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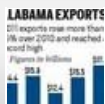


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# Accused as molester, Daniel Acker Jr. was once beloved Shelby County teacher

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By Kent Faulk -- The Birmingham News

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Daniel M. Acker Jr.

When schoolteacher Daniel Acker Jr. in 1992 was accused of molesting a child, churches, teachers, schools and parents rallied to his aid.

They held pancake dinners to raise money for his defense, proclaimed his innocence on marquees, demonized the fourth-grader who accused Acker Jr. of touching her breast -- and voted him, in the wake of the allegations, teacher of the year.

Shelby County circled the wagons to fight for its own. And it won.

Last week -- nearly two months after police say Acker Jr. admitted to groping little girls on at least 20 occasions, including the child involved in the 1992 allegations -- a Shelby County grand jury heard charges

against the now-retired elementary teacher. Officials expect to learn this week whether the grand jury returned any indictments.

And now around the county, preachers, family, friends and former co-workers at the schools still are mum.

Acker Jr.'s attorney, Barry Alvis, has declined to comment, releasing a statement saying that "trying the case in the media taints the jury pool" and that he would comment only during court proceedings.

Acker's parents, county Commissioner Daniel Acker Sr. and Judy Acker, say their lawyer advised them not to talk.

Acker Jr.'s wife, Andrea, apologized for her silence, but said she couldn't comment.

When asked to do an interview, his preacher at Dominion Baptist Church, the Rev. Mark Liddle, said: "I have nothing to say."

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Acker Jr. himself has not responded from his Shelby County Jail cell to interview requests via mail and email.

Shelby County judges have also backed away from Acker Jr.'s case, saying they wanted to avoid the appearance of impropriety with Acker Jr.'s father being a county commissioner.

"As far as the effect on the community, it's the biggest case, and most traumatic case, we have ever worked," said Curtis Rigney, Alabaster's deputy police chief. "And the victims being the children of the community just compounds that."

Some say the reluctance by residents and teachers to talk is out of respect for the Acker family.

"It's a close knit community," said Norma Rogers, the former Shelby County Schools superintendent who pushed for Acker Jr.'s firing in 1993 after the allegation. "I just don't think they want to hurt the family any more than the damage that has already been done." "You can't always judge children by their parents. . . . You can't always judge parents by what their children do," Rogers said "I feel for (Acker Jr.'s) parents and I also feel for the children who have been abused."

For the few who will speak about Acker Jr., they say it is hard for them to reconcile the fun-loving, popular teacher with a man who police say confessed to molesting students.

"There was no hint, no sign of any problems," said the Rev. Gary Ashley, Acker Jr.'s former pastor at Westwood Baptist Church, where Acker was a youth minister. "Two of my children were in his youth group. It goes without saying, if I had any reservations, they wouldn't have been in there."

## Prominent family

Acker Jr.'s professional resume is as solid as they come. His family's reputation in the community is indisputable.

He is one of four children born to Judy and Daniel Acker Sr., a prominent family that has lived in Shelby County for more than 60 years.

Acker Sr. in 1992 challenged the incumbent Shelby County commissioner from District 4 and won. At the time, Acker Sr. was the administrator at the Shelby County Area Vocational Center. He had already held several public offices in Alabaster, including city councilman and chairman of the Alabaster Water and Gas Board.

He is running unopposed for his sixth term on the Shelby County Commission. Acker Sr. and his wife were both longtime educators in the local schools.

In 1996, Acker Sr. retired after 21 years at the vocational school. He was a teacher and coach at Thompson High School from 1959 to 1975. Judy Acker was a second grade teacher at Thompson Elementary School from 1961 to 1993. She was named Mother of the Year at the 27th annual Alabama Mothers of the Year Awards Conference in 1986. Danny Acker Jr. is one of four children. His sister, Melody, is a math teacher in Florida. The youngest Acker brother, Jade, is a missionary. Brother Harmon Acker is a teacher who has served on the Alabaster City Council and worked as a bus driver with the Shelby County School system. Harmon Acker was recently suspended briefly after a curious episode when he was arrested and charged with breaking into Thompson High School. He has been reinstated at the school.

