



Craighead County Sheriff Dale Haas told members of the news media they would be arrested if they broke any laws.

"In a sense, it made her alive for people."

The article was written by reporter Hazel Ashcraft, who had lost a daughter earlier in the year. Suzann Wilson said Ashcraft's loss made her "actually know what I was talking about."

"Once you read this article — she did this, she liked this, she liked that — it makes you realize this was a real little girl, a live, breathing child, who has now stopped at sixth grade. That brought me a lot of comfort to see that article," Brittney's mother said.

Wright also said most of the news coverage he saw was fair and handled tastefully. Asked if it was hurtful to read and see stories about his wife, he replied, "No, especially in our case. Everyone jumped on the bandwagon of going toward the heroic act. It's a lot easier to read something when someone's being portrayed as a hero versus, say, your daughter is 12 years old, and she just took a bullet in the head."

Wright offered advice to other families who may find themselves thrust into the media limelight, but even as he was giving it, he acknowledged that hard as one might try to exercise some control over the situation, the media will persist.

"If they (a family) don't want to talk, they need to issue a statement. It won't be taken seriously, but issue a statement. Then turn off the telephones and the answering machines, but you can't do that because you've got family trying to get hold of you. Now if you want to talk, or you don't mind talking, keep in mind (that) once you do one (interview), once you say one thing, then you're fair game for everyone else. You can't stop it. And just as quick as it happens, they turn it off. You turn around, and they're gone."

Gretchen Woodard had mixed success with the media. At the urging of her neighbors, who employ her husband and from whom the family rents a mobile home, she agreed to go on ABC's "20/20" shortly after the shootings. The neighbors, who know Mitchell well, told her "that somebody needed to hear my side" and that she needed to "get it out that your son is not a monster."

She says she has suffered from the repeated media appearances of her ex-husband, Scott Johnson, and his lawyer, Tom Furth, who originally was on Mitchell's case but has since

been replaced at the request of the boy and his mother. Scott Johnson had little to do with his son before the incident, Woodard said, but after the shootings, he and Furth appeared on shows such as "20/20" and "Court TV." Among the things they said is that Mitchell was abused as a youth, something Woodard said she did not know. That revelation prompted her to place a protest call to Barbara Walters and won her an apology and some flowers from Walters.

"She apologized. She said I thought this was done with your blessing," Woodard said. "She said, maybe the next time you feel harshly about a journalist or reporter, remember me."

"Mrs. Woodard was very [reluctant] dealing with reporters, but I told her most reporters would respect the terrible time she was going through," Walters said. "She also gave me specific statements to use exclusively on '20/20.' I was very touched by her, and I sent her a small bouquet of flowers."

Woodard has had a better experience with the national media than with the local media. She is angry with *The Jonesboro Sun* and the local television station, KAIT, for stories about her son suggesting that he was a troublemaker who boasted of being a gang member and who may have targeted specific classmates. Not once, she said, has the *Sun* or KAIT contacted her to ask about the negative material about her son before using it. She suspects there may be an effort to take attention off the younger suspect, whose family has lived in the Jonesboro area a long time, by putting more blame on her son and her family. They moved to the area from Minnesota about three years ago.

"KAIT could have at least called [before] putting all the negative on — and they've been wonderful at that," Woodard said. "And the newspaper also. For God's sake, if you're going to print something that are lies or show something that is blatant lies, it hurts me."

Although Woodard said she was not interested in giving long interviews, she would have been available to correct the record. "Absolutely, and I've done that many times," she said. "WCCO (a Minneapolis station) ... called and wanted to talk, and I did. That's why I feel the distance. I don't know why *The Jonesboro Sun* chose to do it the way they did. They're real

SUNRISE

Local, national and international journalists and TV news crews have flocked to the parking lot of Westside Middle School. An estimated 50 satellite trucks and camera crews await arriving staff, counselors and police investigators.

10:00 AM

Students, parents and others are coming to Westside to talk with counselors assembled in the building. Some are escorted past dozens of TV cameras by police. School officials, alarmed at what one official calls "hordes" of media chasing after visitors at the school, decide to ban reporters and camera crews from school property.

Recognizing that TV correspondents will want a "visual" of the school in the background for their reports, Sadler and other officials arrange for the media trucks and crews to move to an area across the road in the school-bus parking lot. From that location, the school buildings are visible over correspondents' shoulders as they face cameras.

NOON

It is almost 24 hours since the shootings. News operations worldwide either are in Jonesboro or doing interviews by telephone, with any officials they can find. Some sheriff's deputies report they have been approached with offers of money for news or photos of the two youths being held in the county jail, though those news organizations and the amounts of money offered are not specified.

Sadler has begun a series of hourly news briefings. He and others are concerned that too many rumors — from Shannon Wright's supposed pregnancy to the types of weapons involved in the attack — are flying.

Network news staffs and the network magazine programs are busy preparing for the "second night" newscasts, lining up family members and others to be interviewed.