

## What Really Happened to Jarret Austin Clark?

Jarret Austin Clark was found 26 feet below the surface of Fort Gibson Lake at Wahoo Bay in Wagoner County, Oklahoma, on May 18, 2006. The Medical Examiner ruled that Jarret drowned on May 14, 2006, but an important piece of information left out of the ME's report was whether his drowning was accidental or intentional. Tammy and Eric Slater, Jarret's mother and step-father, suspect the latter.

On May 13, 2006, a few days after Jarret's high school graduation from Broken Arrow High School, he was asked to celebrate at the lake with classmate Brandon Hargrove and his girlfriend Courtney Manzer. Others in attendance included Brandon's sister Dayna and her boyfriend, Tony Wallen. Although Jarret and Brandon knew each other, no one would call them friends, and many people remain perplexed at Jarret's decision to accept Brandon's invitation.

According to Tammy, Jarret only knew Brandon through a weightlifting class during their senior year, and Brandon eventually dropped out of high school a few months before graduation. Sean Sanderson, Jarret's closest friend and fellow classmate, said Brandon had a rough reputation at Broken Arrow High School, and Sean says he'll never fully understand what motivated Jarret to go anywhere with "this Brandon kid." Brandon's troubled history was so widely known that Tammy recalled even the principal of Broken Arrow High School described Brandon as someone "known for pills and a bad temper." Court records show Brandon pled guilty to possession of marijuana and drug paraphernalia in February of 2006, three months before Jarret's death, and he received a suspended sentence on both counts.

The events leading up to Jarret's death follow like this:

On Saturday, May 13, at about 6:00pm, Jarret gave his mother a crystal vase filled with flowers that he arranged himself and a picture frame intended to hold his graduation photograph. These were Jarret's Mother's Day presents for Tammy, since Mother's Day was the following day. He soon left to meet a friend (who will remain unnamed) at his apartment and Sean was expected to meet them later. Jarret gave his mother "his tight squeeze hug" and to his mother and Eric said, "I love you guys." Tammy and Eric never saw him again.

While Jarret was at his friend's apartment, Brandon and Courtney stopped by on their way to the lake, presumably to sell Jarret's friend Xanax. What follows here is sketchy. Many bloggers accused Jarret of being high, and reportedly he was witnessed purchasing four pills and consuming one. But Sean Sanderson is adamant that Jarret occasionally drank but did not take drugs. Toxicology reports indicated only that Jarret had a blood alcohol level of 0.04.

Courtney was rumored to have a crush on Jarret even though she was dating Brandon, and according to some witnesses, it was she who persuaded Jarret to join her and

Brandon to camp out at the lake. At approximately 8:45p.m., Jarret dropped off his car at home and climbed into Brandon's blue pickup truck to ride out to the lake with them. Jarret spoke with his mother at around 8:45p.m., informing her of his plans, and she reminded him to be home by 10:00a.m. the following morning for a planned Mother's Day celebration.

Jarret did not return at 10:00a.m. on Mother's Day, nor did he contact home. Tammy immediately grew concerned because Jarret always returned home when he was expected. She spent all of Mother's Day trying to contact friends and family hoping to locate Jarret, to no avail. She finally spoke with Brandon that Sunday evening and when she inquired about Jarret's whereabouts, he responded, "Your son was an idiot, it was all his fault. He shouldn't have tried to rape my girlfriend. I kicked his ass and left him there".

Neither Tammy nor Eric believed Jarret would try to rape anyone, and as the search for Jarret began Sunday evening, they became increasingly worried. "I knew then that Jarret was with some bad people and in serious trouble, but at that time, I truly thought I would find my son alive, not dead," remembers Tammy. More questions than answers surfaced when law enforcement refused to regard Jarret's disappearance as more than a missing persons case, instead of treating the area as a crime scene as Tammy and Eric requested. The more they learned about Brandon and Courtney, the more they feared Jarret fell victim to their rumored volatile relationship. Many of Jarret's friends indicated to Tammy and Eric that Brandon "was very jealous about his girlfriend, Courtney. That no guys could talk to her without Brandon getting mad and jealous. These comments sure hit home hard when I had Brandon on the phone asking him 'where is my son?'"