Acker Jr.'s parents were as active in church as they were in the community and schools. Acker Jr.'s paternal grandfather was a minister and his father-in-law was a Baptist preacher.

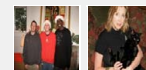
Judy and Dan Acker Sr. were part of the group that started Westwood Baptist Church, Ashley said. Every church has people in it that are the backbone of the church -- that was Dan and Judy Acker, Ashley said. The family is the solid, conservative, Southern Christian family.

## Full resume

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Acker Jr. graduated in 1980 from Thompson High School, where music and theater, including a production of "Go Ask Alice," took up part of his time. He played trumpet in the marching band.

His interest in music led him to the University of Montevallo, where he was in the Baptist Student Union choir and ensemble, and was minister of music and youth at Mayberry Baptist Church in Montevallo.

Acker's work history shows a man who was never without a job in his adult life.

Besides his position at the church in Montevallo while in college, he also worked a brief time as a sales clerk at Walmart, was a camp counselor at the Alabama Baptist Boys Camp in the summers of 1981 and 1982, and served as a student-teacher at Elvin Hill Elementary School in Alabaster near the end of his college years.

His resume also includes volunteer work with the Special Olympics, a speech and hearing clinic, and mission projects.

In 1984 Acker Jr. began his teaching career in the family business -- education -- after graduating from Montevallo with a degree in elementary education. His first choice for teaching was fourth grade, followed by fifth and third grades, according to his job application with the Shelby County schools.

Acker Jr.'s first full year of teaching was the 1985-86 school year at Thompson Elementary, where he spent six years before being transferred to Creekview Elementary in 1991. He stayed at Creekview through the 1999-2000 school year, and then moved to Thompson Intermediate School the next year. He retired May 22, 2009.

Acker Jr.'s personnel file shows many more positive marks than negative ones.

Other than the sexual complaint 20 years ago, the only other disciplinary action noted in Acker Jr.'s file, from Nov. 22, 1989, was for not completing a Shelby County Board of Education disciplinary action form. He failed to notify a supervisor when he paddled a boy. No action was taken.

Principals at the schools where he worked consistently gave Acker Jr. good or adequate job evaluation reviews -- before and after the original complaint.

Acker Jr. was commended in a note in his file in 1990 for excellent presentation in a science workshop at Thompson Elementary School that was designed to encourage more experimental methods in the science area.

As a teacher, he was involved in the schools where he taught: Public Relations Committee, Drug Free School, McGruff Puppet Campaign, Just Say No Club, Leader of Professional Development, Drug Education Course, Math Team and the School Spirit Committee. He also worked with the yearbook and as a school photographer.

## First complaint

But overshadowing everything else in his thick personnel file are a few papers on his first sexual misconduct allegation.

In 1992, Acker Jr., then a 30-year-old youth minister at Westwood, was accused after a neighbor's child who was in his fourth grade class said the teacher had touched her improperly in 1991 at her home.

The school board suspended Acker Jr. with pay until the case was decided.

Acker Jr. told some people that the encounter with the girl was a tickling episode blown out of proportion, and said he had no sexual intent. He told others it was a game of freeze-tag gone bad. But a state Department of Human Resources hearing examiner returned a finding of "reason

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to suspect" that the incident had occurred.

A grand jury heard the case, but declined to indict Acker Jr. The school board decided to reinstate Acker Jr. after a full day of hearings.

Rogers, the former school superintendent, said she remembers staying into the "wee hours of the morning" before the board voted to keep Acker in 1993, despite her recommendation to fire him.

In a January interview with The News, Rogers said she had talked at length with the accusing child and her mother, and found the story credible. She also noted that a state investigator had reported reason to believe the allegation.

But that was not the public sentiment.

Testimony at the school board meeting came mostly from church members, Rogers said. "Their testimonies went a long way" in swaying the decision to Acker Jr.'s favor, she said.

"I thought maybe I was wrong over the years . . . I'm hurt that it was really true," she said. "I just had that feeling."

Acker Jr.'s job was saved by the outpouring of support, despite a note he had written to the mother of the girl who first accused him.

