

***Wanda Cooper Speaks out about the 2.23, I Run With Maud, Estranged father and Foundations using Ahmaud Arbery's Name without permission, For Personal Agendas and Popularity.***

First, I would like to thank everyone for the support in the fight for justice for my son, Ahmaud Arbery, and the consistent outpouring of love you have shown my family. I am grateful for it all; there is nothing that is without value, from the smallest to greatest words/gestures/contributions.

Ahmaud was more than a jogger, who was senselessly murdered in South Georgia, for no reason. He was my baby boy. I gave birth to Ahmaud on Mother's Day of 1994; at 22 years old. He was the last child I birthed, of 3. When Ahmaud was in Kindergarten I became a single mother, ceasing the relationship with his father. Being a single mother did not come without hardships but being a mother is one of the most rewarding titles, I have ever had the pleasure of being called.

When I made the decision to become a single mother, I also decided to never deprive my children of things they needed. I worked two jobs (twelve-hour days) for 15 years to provide for my children. Marcus their father resided right across town but provided nor offered any support. I can support that statement in good conscious, legally, and factually. So, it is with great disappointment that I must now elaborate on this situation with Marcus, founders of 2.23, and creator of I Run With Maud; when I am still grieving, still advocating, still seeking justice, and still trying to adjust to the loss of Aumaud. Before I ever made a statement, I spoke with them several times to do my best to resolve this situation privately.

I cannot in good conscious support a page that is now more of a business and plight for selfish motives. So, I want to shed some light on this so that I continue to prepare myself for the true fight of justice for Ahmaud, protecting his character, and being strong for my family.

1. ***The I RUN WITH MAUD social media page.*** I was asked to start this page by Akeem Baker, friend of Ahmaud's. I was appreciative for the page, at first, as it helped draw awareness and it was a memorial to Ahmaud. The social media was designed as memorial; that is what I agreed to. When the page began to transition to a business, my daughter and I address the concerns. Akeem acknowledged the transition and stated it would be corrected; however, that never took place. Also, I asked to have access to page several times. I wanted to be able to see the inbox, the tags, receive notifications. I was never given any access to the page. This became alarming to me.

2. ***The Trademark for I Run With Maud.*** I did not agree to the trademark nor was I asked to be apart of it. On May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020 it was filed. This was the day after Ahmaud's birthday; two days after the arrest of the McMichaels; and the day we set aside to release balloons in the honor of Ahmaud, a very emotional time for us all. Mr. John Richards did not even attend the balloon release but felt entitled enough to sit, behind his computer applying for a trademark in the honor of my child. Mr. Richards has never seen my son dead or alive. He has never even meet me or spoken to me. Yet, he owns and profits off of a trademark in my son's name.

3. ***The GoFundMe.*** I did not ask anyone to make a GoFundMe. Although, grateful to the contributors. The page was suggested by Akeem. Again, it was not my idea and initially I put a lot of trust into Akeem. He was a friend of my sons. I have fed him meals just as I have my own children. The campaign was established in early May, this was after Ahmaud was laid to rest. Ahmaud was covered under a life insurance policy that I struggled to pay for to prepare for days like these. All that the policy did not cover or anything additional, I had no issue covering it because as a mother that was my job. I never truly

thought I would have to use that policy or bury my son. Money cannot replace what I have lost and the fight for justice does not come without cost. I was not begging for money and I was prepared to fight for my son either way. I have always worked for what I wanted. Since the passing of Ahmaud, I have returned to work because to WORK is all I know. My child's death was not some sort of way to gain money. Money helps with the fight; it helps honor him, but I am still actively working.

5. ***The Foundation 2.23.*** This was founded by Jason Vaughn, a local high school coach. He is not a relative and did not have a close relationship with my son. The foundation was started after national attention was gain from me advocating for my son. The night of the Washington March is when he launched this. Within Seven days of that launching, there was a BIG fundraiser.

The I RUN FOR MAUD committee (all five members with whom I do not know well) have known for months I did not want my child's death to be exploited or used for monetary gain for anyone. I was disrespected and ignored.

I could not remain silent, I not only speak for myself, I speak for my SON most importantly. What is important to me is to gain justice for my son and peace. I am so disappointed that I must address this issue. The truth is I buried my son there is not about a trademark, a social media page, MONEY, or CONTROL that will fix that. I now must protect my son's name.

The grief is a fight every day of my life. Fighting for justice is something I must do each day and every minute of the day. What I am experiencing is draining but it is for my son. There is so much we experience after losses due to injustice. I am simply asking everyone to respect my wishes as they are always fair and in the best interest of my family and Ahmaud.

I thank everyone for genuine support that comes without manipulation. It is needed and it keeps me going.

Wanda Cooper

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