Many of Jarret's friends conceive that it was Courtney who flirted with Jarret, and she who asked to take their conversation inside the tent at camp. Sean guesses that when Brandon discovered Courtney and Jarret together, he grew enraged. With the help of his friend Tony, Brandon may have overpowered Jarret and beaten him unconscious. He presumes they hit him over the head with a baseball bat given the size of the bruise on his forehead when he was found. Once Jarret was unconscious, Sean believes they dumped him in the lake and left him to die.

Brandon, Tony, Dayna, and Courtney are suspected by many of stealing Jarret's phone, planting his shoes and jacket to make it look like he'd wandered off by himself, and then quickly packing up camp and abandoning Jarret in the lake. This theory is substantiated by a witness who says she saw Brandon's truck backing down to the water, the fact that Brandon admitted disposing of Jarret's phone and Carhartt cap, and the fact that Tammy's niece, Ashley Smithson "was at our home with other family members waiting for the phone to ring. Ashley also kept calling Jarret's cell phone periodically. A man actually answered saying he was 'John Smith' from Sand Springs and found this phone on the side of the road at Wahoo Bay. Ashley explained the phone belonged to her cousin, Jarret Clark, and offered to meet this 'John Smith' in Sand Springs to retrieve Jarret's phone. He hung up on Ashley."

Below is the text of an email Tammy received from a cousin of Courtney's almost two years after Jarret's death, in March of 2008, which supports the conclusions of Jarret's family and friends. Courtney's cousin describes a scene that Courtney relayed to her shortly after the events of May 14. Some punctuation has been changed for clarity of text. No other words have been changed.

*Dearest Tammy*

*I am still so very sorry for your loss. Jarret was truly a beautiful young man. I had met him once. I am much older than Courtney at 30 years old. My family would hate me if I ever said anything to anyone but as a mother of four beautiful children myself and one being an angel that watches over us I am more than happy to tell you everything that I know. I am Courtney's cousin. And she actually lived with my mom when all this happened. It was such a shocker and so you know the day your son went missing she came home and spilled everything. My mother called me scared and told me the horrid story which at that time was just Jarret missing on the news. But she told me so much more than that including where he was. She didn't know what to do and was scared so she layed it out there for me.*

*I did call the police in Wagoner to tell them where they said they left him and I tried to tell them all that she had said. At that time I already knew they left him in the lake. And I also knew that they placed his shoe and jacket in a place to throw people off. I tried to tell them and turn her in at the time she was refusing to speak with anyone and hiding from police. Shortly after she went to speak with Wagoner Police. But I was told that a detective would be contacting me and they kinda blew me off. I tried to tell them that Jarret was in the lake and they ignored me. I was so sad it was true three days later when they found him. My heart aches for you*

*The day after my mom called I invited Courtney over to try and talk some sense into her and we talked and she told me the same thing my mom did. And that is this:*

*They were all out at the lake together. Courtney had always had a little bit of a crush on Jarret and apparently Brandon was being a jerk as usual. She said she was drinking and taking pills and smoking pot and so was Brandon but Jarret wasn't a big partier. Brandon and Courtney got into it and he went off while she stayed at camp. Her and Jarret started to talk and ended up talking in a tent together. She says nothing sexual was happening but they did talk about liking each other. And then Brandon came and found them and a he was very angry with Jarret. They got into it and from what Courtney said the two guys, Brandon and Tony, jumped on Jarret and they started fighting. She said that they dragged him to the water and after that Courtney said they left him face down in the lake. She didn't go into detail about exactly what happened but she kept saying "we left him face down in the water." She saw what happened I know she did.*

*The reason all this came out was because Courtney came back to my mom's house dirty and obviously distraught and after some prying she spilled it. She also said that they broke down camp really fast and they stole Brandon's [meant Jarret's] phone and took his shoes and coat from what I understood. I am guessing that Brandon spoke with you and told you that Jarret "got what he deserved" and the phone was thrown from a moving vehicle. After that they talked about what they would say and came home.*

