

Memphis Attack: Father Weeps Over Video of Badly Beaten Son

Mark Sauser is a man not prone to show his emotions. But when he saw the video, he wept.

The video showed a rampaging mob attacking people indiscriminately in the parking lot of a Kroger supermarket in Memphis, Tennessee. A bag boy saw the advancing crowd and sought shelter.

He tried to escape, but within a matter of moments the young man found himself swept up in the violence and chaos.

The first punch came without warning. He was knocked to the ground. Then came another, and the boy collapsed. But the angry mob would not let up. They slammed pumpkins into the boy's battered body. The boy lost consciousness.

All you could see was blood and pumpkins, an eyewitness told television station WREG.

As the boy lay helpless on the ground, one of the predators hovered over his prey—kicking the bag boy's body. Again. And again. And again. And again.

Every single gut-wrenching kick was captured on a cell-phone video that has since gone viral.

"Hold on, they got a white dude," the person filming said.

The "white dude" is Mark Sauser's son.

He's a 17-year-old honor-roll student at a prominent Catholic high school. And he came very close to losing his life last weekend.

"They could have murdered my son, and I have no doubt that some were trying to," Mr. Sauser told me from his home in Memphis. He asked me not to mention the boy's name.

Memphis police say as many as 125 teenagers were involved in last Saturday's melee—that left two other people injured. Authorities believe the young thugs were playing a game called "point them out, knock them out."

The thug who attacked Mr. Sauser's son is a teenager with a lengthy criminal history. So far, 11 people have been arrested—all under the age of 19. Most are facing felony charges. Police have said the attack does not appear to be a hate crime, because not all of the victims are white.

It was just about a month ago that his son got hired at Kroger. The senior in high school needed to earn some money for college as well as his hobby, building computers.

So the part-time position at Kroger seemed ideal—until Saturday night.

It was hardly a fair fight—a rampaging mob versus a slender, bespectacled teenager—just 5 feet, 9 inches tall—a wisp of a fellow.

"He's not a kid who's ever been in a fight," Mr. Sauser told me. "He couldn't hurt a fly. He's a good kid—a very generous kid."

Mr. Sauser was at home with his wife Saturday night when the phone rang. It was the manager of Kroger. Come quickly, he said. Your son has been seriously hurt.

The Sausers jumped into their truck and sped down Poplar Avenue. They arrived at the store in a matter of minutes.

Their son was bruised, battered and bloodied. But he was alive.

"He didn't look too bad," Mr. Sauser told me. "But I didn't understand the full ramifications of what had happened. I was not aware that he had been kicked."

They took him to Baptist East Hospital where doctors pronounced him well enough to go home. There was no bleeding on his brain. There was no skull fracture. It was, quite frankly, a miracle.

It wasn't until Mr. Sauser watched the video that he realized the danger his son had faced.

He watched as strangers pummeled his son. And as a father he struggled to keep his emotions in check.

"I'll be honest—I wept," he said. "My wife won't watch it."

"It's very hard to see people trying to hurt your son," he said. "They didn't even know who he was."

They had no idea that this young man was an honors student. They had no idea that he played clarinet in the band. They had no idea that he had a brother and three sisters.

Mr. Sauser said he saw something else in that video: rage.

"They were taking out anybody they could get their hands on," he said.

"My first gut reaction: They need to be tried as an adult," he said. "That was serious. They could have murdered my son, and I have no doubt that some were trying to."

At the same time, he said, you can't throw people away.

The aftermath of the attack has generated outrage across Memphis—and to some extent the nation. Many have suggested what happened in the Kroger parking lot was a hate crime. Mr. Sauser's son is white. His attackers are black.

But Mr. Sauser says this is not about race. This is about the

breakdown of the American family. And he said there needs to be a national conversation about the issue.

“No one talks about this,” he said. “There’s no family structure—kids who’ve never had a dad. What kind of life is that? Not a single person can replace your dad—not a single person can. These kids have to have families.”

Nevertheless, a crime has been committed, and someone must pay.

“Somebody’s got to be held accountable,” he said. “Somebody’s got to be responsible.”

Life in the Sauser household is slowly returning to normal. Their resilient son is returning to school today—and when he’s ready—he plans to return to his job bagging groceries at Kroger.

“He’s going to be OK,” Mr. Sauser said. “He’s going to be fine.”

That’s because the 17-year-old clarinet player with a penchant for building computers has something money cannot buy—a family.

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