



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on February 27, 2012

## Canada: Four-year-old Allegedly Sketches Gun; Dad Arrested, Strip-Searched

On February 22, Jessie Sansone of Kitchener, Ontario, thought he was making a routine stop to pick up his children at the end of a school day. Instead, he found himself arrested, strip-searched, and thrown in jail. His wife was also taken into police custody, while his children were spirited away by child welfare agents.

Anyone observing this series of events would think Sansone had committed some horrific crime. In fact, he had done nothing even remotely illegal. The entire Sansone family was treated to this raw display of state power because four-year-old Neaveh Sansone had allegedly committed the unforgivable sin of drawing a picture of a gun at school.



Sansone, 26, showed up at Forest Hills Public School as usual Wednesday afternoon to pick up his three school-age children. He and his wife, Stephanie Squires, also have a 15-month-old and are expecting a fifth child in about four months.

When he arrived, he was summoned to the principal's office where three police officers were waiting. They told him he was being charged with possession of a firearm. Then they escorted him from the building, handcuffed him, and took him by police cruiser to the station, where he was strip-searched. He was later told he would be held overnight and would have a bail hearing the next morning.

While this was going on, Squires was also being taken to the police station, and the three children Sansone had intended to take home were instead whisked off to Family and Children's Services, where they were interviewed.

"Nobody was given any explanation," Squires told the [Waterloo Region Record](#). "I didn't know why he was being arrested."

After "several hours," reports the *Record*, "a detective apologized and said he was being released with no charges, Sansone said." At that time, continues the paper, "the detective told him that his four-year-old daughter had drawn a picture of a man holding a gun. When a teacher asked her who the man was, the girl replied, "That's my daddy's. He uses it to shoot bad guys and monsters.'"

The teacher reported it to the principal's office, which called Family and Children's Services, which, in turn, called the cops, who proceeded to arrest Sansone on the basis of this extremely flimsy evidence — if one can even call it evidence. Waterloo Regional Police Inspector Kevin Thaler told the *Record* the police were justified in acting since, in his view, the evidence suggested "a firearm was in a residence and children had access to it," "We had every concern, based on this information, that children were in danger,"m said Thaler.



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After his release Sansone agreed to let police search his house. Their search turned up only one “firearm” on the premises: a transparent plastic toy pistol. And even *that* wasn’t loaded.

Thaler insists that the kids thought it was a genuine pistol. “The child had every belief it was real,” he told the *Calgary Herald*. “The indication from the kids was that it was dad’s (gun).”

Sansone, however, “denied that his children thought the gun was real or belonged to him,” the paper adds.

“You can see springs in it and everything,” Squires told the *Record*. “You can totally see it’s not a real gun.”

As usual in cases such as this, all the government employees involved are saying that everything was done in accordance with proper procedures.

School principal Steve Zack “said a staff member called child welfare officials because the law requires them to report anything involving the safety or neglect of a child,” the *Record* writes.

He was backed up by the Waterloo Region District School Board’s superintendent of education, Gregg Bereznick, who told the newspaper, “We did what we were supposed to do.”

Alison Scott of Family and Children’s Services “said the agency was obligated to investigate after getting a report from the school” and must call the police “if there’s a potential crime that’s been committed,” according to the *Record*.

“Based on interviews with the children and school staff,” the paper says, “regional police believed there was a real gun in the family home and the children were in danger.”

Thaler even defended the strip-searching of Sansone on the basis of “officer safety.”

It’s possible the whole incident was just typical bureaucratic overreaction in this day of “zero tolerance” for anything related to guns and schools. That in itself would be bad enough. [Matt Gurney](#) of the *National Post* observes:

Surely there are other ways to investigate an incident such as this that don’t involve instantly arresting and stripping an innocent man while seizing his children. Is that now going to be the default investigative response to every rumor, hint or intimation made in a classroom or schoolyard? Whatever happened to conducting an investigation, gathering evidence and building a case *before* swooping in with two units of armed officers?

However, consider this curious paragraph from the *Record*:

Thaler said investigators never saw the drawing that sparked the investigation. Sansone has not seen it. Bereznick won’t acknowledge a drawing exists. Alison Scott, the executive director of Family and Children’s Services, says the agency may or may not have a copy of the child’s drawing.

In other words, the Sansone family was subjected to a nerve-wracking nightmare on the basis of a drawing that may not even exist. This, of course, calls all the rest of the so-called evidence into question. Did Neaveh actually make the comment about her dad’s using the gun to shoot bad guys? Did she and the other Sansone children really tell investigators that they thought the gun was real? Or did someone, somewhere along the line, just have it in for the Sansones?

Jessie Sansone admits that he’s been in trouble with the law before. Five years ago he was convicted of



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assault and attempted burglary, but he has never been charged with anything firearms-related. He also says he's cleaned up his act and is now a counselor at a sobriety center who also speaks to high school students on the dangers of drugs, violence, and bullying. Nevertheless, it's possible someone still mistrusts him and is inclined to seize on any pretext to make trouble for him.

It is also distinctly possible that the Sansones' flagrant disregard for the do-gooders' population-control mantra has them in bad stead with the powers that be, who would like nothing more than to find a way to take their children away from them and to separate Sansone and Squires so that they will not burden Mother Earth with any more. After all, Scott of Family and Children's Services told the *Record* that even though the police dropped the charges, the gun in question turned out to be a toy, and Squires has said she will throw it away, "We're still investigating this one."

Obviously someone doesn't want to let it go.

Sansone, for his part, is outraged that he has been "slandered" by the incident, he told the *Herald*. He's also not happy about the effect it had on his little girl. "The first thing my daughter said when I saw her [after being released] was, 'Daddy, are you mad at me?'" he recounted to the paper. "That sums it up for me."



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