



# Grandmother says family had nothing to do with toddler's disappearance

By Susan Candiotti and Ross Levitt, CNN

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"Somebody came into my home and took my granddaughter who was sleeping," Phoebe DiPietro, grandmother of Ayla Reynolds, says.

## Story highlights

Ayla Reynolds disappeared on December 17

The grandmother notices "oddities" in the house after toddler disappeared

"There was no party at the house," grandmother says

The grandmother of a missing Maine toddler says no family members in the home the night the girl vanished had anything to do with her disappearance.

"I feel violated. Somebody came into my home and took my granddaughter who was sleeping," Phoebe DiPietro said during her first television interview

about Ayla Reynolds, the now 21-month-old toddler.

Ayla disappeared December 17. Police have said they believe foul play was involved. They also say the DiPietros have fully co-operated in the investigation.

Sitting in her living room, steps away from Ayla's bedroom, DiPietro said she heard nothing while she slept that night. She wasn't the last one to go to bed that night and wasn't sure whether the doors were locked. She and her son suspect the child was abducted.

## Update: Grandmother changes story

"I'm sure that eventually they will be able to let us know how someone got into the house whether it was an unlocked window, an unlocked door, I don't know," DiPietro said. "If I knew, it wouldn't have happened," she added.

A \$30,000 reward has been offered in the search for 20-month-old Ayla Reynolds.

Investigators have said there were several adults in the DiPietro home that night, including DiPietro and her 24-year-old son. Police won't identify

the others, nor reveal much else.

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Neither will Phoebe DiPietro. She says detectives have asked her and her son not to divulge details of what happened that night to avoid possibly hindering the investigation.

"I can tell you there was not a party here at the house. Just beyond that, I can't answer any questions." She says her son put Ayla to bed every night.

DiPietro says it was her son Justin (Ayla's father) who told her Ayla was missing. She would not say what time, where she was when she heard or elaborate.

Police have said the little girl was put to bed about 8 that night and that her father reported her missing the next morning just before 9.

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DiPietro revealed she told investigators about "oddities" in the house after Ayla disappeared. She would not describe what they were. She added that she doesn't think police want her to disclose that information.

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Ayla's grandmother also said she allowed police to immediately search her house without a warrant, and that she and her son have undergone several interrogations. She says she answered all their questions and prepared several written statements of what happened that night at their request.

The police had full access to the house for about three weeks from mid-December until the end of the month. DiPietro says police searched everywhere, fingerprint dust was all over the place. They left her a list of what was removed, including laptop computers and cell phones that belonged to her and her son. The phones and computers have now been returned.

Ayla's room, she says, has been turned upside down by investigators searching for clues.

Maine State Police took the lead in the investigation, at the request of the Waterville police, because they now consider it a criminal investigation based

"on evidence gathered by investigators."

The FBI and Maine Warden Service are also involved in the case.

Ayla was last seen wearing pajamas that said "Daddy's Princess."

DiPietro says she believes investigators are doing all they can to find Ayla.

She also discounted claims by Ayla's mother that Justin DiPietro may have abused or mistreated his daughter. The toddler's parents don't live together.

Ayla's mother previously has been in rehab.

Ayla had been wearing a soft sling on her left arm.

Her grandmother says Ayla's arm was injured during an accidental fall. At the time, she says her son was coming home with Ayla. DiPietro says she heard a thud at the back door.

It was dark at the time, and she says her son had slipped on the stairs outside the side door and fell with Ayla in his arms. DiPietro ran to help them both. The youngster was crying but didn't immediately appear injured. The next morning, one of her hands swelled and she was taken to an emergency room for treatment.

She says her son would never harm Ayla.

"Justin is a great dad. He truly, truly is. And I know he loves Ayla," his mother said.

Ayla's grandmother gently stroked a sparkly red dress with a sales tag still hanging on it. It was supposed to be a Christmas present for Ayla.

Tears rolled down her cheek.

"I'd give everything I owned if we can have her back."