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Ayla's parents meet at vigil for missing toddler

Next



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WATERVILLE, Maine — For the first time since their toddler daughter was reported missing six weeks ago, Trista Reynolds and Justin DiPietro came face-to-face Saturday afternoon at a vigil held for Ayla Reynolds in front of City Hall.

Their words were private, but their body language spoke of anguish. Trista Reynolds, who rocked back and forth on the City Hall steps as she talked to DiPietro, earlier had addressed the news that police have been analyzing blood found in the basement of the Waterville home where 20-month-old Ayla was last seen.

"I don't have the answers you guys are looking for," she told media gathered at the vigil. "I want to know where she is and who took her."

Reynolds said that she was trying to process "the concept that blood was found" at the home where her daughter had been living, then broke off, huddling for support with two other women who gathered her in their arms.

According to the Maine State Police, investigators have been analyzing blood found in DiPietro's basement early in the investigation. Spokesman Stephen McCausland said that it was unclear when test results would be ready. He called the discovery of the blood "troubling," and said that police believe that the three adults who were in the home that night have not given investigators the full story.

DiPietro said that he did not want to comment about the police report.

"I'm coming out here today to support her," he said before leaving the event. "And thank the community for all they do."

The vigil and balloon rally for Ayla was organized by Bob Vear of Waterville.

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Over the two hours it lasted, dozens of people signed a poster for the missing toddler, helped their children blow bubbles, listened to music — and hugged Ayla's family members.

Reynolds wore a green ribbon in honor of her daughter and a button with Ayla's smiling face pinned to her hooded sweatshirt. She and Selena Johnson, DiPietro's aunt, cried and held each other for a long moment.

Johnson said she has never had the chance to meet Ayla.

"That is my prayer, that she's still alive," she said. "I am praying. I need answers. I think everybody does."

At one point, Reynolds was given a pink balloon that said "princess" on it.

DiPietro told police that Ayla had been wearing green polka dot pajamas and the words "Daddy's Princess" on them when he put her to bed the night of Dec. 16. He reported her missing the next morning.

"I haven't seen her face since Nov. 21. I haven't hugged her. I haven't kissed her," Reynolds said. "I've learned how to be patient in the last 40 days. Every day is getting harder, and the days are getting longer."

Two nuns from the community of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament in Waterville came to show their support for Ayla.

"I just pray that she's alright," said Sister Colette Caron. "She's everybody's child."

"What can you say?" asked Sister Lorraine Rioux. "Wherever she is, let her be loved, let her be comforted, let her be safe."

Alanna Beggs, 8, of Winslow, said that she had brought a stuffed bear to Ayla's house at Christmastime.

More than a month later, a pile of stuffed animals lay half-covered with snow outside of DiPietro's home on Violette Avenue.

Beggs' grandmother, Barbara York of Winslow, said that the girl's disappearance caused people to be more protective of their own children, who have also "gone through a lot" since Dec. 17.

"It's very sad. It's heartbreaking," she said. "I can't imagine ever going through something like that."

Reynolds, her eyes red from crying, told a friend that she was trying to keep it together and stay strong for Ayla's sake.

"Whoever did take her, whoever has answers, I'm asking again, please tell us," she said to the reporters. "I love her. I will not stop fighting until I get the answers I want, or she comes home."

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

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