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Mississippi Court Rules “Other Woman” Owes \$88K for Marriage Breakup

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Melissa Simmons must pay her husband's ex-wife \$88,000, a Mississippi appeals court ruled recently. Chrissy Strickland won the award after suing Simmons for her role in ending the marriage between Chrissy and Chuck Strickland.

The End of a Marriage

Chrissy and Chuck Strickland married in 1996 and had a child two years later. In 2007, while on a camping trip, the couple fought. Chrissy cut her trip short and left, taking their son with her. Chuck remained at the campground and while there, met Melissa and her then-husband Lane.

After returning home, Chuck and Melissa continued to communicate with one another. Though there's disagreement over how quickly their relationship turned physical, they were unquestionably engaged in an emotional affair. During one eight-week period, the pair was averaging two or three phone calls daily.

On September 17, 2007, both couples separated. Their divorces were finalized the following year, and Melissa and Chuck married one another.

Alienation of Affection & Emotional Distress

When someone files for divorce, they are essentially suing their spouse to end the marriage. Depending on the state in which you reside, you may be able to file for a [no-fault](#) or a [fault-based divorce](#).

- A no-fault divorce means that both parties want to end the marriage and neither is being blamed for the breakup.
- A fault-based divorce means the actions of one spouse were responsible for the end of the marriage. Reasons commonly cited in a fault-based divorce include [abandonment](#), [adultery](#) and [incompatibility](#).

[Mississippi](#), where the Stricklands lived, allows for *both* fault-based and no-fault divorces, though it isn't known which option Chrissy and Chuck pursued. What is known is this: In 2008, Chrissy Strickland sued Melissa Simmons for [alienation of affection](#) and [intentional infliction of emotional distress](#) for Simmons' role in the Strickland's breakup.

- **Emotional distress** describes the onset of anxiety or depression as a result of a sudden and sad event.
- **Alienation of affection** means that Chrissy was accusing Melissa of depriving her of her husband's love and affection. In other words, if Melissa hadn't come around, Chuck would have still loved her

and they would have remained married. Only Illinois, Mississippi, North Carolina, New Mexico, South Dakota and Utah permit a spurned spouse to sue for alienation of affection.

“Mississippi is one of the few states that still recognizes alienation of affection suits as a civil action for damages,” says Jackson, Miss., lawyer [Lindsey A. Boyd](#) of the Lindsey A. Boyd Law Firm, PLLC. “Mississippi courts are greatly familiar with alienation of affection suits, which are commonly filed by a spouse against an alleged paramour in an adulterous relationship. Alienation of affection claims are feasible for a client whose husband or wife has abandoned the marriage due a third party’s malicious, intentional acts which alienated the love and affection of the husband or wife away from the client.”

If someone sues for alienation of affection and/or intentional infliction of emotional distress and wins the lawsuit, the plaintiff can collect two types of monetary awards: **Compensatory damages** and **punitive damages**.

- Compensatory damages are meant to pay the victim for their loss. In the case of alienation of affection: How much was Chuck’s love and companionship worth? And did Chrissy’s standard of living change as a result of the divorce?
- Punitive damages are designed to punish someone for their wrongdoing, and are only awarded if the behavior is willful and malicious.

In Chrissy Strickland’s case, the trial court ordered Melissa Simmons to pay her \$87,500 in compensatory damages and \$500 in punitive damages. The case was appealed to a higher court, which agreed with the trial court’s decision.

In his decision, Appeals Court Judge Kenneth Griffis wrote:

“The cell phone records show that Melissa called Chuck more than twice as much as he called her. A few months later, Chuck abandoned the marriage, saying that he was in love with Melissa...Based on these facts, there was sufficient evidence for the jury to infer that, but for Melissa’s active interference, the marriage of Chuck and Chrissy probably would not have ended.”

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