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'I'm here to help,' father says

WATERVILLE -- Justin DiPietro wants his daughter back.

BY **BEN MCCANNA**



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WATERVILLE — Justin DiPietro wants his daughter back.

“I hope that whoever had the courage to come into this house and take her has the courage to bring her back. It’s gone on long enough,” DiPietro said during a Monday interview with the Morning Sentinel.

ADDITIONAL PHOTOS



RETURN MY DAUGHTER: Justin DiPietro, right, leaves his mother's home at 29 Violette Ave. in Waterville on Monday followed by his brother, Lance DiPietro. Justin DiPietro asked for the return of his daughter Ayla Reynolds, missing since Dec. 17, in an appearance on the "Today" show and an interview with the Morning Sentinel. *Staff photo by David Learning*



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DiPietro's daughter, 20-month-old Ayla Reynolds, has been missing since Dec. 17. For two weeks, her disappearance has been the subject of national media attention and the focus of a massive multi-agency investigation.

On Monday, DiPietro, 24, sat in the sunlit living room of 29 Violette Ave., the home where Ayla was last seen. His mother, Phoebe DiPietro, and older brother, Lance DiPietro, sat nearby.

DiPietro said he wanted to clarify a widespread rumor regarding the hours before Ayla was reported missing. He said some media outlets and blogs reported there was a party at the DiPietro home on Dec. 16.

"There was no party," he said.

Phoebe DiPietro nodded in agreement. She also offered a simple plea to anyone who might know about Ayla's whereabouts.

“I just want her back,” she said, tearfully.

DiPietro said he wanted to thank the community for posting a \$30,000 reward for information that leads investigators to Ayla.

“It’s amazing,” he said. “I don’t know John Nale or any of the people involved in raising money for the reward. To think that they would do something like that for people they don’t know is just overwhelming.”

John Nale is a Waterville attorney who announced the reward during a Dec. 26 press conference.

For two weeks, DiPietro had remained quiet. On Dec. 19, he released a written statement through Waterville Police saying he didn’t know who took Ayla. On Dec. 28, he released a second written statement to thank the community for their support during the search.

On Monday, DiPietro appeared in front of television cameras for the first time. A few hours prior to his interview with the Morning Sentinel, DiPietro spoke to NBC’s “Today,” and explained his silence.

“Initially, the first few days, I was emotionally incapable of coming out to do an interview.” Police also initially advised him against doing media interviews because it could hinder the investigation, he said.

But, he said a national interview could help break the case.

“I’m here to help in any way I can. By coming on here it’s in hopes of reaching out to the person that does have my daughter, to let them know that what you’re doing isn’t right. You may think what you’re doing is right for Ayla, but it’s not. You have no right. You’re not her parent. She belongs home with her family.”

DiPietro also addressed criticism from Ayla’s mother, Trista Reynolds, who has made several television appearances in the last two weeks. DiPietro said Reynolds’ questions about his parenting skills in the weeks leading up to Ayla’s disappearance are new.

“As far as I know, there were never any concerns,” he said. “We had both agreed that me having her at this point in time was the best thing for her.”

Ayla’s parents had agreed that the toddler would stay with her father when Trista Reynold checked into rehabilitation for substance abuse in mid-October, according to Lewiston Police records.

DiPietro said he’s unaware of any new developments in the case.

“As far as I know, we’re at the same place that we were at on Day One with this,” he said.

There were no updates from police Monday.

Maine State Police ended their investigative work Saturday at the home, which is owned by Phoebe DiPietro. Police also “released the house back to the occupants,” according to Department of Public Safety Spokesman Steve McCausland.

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