

14-year-old Michigan youth who was brutally treated by police dies of COVID-19

Valery Tsekov
1 December 2020

Fourteen-year-old Honestie Hodges has died from complications of COVID-19 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, two weeks after being hospitalized on her birthday, November 9.

Hodges was rushed to Helen DeVos Children's Hospital after coming down with a severe stomach ache on her 14th birthday. Her positive test result for the coronavirus came back earlier that day. Hodges was placed in an intensive care unit and when her condition worsened she was given iron and a blood transfusion. On November 14, she was placed on a ventilator as her physical state continued to deteriorate and she struggled to breathe on her own. Honestie Hodges passed away on November 22.

Honestie's mother, Whitney Hodges, wrote in a Facebook post, "She was one of a kind and I am honored that I was chosen to be her mother."

Her grandmother, Alisa Niemeyer, announced the death of her granddaughter in a post on the fundraising site, GoFundMe: "It is with an extremely heavy heart that I have to tell all of you that my beautiful, sassy, smart loving Granddaughter has gone home to be with Jesus."

Niemeyer started the fundraiser to help Honestie's family cover the costs of treatment and to pay for other forms of care such as food and rent because her mother had to stop working while her daughter was hospitalized.

"There was no way we thought this was ever going to happen," Niemeyer told local news station Wood TV the day after Honestie's death.

"You know [we thought], 'She is going to get better; she is going to come home and we are going to have a birthday party.'" Niemeyer also told reporters from News 8 that Honestie was a "healthy" child and she had no underlying health conditions.

vigil was held in Honestie's honor on November 23, with roughly 60 people in attendance, practicing safety precautions in mindfulness of the virus.

Honestie was the 301st person to succumb to the coronavirus in Kent County. The current contraction rate for the coronavirus in Kent County, where Grand Rapids is the largest city, is at 104.6 per 100,000 residents as of this writing. A total of 33,402 cases have been identified, with 354 deaths.

The day after Thanksgiving saw the highest daily total number of cases by far during the pandemic, 1,668. Roughly one-third of all COVID-19 infections in Kent County this year have been recorded during November. Ten more deaths from COVID-19 occurred yesterday alone.

As of last Wednesday, two hospitals in Grand Rapids have reported a bed occupancy rate approaching or at total capacity, due to an overwhelming influx of COVID-19 patients: Spectrum Health-Blodgett Hospital and Mercy Health St. Mary's Main Campus, with 93 percent and 100 percent occupancy respectively.

It is unclear where Honestie contracted the virus or if she was attending in-person classes. Currently, there are 28 ongoing outbreaks that have occurred in K-12 schools in Kent County, with 13 of them in Grand Rapids.

A study published in the *Medical Journal of Australia* on October 25, "COVID-19, children and schools: overlooked and at risk," found that "children may be more susceptible than originally thought and could play a role in community transmission."

Other than death due to infection with the disease, which occurs at a much lower frequency for children than for the elderly, an increasing number of children who have been infected with COVID-19 are being diagnosed with multisystem inflammatory syndrome

(MIS-C), a condition that causes severe inflammation in human organs like the kidney, lungs, brains, skin and most commonly, the heart.

Responding to Hodges's death on Wednesday, filmmaker Ava DuVernay wrote on Twitter that "America failed this girl." More accurately put, the capitalist system failed Honestie.

Indeed, all deaths like this one, happening at this stage of the pandemic, could have been prevented with policies that prioritize saving lives as opposed to generating profit for the wealthy ruling elite. Ten months after the first reported case in late January in the suburbs of Seattle, the pandemic has been allowed to penetrate virtually every working-class community in the USA, bringing suffering and death to some 270,000 people of all age groups and their families.

Like her death, Honestie's life was also plagued by the ills of the capitalist system.

When she was 11 years old, Honestie was handcuffed by police at gunpoint during a search for a 40-year-old woman who lived nearby. The incident made national news at the time for its exposure of police brutality.

On December 6, 2017, police officers from the Grand Rapids Police Department were searching for Carrie Manning, who was suspected of having stabbed her sister. But when they came upon Hodges, her mother and her aunt as they were walking out of a nearby home, the officers held them for questioning.

The entire incident was captured on a body cam kept by one of the officers. The footage shows the young girl, who had done nothing wrong, crying at the top of her lungs. Officers point their guns at her, place her in handcuffs, drag her away from her family and search her as she pleads for them to stop. The officers in the video show callous indifference for the girl's psychological well-being.

"I didn't know what was going on," Honestie told WXMI after the incident. "I didn't do anything wrong. I've never [been in trouble with] the Grand Rapids Police. I used to want to be a Grand Rapids police officer, but ever since that happened, I want nothing to do with them."

In a 2018 interview with the *Detroit Free Press*, Hodges' other legal guardian, Rennae Wooten, said that the incident traumatized Honestie. "She can't sleep. She doesn't even want to go to school."

However, the internal investigation that followed the

incident found that the officers did not violate departmental policy, and no one involved faced disciplinary action.

The incident angered the public in Michigan and forced the police department to implement changes to its protocol regarding the way officers are to interact with youth. They dubbed these changes the "Honestie Policy." The revised protocol instructed officers to consider "the most reasonable and least restrictive" options for interacting with juveniles.

This public relations stunt quickly proved to be worthless.

The following summer, Wood TV reported that GRPD handcuffed two 11-year-old twin boys after pointing guns at them and forcing them onto the ground even though the two boys were following the officers' instructions.

In life, as in death, Honestie Hodges' story is defined by the failures of the entire social system: capitalism, which is built to safeguard the private wealth of a small fraction of society.

An abundance of resources exist in society to ensure that children and their parents can shelter at home during the pandemic without being forced into financial insecurity.

However, in order to save lives, ensure that children are provided a high quality education and secure the livelihood of all working-class families, the resources in society must be expropriated from the parasitic ruling class and placed in the hands of the international working class, to be appropriated where they will be of greatest use to humanity.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact