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## Ayla's mother: 'This isn't how I wanted her to become a star'

By Christopher Cousins, BDN Staff

Posted Jan. 12, 2012, at 5:32 p.m.

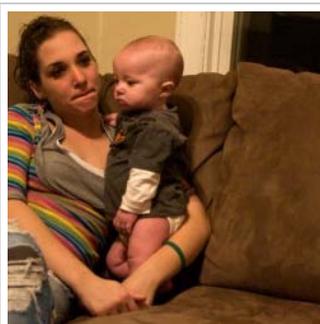
Last modified Jan. 12, 2012, at 6:06 p.m.



PORTLAND, Maine — Holding Ayla in her arms, snuggling in bed in the early morning or whispering into the sleeping child's ear at night, Trista Reynolds always could count on her daughter to listen to her problems and wash sorrow away with the power of her smile.

"Ayla is my best friend," said Reynolds on Wednesday. "I have told Ayla all of my deepest, darkest secrets. I'd tell her about my whole day. No matter what, Ayla would still look up at me with those eyes and that smile."

Children as young as Ayla don't understand relationship and



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financial problems, but as most any parent learns with their firstborn, even an infant has a personality that endures a lifetime. Trista said Ayla's shone through moments after she was born April 4, 2010, with blond hair, brilliant blue eyes and an unmistakable smile.

"She was born with a smirk on her face," said Reynolds during an interview Wednesday with the Bangor Daily News. "I don't think Ayla has ever had a bad day."

Trista's story of motherhood — and Ayla's story of daughterhood — are not unique, or at least they weren't until Dec. 17 when [Ayla was reported missing](#) by her father, Justin DiPietro. Twenty-seven days into the wrenching and captivating search for the girl, Trista said she tries to focus on Ayla the person, not Ayla the missing person.

"I used to tell her she was going to be mommy's star, but this isn't how I wanted her to become a star," said Trista. "She's got to come home. I can't imagine the rest of my life without her."

Trista said her goal to have children intensified at age 15, but it wasn't until she was 21 that she realized she was pregnant. Her first reaction was typical: terror.

"At first I was scared," said Reynolds. "I think I had every emotion a new mother is going to have. But as the months went on, I was so happy."

At one point, doctors told Trista she had a tubular pregnancy, meaning that Ayla was growing inside the fallopian tube, and that she might not survive. But those fears faded and attention soon turned to names. Early possibilities: Jaylyne, Jaylene, Adrianna and Ariana. Then Trista's fiancé — who is not DiPietro — saw Ayla in a baby names book.

"[The name] Ayla stuck to us immediately," said Trista. "It means 'forever flower.'"

Two weeks before her due date, Trista went into labor. Surrounded by family members and a midwife, she pulled Ayla into the world with her own two hands. Ayla's grandmother Becca Hanson cut the umbilical cord.

"I could see a lot of Trista in her right away," said Hanson, who was present for the interview at her home in Portland.

After a week in the hospital, mother and daughter finally went home to a Tinkerbell-themed nursery. Ayla's birthday smile and zest for life never faded. She rolled over at less than 2 months old, crawled at 9 months and walked at 11. Trista said her favorite time of the day was around 6 a.m. when Ayla woke jumping up and down in her crib and reaching out for Mommy. Trista would bring Ayla into her bed — along with her son, Raymond, who is 11 months younger than his sister — for cuddling. Then they'd dance and sing with the radio while they made breakfast.

"One of Ayla's favorite things is music," said Ron Reynolds Jr., Trista's brother. "Whenever you turn the radio on, she'll dance."

Though anything with a beat could get her going, her favorite song is "Moves Like Jagger" by Maroon 5, a popular dance tune which celebrates the Rolling Stones frontman.

Ayla always wanted to be the center of attention. She'd spin around in circles and intentionally fall to the floor, looking up to make sure everyone was laughing. Whenever there was a camera around she'd put herself in front of it. When she was up to mischief — such as once when she emptied her aunt's purse — she'd give Trista a sly smile and then scamper away giggling.

One of Ayla's favorite toys was a stuffed purple rabbit she called Dadda, followed closely by a collection of a half-dozen stuffed puppies from the movie "Hotel for Dogs."

"Nobody was allowed to touch those puppies," said Trista. "Raymond would scooch over and try to take them and she'd scream."

As the months passed Ayla began picking up words, like momma (which she usually pronounced ma-MA! at the top of her lungs), bubba, dadda, nanny and thank you. When she wanted something she couldn't reach, such as a snack from the cupboard, she'd point to it and say "Up!" More recently she began winning laughs by saying "Ki-ki-ki kick your butt!" which she learned from some older cousins.

Troy R. Bennett | BDN

Trista Reynolds holds her nine-month-old son Raymond Fortier during an interview with the BDN in Portland. She talked about her infant daughter Ayla, who went missing in December.



Troy R. Bennett | BDN

Trista Reynolds talks about her daughter Ayla, who went missing in December, during an interview in Portland with the Bangor Daily News on Wednesday evening.

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When it came to her brother and infant cousin, Ayla's nurturing spirit came to the fore.

"Whenever Raymond starts crying, Ayla will run across the house to him," said Trista. "She wants to help with everything. Even when I'm changing his diaper, Ayla tries to push me out of the way."

The last time Trista saw her daughter was when she decided to check into a hospital to fight substance addiction. She said Ayla's sad eyes when she walked out of the room is an image she just can't escape.

"I had to do it," said Trista. "I knew I had a problem. I knew it was getting out of control." Asked about her recovery, Trista embraced her son and said "Mommy's doing good, isn't she?"

Trista said she called Ayla daily from the hospital and that DiPietro sometimes resisted letting her talk to the girl. Trista's last conversation with Ayla was on Dec. 8, nine days before DiPietro reported her missing. After that, she said, DiPietro always had a reason not to put Ayla on the phone, such as she was sleeping or busy playing.

Despite Trista's frustration with that, she said she didn't sense that anything was wrong. She said she still isn't convinced DiPietro contributed to Ayla's disappearance, though she said she has a lot of questions for him that he won't answer.

"I don't think he would hurt her," said Trista. "Whenever I saw them together he seemed like he cared a lot about her. I had to give him a chance. He's her biological father."

DiPietro could not be reached for comment. Someone inside his Violette Avenue home in Waterville did not answer a knock at the door Wednesday, though a vehicle he is known to drive was in the driveway.

Trista said her frustration with Justin has intensified since Ayla's disappearance, mostly because other than a brief conversation a few days ago, he won't talk to her.

"He says there's nothing to be discussed," said Trista. "I have a lot of questions ... most of all I would like to know what her last day was like [before she disappeared]."

Trista said she learned that investigators were [searching the Kennebec River for Ayla on Wednesday](#) when she heard it on that morning's news.

"When I saw that I kept thinking to myself, 'there's no way that my little girl could be in that river,'" she said. "Sometimes I have to pretend it's not going on. If I don't tell myself that sometimes, I don't know how I could function. I can't just become a zombie. I have a son to take care of."

Trista said she is doing everything she can to find her daughter, including interviews with the media to keep the public's attention and interacting with visitors to a website designed by her stepfather, [www.aylareynolds.com](http://www.aylareynolds.com). She said she believes Ayla is still alive.

"My mind and my heart keep telling me that she's OK, but she's not OK with where she's at," said Trista. "She's miserable and sad."

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