

Mother Accused of Burning Son's Hand on Stove as Doctors Order Off-Island Treatment for Injuries

Court documents detail how 12-year-old was allegedly forced to endure stove burns as punishment for theft. The boy also reported being struck with an insecticide can, with doctors confirming burns serious enough to require off-island care.

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Mugshot of Shelva Smith. By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT.

ST. CROIX — A woman has been arrested on charges of child abuse, after authorities discovered that a 12-year old boy told a relative about the punishment meted out to him for theft.

According to court documents, police were alerted on Sunday to the incident, and responding officers spoke to a woman who told them she had been awoken from sleep by tapping on the

window. It was her young relative, who she had raised from approximately seven weeks old until the age of eight. The boy told the older woman that his mother, Shelva Smith, had burned his hand on the stove for an infraction. The relative then called 911 and requested the assistance of police and emergency medical services. The boy was transported to hospital via ambulance.

She told police when they arrived that once Ms. Smith had claimed her child back after eight years, he always seemed to suffer some kind of “mishap”. She relayed her suspicions of abuse and told officers that she has contacted the Department of Human Services about her concerns on more than one previous occasion.

Police spoke to the boy, who admitted that he stole a chain from a home where his mother works a few days prior, but had returned it to its owner on Sunday. He said that Ms. Smith, embarrassed and angry, promised to make him pay for the offense. The owner reportedly subsequently called to report that a pendant was missing from the returned chain, but the boy insisted that he had only taken the chain itself. His mother reportedly did not believe him, and turned on a burner of her gas stove. The pre-teen told police that his mother ordered him to put his hand on the flame, or else she would do it for him. He recounted holding his hand over the fire in a way that would keep him from getting burned. Not satisfied, Ms. Smith reportedly took hold of his hand and held it over the fire despite his attempts to pull away. She did this a few times, he said, before calling the police and telling them that he had stolen the jewelry.

The officers that responded to the call noticed the boy's burn, but he told them at the time that it was a self-inflicted accident and declined the offer of medical assistance at the time, according to the affidavit.

When they saw him on Sunday, the boy's palm appeared to be severely burned with red, blistering skin, police say. The boy also showed officers a small laceration in the middle of his scalp, which he said was caused by his mother hitting him on the head with a can of insecticide the previous day, following an argument about a bedroom light. A doctor at the hospital assessed the boy's injuries and confirmed that he had suffered second degree burns, which needed immediate off-island treatment at a hospital with a dedicated burn unit to avoid severe complications in the future.

The Department of Human Services was contacted, and a social worker first reportedly released the boy into the care of his older female relative, before beginning to work with the medical team to effect the boy's transportation out of the territory for further treatment.

When police interviewed Ms. Smith, she claimed to be unaware of his injuries or the incident in question. She also claimed that there was no physical interaction when the two were arguing about the kitchen light the previous day.

Ms. Smith was nonetheless arrested and charged with child abuse. Third-degree assault and simple assault and battery, as crimes of domestic violence, were also proffered against her, and she was remanded into custody to await her advice of rights hearing.

In court on Monday, Magistrate Venetia Velazquez found probable case to uphold the charges against Ms. Smith, and set bail at \$60,000, with \$3,000 of that sum due in cash to secure her release ahead of trial. The next court appearance for Ms. Smith is scheduled for October 15.