

G. Anita Cummings: the Person who Shot and Killed Judy

Anita Marie Lewis was born in Batesville, Arkansas, on August 2, 1969. She is the only girl and the second of three children born to Harry and Louise Lewis. She grew up in Batesville and spent most of her life there prior to marrying Jessie Cummings in 1989.

Little is known about her early life. She started smoking at age 12 (Appendix 19, p. 13). At age 15, she was working as a car hop at a local Sonic (PH-1 276). As a teen, she was arrested for a DWI in Batesville when she drove her car into the car in which her boyfriend was with another girl.

When she was 16, she was dating a cousin of Craig Martin and became friends with Craig and his teenager wife, Faye. Anita and Faye Martin become close friends, and eventually lovers. Faye attended Anita's high-school graduation in 1987, when Anita graduated from Cushman High School. Although Anita has claimed she started attending college but dropped out when she became pregnant, her father reports she never attended college (Appendix 7).

After high school, Anita moved in with her cousin Arlis Lee and his wife Donna in Batesville. Anita's parents lived in a rural area on the outskirts of Batesville, which made it hard for Anita to get into town to party. She lived with the Lees for several months, doing some babysitting for them. From their house, she moved in with the Martins, who also lived in the heart of Batesville. It was this same year that Anita, who always had a volatile temper, stabbed another girl in a local park with a butterfly knife during an argument.

During the Fall of 1987, Anita began traveling with a carnival as a carney worker. When the carnival was in Jacksonville, Arkansas, she met Darren Gionson who was in the Air Force and stationed at the Little Rock Air Force Base. Darren had been born and raised in Hawaii before he enlisted. He and Anita immediately started a relationship. She quit her job with the carnival and began staying various places in Jacksonville, and often sneaked on based to be with Darren in his barracks.

In January 1988, Darren was given a general discharge from the service due to a fight in the barracks, so he returned to his parents' home in Hawaii that February. By then, Anita was pregnant. Darren sent her a plane ticket to come to Hawaii, and she flew there in March with the intent of

marrying Darren and living there with him. Darren's mother vividly recalls Anita's stay with them. She described Anita as willful and resistive to authority. Anita refused to listen to anyone, tried to dominate others in the household, and was a story teller who would attempt to sabotage anything that went on in the home. Darren's mother also recalls Anita as a very negative person who complained about everything and made no effort to help herself. His mother also described Anita as not very clean, and very aggressive when she wanted to be.

Darren reports Anita had been with a number of men before they met. They had sex the first night they met. He wonders if she latched on to him in order to get away from home. He describes Anita as capable of being aggressive under pressure. Anita was unhappy in Hawaii and left after only a few weeks and returned to Batesville. Their son, Robbie Jewel Glen Lewis, was born in Batesville on August 27, 1988. Anita sent Darren a photo of Robbie after he was born. The last time he heard from her was when she called him around December 1994, shortly after he had married. She did not tell him she was in jail on murder charges. She said she wanted to get back together with him, however, explaining she had recently divorced her husband who beat her. He asked her if her ex-husband had also beat Robbie, and does not recall her saying that he did.

After Robbie was born, Anita moved into a HUD housing complex in Batesville. Not long after, she started seeing a man named Terry Davis who moved in with her. She reports that he was abusive to her and Robbie. He introduced her to bisexual activities with his former girlfriend, Kim. Terry also got Anita, who used marijuana, involved in selling dope (Appendix 19, p. 15). This relationship ended when she learned Terry was seeing another woman and she had tired of his being abusive to her. Anita has reported she was hospitalized in Batesville from a beating Terry gave her, but that has not been verified. She also reports the hospitalization resulted in her being placed on Valium. Terry's abusive treatment of Anita is the likely source of many of the stories that Anita would later make up about Jessie's treatment of her. Her description of how Terry treated her (Appendix 19, p. 15-16) is remarkably similar to the abusive actions she later attributed to Jessie.