The note, explaining why a quiz the girl had taken had included a question about the color of her underwear, read:

"I thought the last question might need some explanation. (The child) came to me complaining about some boys trying to look up her dress while we were studying.

"I kidded her, saying the boys must think I was going to have a question about her underwear, since that was the only thing they were studying.

"I promise I'm not a pervert; I just have a strange sense of humor. I assure you this question was only on her copy of the test."

## **Accuser bullied**

While supporters rallied around Acker Jr. after the girl accused him of touching her improperly, the girl's mother said at the time that her daughter was being harassed constantly and told to "quit lying" by other children.

The girl also was pushed and shoved at Thompson Middle School, where she received no support from teachers, her mother had said. The harassment eventually led the mother to transfer her daughter to another school. A Thompson Middle School official said at the time that counselors did work with the family.

Cindy Warner, spokeswoman for the Shelby County school system, said that Acker Jr. did not have a complaint in his personnel file -- not even a complaint about homework -- after the 1992 accusation.

Periodic background checks by the Alabama Bureau of Investigation and FBI as part of routine teacher checks to conform with the Alabama Child Protection Act of 1999 came back with Acker Jr. being suitable to be a teacher.

Acker Jr. also worked as a bus driver throughout much of his career and even after he retired in 2009. At least one former student in Shelby County schools has claimed Acker Jr. molested her on the school bus when she was 9 years old.

Ashley, Acker Jr.'s pastor at that time of the 1991 incident, said he has been taken aback by how the whole episode has unfolded.

After the 1992 allegations, Ashley said, Acker Jr. "came to me, or I heard about it and went to him. He told me that it was during the summer months, and a neighbor had asked him to keep an eye on her children."

"It was a he-said, she-said situation," Ashley said. "I took all the data I had, but there was no reason to suspect the reality of the situation."

Ashley said he was saddened and disappointed when new allegations surfaced in January, but not surprised. "I'm old enough that nothing surprises me," he said. "We're capable of doing anything and everything."

The case burst into the open when, on Jan. 4, Acker Jr. was arrested on two charges of child sexual abuse. He was arrested after police say he confessed to an allegation by a 12-year-old former student that he molested her three times when she was in his fourth grade class in 2009.

Rigney, the Alabaster deputy chief, said Acker Jr. confessed to molesting more than 20 other female children during his tenure at the three Alabaster schools over his 25-year teaching career.

Since then, four more counts of child sexual abuse have been filed. He remains in the Shelby County Jail on those six charges with bond set at \$545,000.

Four females have come forward to accuse Acker, including the 1992 victim, who is now an adult.

Rigney said he was shocked when the allegations resurfaced.

"I wasn't sure where it would go, but I was confident (investigators) would get to the bottom of it," Rigney said. "When he cooperated, I knew then it would be a very traumatic event for this city, and I was disappointed for everyone involved."

*Birmingham News staff writer Carol Robinson contributed to this report.*

Join the conversation by clicking to comment or email Faulk at [kfaulk@bhamnews.com](mailto:kfaulk@bhamnews.com).

*This entry was updated at 10:40 a.m. to correct the story entry.*

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**mackmj**

March 04, 2012 at 10:07AM

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and daddy couldn't protect him now...

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March 04, 2012 at 10:44PM

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**Edmund Burke**

March 04, 2012 at 10:48AM

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Even more evidence supporting what we all know about Shelby County and the people that live there.

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**epiphenomeno**

March 04, 2012 at 1:01PM

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Wait a minute! That's my line!  
You are absolutely right!

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**Hagar the horrible 2012**

March 04, 2012 at 2:41PM

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The truth.....Birmingham, in the top ten for violent crime over 8 yrs. in a row, and the ones responsible.....over 1/2 the US prison population, committing 6.5 times the crime of their white counterparts, though only 14% of the US population, including all blacks.

So the real # is much lower.....7-8%. Now those are facts.  
You two can only tell racist lie! Have a nice day! :)

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**epiphenomeno**

March 04, 2012 at 6:18PM

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I think that we were talking about Shelby County.  
I believe that the article is about Shelby County and the people that live there.

