

How the **Blue Bow** Became the Symbol for Child Abuse Prevention

Bonnie Finney's Story

Bonnie Finney, a grandmother from Virginia, connected the Blue Bow to child abuse prevention awareness in the aftermath of her grandson Michael Wayne "Bubba" Dickenson's death as a result of child abuse in Chesapeake, VA in 1988. Her daughter, herself a victim of domestic violence, was sentenced to five years imprisonment for failing to do more to protect her son. Luther Ray Phillips, Jr., who committed the crime, was sentenced to 55 years imprisonment. The following story was written by Bonnie Finney in conjunction with Prevent Child Abuse Virginia. It is used by permission of Prevent Child Abuse Virginia.

I only had one child. She was a beautiful little girl—the light of our eyes. We knew she had entered into a stormy marriage, for we brought her home several times in the five years it lasted. We suspected heavy use of drugs, but in those five years, three beautiful healthy children had been born. I loved them dearly, and they loved me. The children were 16 months, three years and four years.

My grandson was hospitalized for abuse. He had bruises on his body and cigarette burns on his hands. His doctor did not believe my daughter's story, "He fell in slippery water in the bathtub." After the ordeal at the hospital, my grandson was placed in foster care for three weeks. He cried when they came to return him to his mother. He told his foster mother, "My mamma don't love me" and begged to stay. I ached for his dilemma, but I wasn't physically able to care for him. The courts believed that home was the best place for him, but I knew better and I told, no I begged them, not to return him to his mother. But I was overruled—my grandmother's instinct didn't count.

I never saw Bubba again.

My 16 month old granddaughter was hospitalized after being beaten severely, her leg broken in four places, and her hand burned from the tips of her fingers to her wrist. It was only then that the "search was on" for Bubba. We learned he had been killed, wrapped in a sheet, stuffed into a toolbox, and dumped into the Dismal Swamp Canal three months earlier.

My efforts to understand became a plea to stop abusing children. I tied a blue ribbon on my van antenna to make people wonder. It caught on locally with restaurants, businesses, police, and TV and radio stations supporting me in my efforts to make it a real awareness campaign.

Why blue? I intend never to forget the battered, bruised bodies of my grandchildren. Blue serves as a constant reminder to me to fight for our children.

Please wear a blue ribbon. Put one on your car. Give one to your friend. Tell them what it means. You may save a child's life! If you suspect anything is happening to your children, your grandchildren, the child next door, please act! If you get no response, try again! You may not hear their screams. You may not see their bruises, so check for the hidden pain and watch for the silent screams in their eyes.

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