In the Spring of 1989, Anita was working at Hardee's. She reportedly also was earning money turning tricks during this period of her life. Robbie's babysitter was Mary Ann Jackson, who

is the half sister of Sherry's youngest sister, Lahoma Yaws (Lahoma and Mary Ann have the same father but different mothers; Lahoma and Sherry have the same mother, but different fathers).

Jessie and Sherry initially moved in with Mary Ann and her husband, Walter Renfrow, when they moved to Batesville that year. Because Mary Ann was babysitting Robbie for Anita, it was at Mary Ann's house at Anita became acquainted with Jessie and Sherry. Soon after, Jessie and Sherry rented a house up the road from Mary Ann. Anita began seeing Jessie and Sherry, and soon moved in with them. Sherry and Anita began a bisexual relationship in addition to their relationship with Jessie. They shared the same bed in the same bedroom. One night shortly after Anita moved in with them, Sherry came up with the idea for Jessie to marry Anita.

On June 14, 1989, Jessie and Anita were married by a minister who lived near Anita's parents. The ceremony took place in the minister's home. Anita's mother and Sherry were in attendance, but Anita's father refused to attend. Anita lied at trial when she claimed she did not know Jessie was married to Sherry when she married him, and did not learn about his marriage to Sherry until months later when they moved to Oklahoma (T. 689).

Anita introduced Sherry and Jessie to Craig and Faye Martin. Faye also was bisexual, but is now a lesbian. Jessie and Faye had met briefly years earlier. The Martins and the Cummings began to have group sex together. During some of those encounters, photos were taken. These encounters would continue to take place several times a year until the July 1994 arrests of Anita, Sherry and Jessie. Although Faye initially was a close friend of Anita, over the years she became closer to Sherry. By the time of the arrests, Faye was barely talking to Anita, because of her attitude.

Around the end of August 1989, Jessie, Sherry and Anita moved to Tupelo, OK. Jessie had been working for Weaver Trucking in Batesville, but lost his job over an argument with the owner. In Oklahoma, they initially lived with Jessie's sister, Debbie and her husband Jimmy Smith. Then they rented their own home in Stonewall, OK, and later moved to a rental home in Centrahoma, OK. In January 1990, they moved to a rental house in Philips. That is the house where they were living when these offenses took place.

Anita, who was less maternal than Sherry and less inclined to stay home with the kids, would

hold various jobs from time to time, often quitting them within a few months. At the time of these offenses, Anita was working at the Dairy Queen in Atoka. In January 1992, she worked a few months at the Chuck Wagon in Coalgate. In 1992, Anita pulled a gun on some guys who, as a prank, put an ice chest out on the highway and pulled it away with a rope when she stopped and approached it. The incident was reported to the Atoka Sheriff's Office.

Anita's volatile temper and irritability shortly before these offenses was demonstrated in an incident with the mother to Eugene Mayo, Nancy Elliott. When Eugene left Judy, he left their red pickup in Judy's possession. Nancy wanted to get a CD that belonged to her out of pickup, which was at the Cummings' house for repairs in late August 1991. Nancy stopped by the Cummings' house for that purpose, but when she exited her vehicle Anita came to the front door with a gun in her hand and threatened to blow off Nancy's head. Jessie drove up at that moment and calmed the situation down.

In 1992, Anita had laparoscopy surgery which resulted in the removal of two cysts from her right fallopian tube. A short time later she became pregnant, and gave birth to Ashley Cummings on July 12, 1993. Jessie, who has had midwife training, was in the delivery room and assisted with the delivery. After giving birth, Anita had a tubal ligation. She also had surgery later that year for a bladder repair and a cervical repair for problems she had since Robbie's birth.

During her marriage to Jessie, Anita had frequent contact with relatives, friends and acquaintances of Jessie and Sherry. Interviews with many of these people resulted in several themes. Anita was considered less personable than Sherry and many people report not liking or getting along with Anita, who was considered to have an "attitude". Anita like to brag about her exploits, claiming to have engaged in a variety of escapades and fights. She seemed to have little interest in her children and was considerably less maternal than Sherry.

