

Gloria Abraham speaks out on the Michigan murder trial of her 13-year-old son

"People need to become aware that the government can do these things"

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The World Socialist Web Site spoke to family members of Nathaniel Abraham, including his mother Gloria Abraham, outside the Pontiac, Michigan courtroom where the 13-year-old's murder trial is under way. Nathaniel is being charged with the murder of 18-year-old Ronnie Greene. He is possibly the youngest person in the US to be prosecuted for first-degree murder as an adult, having been only 11 years old at the time of the crime for which he stands accused.

"They didn't have any evidence. I just don't see how they can convict my son," Gloria Abraham told the WSWs as the jury began deliberating in her son's case. "Common sense shows they haven't proven anything. There are too many things the prosecution has not proven. [Defense attorney Geoffrey] Fieger said in his closing statement that they haven't even matched the gun to the bullet."

Marilyn Dickerson, Nathaniel's aunt, pointed out, "The other thing that came out in the trial was there was someone else shooting at the same time that Nathaniel was shooting at trees. The prosecution's witness, Carlos Falu, said there was a shot from a .22 caliber rifle from behind the store.

"He said he knew exactly what kind of gun it was. He said there was a group of about 50 people from a gang at a house party. Before the trial we had not heard of any of this. It's a mystery why the police have not investigated what was going on."

"We are not trying to defend Nate playing with a gun," Marilyn continued. "He shouldn't have had one in the first place. But to say that he had the intent, and that he purposely was trying to kill someone—that's a lie. They had no evidence. The expert marksman who testified said he could not make that shot in a thousand tries.

"Several psychiatrists have shown that he has diminished mental abilities. He didn't know that if he went out and shot at a tree that something was going to happen. They are saying that he planned this out. If you knew anything about

his track record, you knew that he wasn't that kind of kid at all. He was playing and doing, unfortunately, those kinds of things that a child does. But a child does not plan their schedule out for a whole week, or tomorrow say I'm going to do this and this. A child doesn't think that way."

Doris Abraham, also Nathaniel's aunt, added, "You recall that Richard [Morales, their next door neighbor] testified that Nathaniel tried to sell him the gun. Is that the thinking of someone who is planning to kill people the next day?"

Nathaniel has also been charged with attempting to murder his neighbor Michael Hudack earlier on the evening when Ronnie Greene was shot. Initially sympathetic to Nathaniel, Hudack appeared as a prosecution witness at the trial. Gloria commented on Hudack, "Well, you know, he changed his story."

Tommy Williams, a friend of the family who helped raise Nathaniel after his father abandoned Gloria and her children shortly after Nate's birth, stated, "Nathaniel said several times that he was not trying to shoot anyone. It's even on the tape [the alleged confession] the police made. However, she [prosecutor Lisa Halushka] is trying to say that he set out to kill. I believe the police got to Hudack."

Marilyn agreed, "If he wanted to kill Hudack, why would he give him the gun? Why would he give the gun to the man he 'so-called' tried to kill?"

"They have tried to portray Nathaniel as uncaring," Tommy added. "The prosecutor said he shot Greene and went to his friend's house to watch television. It's not true. The girl who lived next door said Nate asked them to take him to the scene to see what happened. But Nate went home after that."

Stacey Kay, the sister of Stephanie Kay who took Nathaniel to the scene where the police found Ronnie Greene's body, said he was afraid that he had possibly done something by accident.

Marilyn commented on some of the broader issues involved in the case. "You do have kids who get into trouble, kids who do things that are not right. The problem is the system. Too many families are not getting the help that they need. For many children there is no room for them to be developed. There are no resources available, especially in the poorer communities.

"In this area they have taken away the recreation. They used to have basketball after school, activities that were available for the children. Now they have taken that away. So, what do you have? You have parents trying to provide for their children, especially one-parent families. But either you go to work or you stay home and starve."

Gloria agreed, "They have cut the benefits, so you can't be at home with your kids."

Gloria was aware that Nathaniel was growing increasingly restive and attempted counseling to calm him down. She went to the Community Mental Health for guidance. "We did some counseling, but I didn't see anything that really came out of it. I think he needed real extensive sessions. We would go in there once a week. I don't even know if they did any tests; very little came out of it."

The public mental health system in Michigan has been largely destroyed by cuts in social spending, and presently there is only one mental health institution for children. Six mental health hospitals have been closed since 1991.

Gloria, like many single parents, has no choice but to work. Her job as a lab technician demands she work from 7:00 p.m. to 3:00 a.m., hours that unfortunately often left Nathaniel on his own. When she began the job Doris would come to the house after work and take the children home with her. Nate, however, often would not be there.

Gloria described how she repeatedly attempted to get help for Nathaniel, but was rebuffed at every turn. "They would send me back and forth. The police would tell me to come down here to the juvenile court and then the juvenile court would tell me that I would have to get something from the police."

Marilyn, who worked for Oakland County, explained, "The procedures are the police department is supposed to submit a report to the juvenile court. And then the juvenile court system is supposed to contact the individual and the parents to set up whatever is necessary for that child. And somehow it fell through the cracks; it never happened."

After the police detained Nathaniel following the shooting of Ronnie Greene, Gloria said she had no idea that he was being charged for murder. She signed the form waiving their Miranda rights without being aware of the seriousness of the charges. "They said they just wanted to talk to Nathaniel about a gun. Prior to going to the police station they had already told my sister that they [Nathaniel and his friend

Marcel Moolhuizen] had been out shooting at streetlights, so this is what I'm thinking this is all about. So quite naturally I said, sure, we could sign because I didn't know that anything else had happened. Just the street lights; that's what I honestly thought it was about."

Asked why they felt there had not been more protest against Nathaniel's prosecution, Tommy responded, "Soon after Nate was arrested the NAACP and others said they were going out to get crowds of people and would do this and that," but that little had come of it.

Gloria added, "Over the past two years nothing has happened. I haven't seen or heard from the people who promised the demonstrations. We were holding meetings after it started. We had even formed a committee on Nate's behalf. There were doctors and lawyers and officials of all kinds. School teachers were involved as well as people from the community came together, including ministers. They said they would set up different rallies. Over the course of time they delayed the trial and things died out. I don't know what happened.

"It's just an injustice, that's what it is. It's not right. You have to distinguish the difference between adults and children. If they are going to start charging children for adult crimes then they should be able to do what an adult does. Just like they don't have 11-year-olds in a jury they shouldn't have 11-year-olds charged as adults.

"I think that it's taking away a person's rights," added Marilyn. "A child goes through different stages of development and growth. When you are a child you do childish things. A child cannot be something that he is not. As an adult you can act childish, but you can't reverse the situation. A child is going to be a child no matter what some one says."

Gloria concluded, "I just think that people need to come together so that they can become aware that the government can do these things to people. I couldn't believe it. I'm sure that many people just don't know."



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