*I am so sorry I even had to write this but it has haunted me for two years now. I wish I could give you your son back. I did talk with an OSBI agent at my mom's house when they came to talk to us. But my mom being a severe alcoholic couldn't recall exactly what Courtney said. And trust me my mom can't remember my kids names all the time. So she didn't mean any harm. But I did tell the lady that I knew Brandon and Courtney were guilty and she reassured me that she thought that Courtney was lying about her statement.*

*I don't know how accurate all this information is because teen girls can exaggerate or refrain from telling information if you know what I mean. But Tammy. I saw the look in Courtney's eyes. And I think she saw what happened to Jarret. I don't know if Brandon and Courtney are together the last I heard they were and have been. But I didn't know that Brandon was in Jail so I could be out of the loop since I moved so far away from them all. I love my family But I had to get away from them. Good people with too many problems. Me and Courtney's Aunt also went to the police when all this happened because she knew they killed Jarret and wanted them also to look in the lake but she also has since changed her story. I was there the day she went to BA police and told them everything she knew.*

*Again I am so so sorry for your loss and wish I could ease your pain. I talk to Courtney still from time to time but she doesn't say a word these days even when I ask. If there is anything else just let me know. And hugs to you and your family. I wish that Courtney would come forward but I am ashamed to say she is too selfish to do that. I already tried to convince her of that and she pulled away from me.*

*(Sender's name omitted for privacy reasons.)*

By the time this message was sent, Brandon had been arrested in June 2007 (and ultimately convicted in April 2008), for charges of second degree burglary, knowingly concealing stolen property, possession of a controlled drug, possession of paraphernalia, and malicious injury/mischief. He was subsequently killed in a car accident on July 18, 2008, along with two other passengers unrelated to this case, after the car veered off of a curve, "vaulted into a creek bed" (TulsaWorld.com) and landed on its top in approximately 18 inches of water. The irony of this submersion in water was not lost on those familiar with case, including one blogger

who proclaimed, "Karma is always around, watching who it's going to get next, it got justice for Jarret. Karma got a hold of Brandon Hargrove."

Two Grand Juries failed to return indictments on Brandon, Courtney, Tony or Dayna, citing insufficient evidence. Several witnesses were called to the Grand Jury hearings, but many failed to appear, and according to Tammy, some of those that did appear were not allowed to testify. The case consists primarily of circumstantial evidence and the Grand Juries were not convinced criminal charges were plausible from the facts presented.

Many questions remain about Wagoner Law Enforcement's investigation of this case, and the Slaters speculate a possible cover-up since it is rumored that Brandon and Dayna Hargrove are extended relatives of Jim Hargrove, a Wagoner county commissioner. Tammy personally asked Jim Hargrove over the phone if he was related to Brandon and Dayna, but he denied knowing of any connection. However, other reliable sources have indicated that he is their great uncle.

Wagoner police were reluctant to search for Jarret, and the Slaters felt the effort from Wagoner officials was lackluster at best. Ultimately, it was pressure from the Slaters that got the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation on the scene, a full three days after Jarret's disappearance. And it was the OSBI that located Jarret's body. The only other evidence found was Jarret's shoe and jacket, and this was found by Eric and a park ranger. These items were spotted approximately 300 feet from the lake near some brush, which spurred police speculation that Jarret simply wandered off alone and drunkenly stumbled into the lake.

Wagoner Law Enforcement also suggested to OSBI that perhaps Eric and Tammy planted their son's shoe and jacket in hopes to expedite the search and intimate foul play. When an OSBI agent parroted this accusation, the Slaters were devastated and alarmed at the same time. They instantly sensed that Wagoner investigators were intentionally trying to misrepresent Jarret's case because of Jim Hargrove's influence in Wagoner County.