Sherry and Anita often fought. As is often the norm in Poor White Trash families, they would take their arguments outside to resolve by fighting. Sherry was already a good fighter when she married Jessie. Both Sherry and Jessie gave Anita fighting tips, in order to make sure she could defend herself. In a social setting where resolving conflict by means of a fist fight or wrestling

match is the norm, it is important that men, women and children all be able to hold their own in a fight.

Anita was less enthused than Sherry about Shirley Cunningham joining their open marriage. However, while Sherry dominated Anita, Anita was stronger than Shirley and thus able to dominate her. Shirley reports with pride, however, that she finally got the best of Anita in a fight. That took place shortly before Anita decided to leave the Cummings' household in 1994.

In August 1992, Robbie was enrolled in the Head Start program at the local elementary school in Coalgate. Later that month, one of the teachers made a house visit. When the Cummings' family temporarily moved to Ft. Townson that Fall for a few months, to earn money cutting wood there, Robbie also went to school there. A short time after starting school, the school referred Robbie to a local guidance clinic for an assessment. He was found to have ADHD, and began going to counseling sessions with Steve Beck. It is noteworthy that Steve Beck never found any indications Robbie was being mistreated (Appendix 43). If Robbie were, the adults in the Cummings' family would have been reluctant to permit him to attend school, much less receive counseling.

Robbie's ADHD had for some time frustrated the efforts of the adults in the Cummings' household to discipline him. Anita told Jessie and Sherry that Steve Beck recommended they have Robbie walk back and forth as a punishment, rather than stand in a corner, because standing still is hard for a child with ADHD. Unfortunately, Anita either was not told or did not relay to Sherry and Jessie this was an appropriate punishment only for short periods of time. Hence, the adults sometimes had Robbie walk back and forth for long periods of time. A problem they had was Robbie touching things with his hands and playing around with his hands as he walked. To counter that problem, Sherry and Anita devised the idea to give him old bottles of pop filled with water to carry, thereby keeping his hands busy.

Like many children with ADHD, Robbie was not a good sleeper. Sometimes he would wander the house at night. One night he was found on his bed with a package of hot dogs and a sharp knife. This caused concern that Robbie might hurt baby Ashley or other occupants of the

home while they were asleep. As a result, when Jessie was not home, the women occasionally kept Robbie in bed at night by means of handcuffing him to his bed.

Anita continued to have a variety of health problems. In October 1993, she had a tonsillectomy. In April 1994, she had gallbladder surgery. That year was a traumatic year for Anita in many ways. Around January 1994, Anita's mother had open heart surgery in Little Rock. Anita and her children went to Batesville after the surgery to spend time with her.

Around late April 1994, Anita began working at the Final Harvest Ministry's wood shop in Atoka. It was owned and operated by Eddie and Diane Fields, who employed less than a dozen people to make craft items that were sold to Hobby Lobby. At work Anita became close to Michael Williams, and possibly contemplated moving in with him when she decided to leave Jessie and Sherry in July 1994. It was that decision which resulted in her going to the police for assistance in getting Robbie and Ashley away from Jessie in order to leave him, and which led to Anita, Sherry and Jessie being arrested in July 1994.

Anita is serving a Life sentence for her Second Degree Murder conviction for shooting Judy Mayo. Her parole date is March 2003. She is currently incarcerated in a private prison for women in Newport, Arkansas.

H. Lahoma Yaws: The False Rape Allegation Invented to Help her Sister

Lahoma Yaws had eight children by various men. Her oldest child is Sherry Cummings, who was born in 1967, when Lahoma was 16 years old. Lahoma's youngest child is also named Lahoma Yaws [hereinafter "Lahoma II"]. The birth certificate for Lahoma II indicates that her father was Charlie Yaws, her mother's husband who died seven months before Lahoma II was born. However, it is well known that Lahoma II's biological father is Douglas Pearson who lives in the Batesville, Arkansas, area.

Lahoma Yaws and her extended family are classic members of the "Poor White Trash" subculture (see Part I, below). The family is constantly moving, living in various rental properties in Arizona, California, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Colorado, to name a few states. Many times their