

In the blink of an eye, North America was informed of Susan Smith's tragic loss of her two young boys. No one would have guessed that such a violent crime could have occurred in a small town. Throughout the ordeal, police began to see the flaws in Susan Smith's story. This led to suspicions, causing the police to make Susan Smith their prime suspect. Days later, Susan Smith confessed to the hideous crime she committed, leaving the nation in disgust. The actions of Susan Smith, which were based on her background and the events in question have left a profound social and legal impact on society's views of violent crimes.

Susan Smith lived what most would consider a normal life up to the time before the event concerning the murder of her two children. The only exceptional incident in her past was the suicide of her father when she was eight years old. Susan met her future spouse David Smith, at the age of nine-teen. The couple later went on to have two children, Michael and Alex. She was described as "well-known and well-liked" by her friends, neighbours and relatives. None of her friends or neighbours could have expected Susan Smith to commit such a horrible crime.

The event took place in a small town in Union, South Carolina. On October 25th Susan Smith explained that she was "heading east on Highway 49 when she stopped at a red light at Monarch Mills about 9:15 p.m., and a man jumped into the passenger seat." She described the man "as a black male in his late 20s to early 30s, wearing a plaid shirt, jeans and a toboggan-type hat." She said that the abductor held her at gun point and told her to drive. She drove northeast of Union for about 4 miles. Then the man suddenly told her to stop the car. Mrs. Smith said she asked if she should pull over, but the man said for her to stop in the middle of the road. She claimed that she begged for the release of her two children, who were still strapped in the back seat, but it was to no avail. The town sent out thousands of volunteers to search through "over five hundred square miles for the children." The story later went national but there was still no sign of the children or the attacker. The town Sheriff, John Wells, with the help of an FBI computer system went after every lead that came in from psychics, crackpots and well-meaning citizens. Even helicopters with heat seeking devices were used to try and locate the children's bodies. Both Susan and her ex-husband also faced the cameras in an emotional cry for help.

Police and prosecutors played a major role in uncovering holes in Susan Smith's story of the abduction. As days passed Susan's story left too many unanswered questions. "No crimes had been reported in the area that night so why would a suspect be fleeing? Why would he take the children if he only needed a car? If the stop light Susan stopped at uses sensors to detect other cars so as to determine when to flash a green or red light, how could she have stopped at a red light with no other cars around?" Also, "Susan's description of the abductor was so ordinary that it was useless." "Marc Klass and Jeanne Boylen came to Union to help the police with the investigation yet Susan wanted nothing to do with them." "The incident had so many holes in it that everyone started to get suspicious of the story. The police began to wonder about Susan's innocence even though nothing of the sort was said in public. The police finally called Susan in for questioning and searched her home for fingerprints. She failed a lie detector test and the neighbours began to get suspicious telling the police about a man she was recently seeing. A letter from Tom Fidelity (the man she was seeing) was found telling Susan that he wanted to be with her, yet he was not ready for a ready made family. "The pressures were suddenly more than Susan could handle and she broke down under questioning and confessed after nine days." On November 3rd, she told police the location of the bodies. Divers went to John D Long Lake at 4:15pm on Thursday and they pulled the car from the mud. At 6:45pm it was confirmed that two bodies were found in the back seat. Mrs. Smith was arrested and charged with two counts of

murder.

The prosecution in the trial, Prosecutor Thomas Pope, sought whole-heartedly to convict Susan Smith to the full extent of the law in the murder of her two children. "At one point during the trial he asked for the death penalty." On July 22nd, 1995, a jury of nine men and three women swiftly rejected the death penalty after only two and a half hours of deliberation. They decided that the death penalty was not appropriate for a "really disturbed person." When it came to the trial her lawyer tried to argue she had "suffered enough for drowning her two young sons, and that the jury should be lenient." The request fell on deaf ears. Susan's confession led to her sentencing to life in prison. She will be eligible for parole in thirty years.

The actions of Susan Smith will never be forgotten, especially by those who live in Union, South Carolina. The unforgivable misdeeds of Smith have had an enormous impact on this little town which citizen described as "...a God-fearing, law-abiding place." The whole town of Union bonded together to help support Susan and the police during this difficult time. The citizens hung yellow ribbons on their doors as a sign of hope that the two little boys would soon be found. Once Susan admitted to killing her sons the reaction was intense and furious. People replaced their yellow ribbons with black ones for mourning, blue ones for boys and white ones for innocence. Flowers were left near the lake by mourners and many felt the need to hold their children for a while during this time. Susan Smith fooled everyone, even her husband of three years and her family. Once Susan admitted her guilt, anger and hatred rose in the hearts of those who believed in her. Thousands everywhere had no idea how someone could be filled with so much despair as to step so far over the line of right and wrong and murder her own two sons. At Susan's bond hearing hundreds of people showed up to voice their opinions yelling 'murder!' and 'baby killing bitch' Out of anger also arose ugliness. Some people advocated "stringing her up right in the middle of the courthouse." Many African Americans were also very upset at the fact that Smith labeled the abductor as a black man. "The actions of Susan Smith will never leave the hearts and minds of the citizens in Union who once trusted her and sympathized with her."

This particular case did not cause changes in the law or the legal system. What it did do is awaken the people of the United States and Canada to the reality that evil and deceit lives in our countries. Because of this incident programs have now been opened throughout the United States and Canada to provide support and assistance for troubled families.

The three principles of law could be seen in the case against Susan Smith. "Law as a legal concept" was illustrated in the case through the use of the jury to come out with a just decision concerning Susan Smith. "Law as a legal system" was also seen in the many agencies of our society used to uphold rights. The police and the FBI got to the truth about what really happened, and arrested the person responsible. Finally "law as a set of rules" was shown in this case because the court decided that Susan Smith broke one of the various rules set by society and she must be punished for it.

Susan Smith's actions were based on countless actions throughout her life. Traumatic experiences found in her background inevitably lead to the appalling crime. One thing that is certain is that it left a scar on society, and had an impact on their social and legal views. This research assignment has enriched my understanding of law as a legal concept, law as a legal system and law as a set of rules. It has shown me first hand the use of these three concepts in our world today.

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