No wonder you never finished HS. You couldn't keep up with the conversation.

Bless your little heart.

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**gogopher** March 04, 2012 at 7:29PM

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ONLY YOU COULD BRING UP RACE IN A SITUATION LIKE THIS (NO SUPRISE).

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**El Jefe** March 04, 2012 at 2:55PM

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I live in Shelby Co., but I want this guy to go straight to "Bubba's" cell, so does everyone I know. I guess we should infer that you Bham types support murder, assault, and robbery according to your logic.

That Watson dude should be in the klink too...

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**elmerthefirst** March 04, 2012 at 3:40PM

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So I take it you were one of Acker jr's supporters when he was first accused of being a sexual deviant who preyed on children?

Did you call the little 4 year old he molested a liar like most everyone else in Shelby County?

When I was a kid one of my school friends got molested by his Royal Ranger leader and when he said something about it his family was told they were no longer welcome at their church, and that same church hired a lawyer (with church funds) to defend the guy who later was caught red handed with two other boys from the same church.

Oddly enough the same thing happened there that happened in Shelby County. When the guy was first accused, the members of his church circled the wagons and called the child a liar. When he got caught later with two other boys the members of his church didn't have a single word to say.

Sad how people of faith can be so easily fooled by one of their own.

Hopefully you learned something from your mistake in supporting Acker jr, or are you going to claim you never supported him the first time? I'll bet you can't find a single individual in Shelby County who supported him the first time. At least not one who would admit it.

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**El Jefe** March 04, 2012 at 4:55PM

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Elmer, are you talking to me, you clown? I did not live here when that happened....not even close. I'm not from here. When this story broke a couple months back it was the first I heard of it. And, I don't go to that puppet church of his either, nor do the people I associate with....in fact I wouldn't set foot in a southern baptist church. You assume too much, you blowhard. I'd ask for an apology, but I know you aren't man enough to issue one.

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**elmerthefirst** March 04, 2012 at 7:11PM

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OK so I assumed too much...mea culpa...

Unlike many here who would see an apology as a sign of weakness, or are simply too redneck proud to admit they stepped in it, I'm well aware of the fact I'm human and as

such, subject to the occasional faux pas.

I'll admit, its tough living among so many perfect examples of humanity, but someone's gotta do it.

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**ericac01** March 04, 2012 at 11:20AM

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oh, so if your wealthy orknow someone in Shelby County , then you can do whatever you want to little children and get away with it. The church, Dominion Baptist, the judges, and everyone else there should be ashamed of themselves. These children count on you for protection. If there are any REAL MEN HERE,please stand up!

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**mrsandmr** March 04, 2012 at 11:31AM

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It would be unfair to allow this incident to taint an entire county, but the entire county has been strangley quiet about this.

If Mr Faulk's article is correct, the people in Shelby County rallied to Acker's defense and demonized a little girl out of respect for the Acker family. The people in Shelby County are now remaining silent out of respect for the Acker family. Well, at least the current victims can be thankful for that.

Would it be disrespectful for the people of Shelby County to rally in support of these 4 victims that have come forward? Even the one they ran out of town 20 years ago? Maybe then the other 16 victims that Acker confessed to molesting will have to confidence to come forward. I wonder how many of them witnessed the first little girl being demonized by an entire community? I wonder if their families were part of the lynch mob?

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**shellseeker7** March 04, 2012 at 11:55AM

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Why would you want to respect anyone that has raised a child molestor?? I sure they had to know something sick about this man.....

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**Blessed-Are** March 04, 2012 at 11:55AM

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The Catholics get a lot of bad press for covering up sex abuse crimes, but the Southern Baptist are just as bad, if not worse.

Jack Graham, former president of the SBC, refused to report John Langworthy to the police after he was found to have molested to boys in 1989. He simply gave Langworthy a a reference, and sent him on down the road to molest other boys.

Langworthy was finally arrested last year, and the Southern Baptist church he was working at in Mississippi has repeatedly tried to keep what they know from the hands of law enforcement.

That's how they roll.

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