Tammy and Eric are convinced Jarret was murdered, and a quick search of the Internet proves they're not the only ones. Yet this case remains unsolved and essentially inactive. In fact, the Slater's attorney, Mark Collier, told the Tulsa World that the most recent Grand Jury, which took place in December of 2008, was the family's last chance at moving forward with this case. Tammy says the case has not been closed, but no one is ardently seeking justice either. Some conclude the Slaters are unwilling to admit Jarret's death was a tragic accident that came as a result of heavy partying. And regarding a possible connection to County Commissioner Jim Hargrove, Tammy is mostly met with skepticism and accusations that she is falsely promoting conspiracy theories. Tammy just believes that it's better to look at all angles and be proved wrong rather than to not look at all.

Jarret's death left many unanswered questions, and even more empty hearts. Jarret is missed by many, as seen in many memorial websites and blogs, but next to Jarret's parents, Sean Sanderson lost the most. "We were like brothers," he says. Sean and Jarret had been

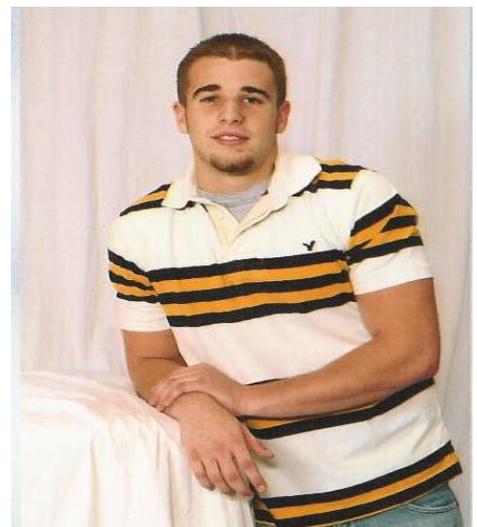
friends since the summer before tenth grade, and were planning to join the Army together after graduation as combat engineers. Sean is currently serving in Iraq, and says "Every time I'm up in the gunner's hatch I look up at the sky and know he's watchin' my 6." Sean was deeply affected by Jarret's death, and remains especially close with Jarret's parents to this day.

If you live in Oklahoma, you may spot cars with windshield decals that read "Justice for Jarret" or "We Will Never Forget" with Jarret's name and birthdate. Jarret's death remains a fresh wound for many, and his case deserves further investigation. Lack of concrete evidence doesn't make Jarret's death any less suspicious, and pursuing family connections and possible cover-ups isn't conspiracy, it's just good investigating.

For more pictures and a moving tribute to Jarret, please visit Jarret's website at [www.jarretaustinclark.com](http://www.jarretaustinclark.com). If you have any information regarding this case, please contact the Broken Arrow Police Department at 918-259-8400 or OSBI at 918-456-0653.



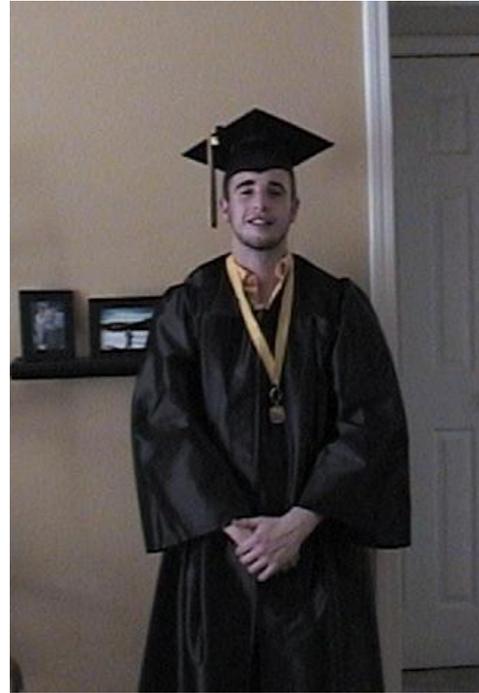
A younger Jarret in his baseball uniform.



Jarret's senior picture.



Tammy, Jarret, and Eric on Graduation Day.



Jarret, ready for Graduation.



Pallbearers load Jarret's casket into the hearse.



A friend's windshield remembers Jarret.