a parent to protect him? Most parents would rather clean up a spill than find their child beat up! I hate to judge, but neither of these two even look remotely CLOSE to being competent parents! This poor kid is going to be afraid to trust anyone!

I hope this boy is placed with people who will love him enough to give him what he needs. I will light a candle for him! May both the mother and her boyfriend have the same thing done to them and may they NEVER see this boy again!

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Puddles

Posted: Apr 04 2009 3:50 pm
Subject: Re: Boyfriend, formerly of South Bend ...

Joined: Oct 07 2008

Posts: 606

My father did the same to me day after day, week after wee with nary a word from anyone. It happens allthe time. And you all know it.

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driver

Posted: Apr 04 2009 10:06 pm
Subject: Re: Boyfriend, formerly of South Bend ...

Joined: Jan 05 2008
Posts: 239

you're right puddles, it happened to this navy son, and i can say that the belt hurt in a way that it still hurts today.

but, i know tom betty. this guy is a mess, this guy is a first class jerk who tried and tried and tried to take my money on some half-cocked scheme to get rich. when he had the bar in lydick our bowling team let him bowl with us and it wasn't a year before we through him off the team.

this guy needs jail time. he needs to know real love and he'll get a real man. he'll get it, he'll get his and hopefully we can mark one more piece of scum put away. and let's see if he's is still smiling when he gets out. i would bet no.

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