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Missing toddler's mom wants answers

Trista Reynolds of Portland says she continues to pray for Ayla's safe return but needs answers – good or bad – about her daughter's fate.

BY DAVID SHARP / THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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PORTLAND — The mother of a toddler missing since December says she was in denial for three months but has come to accept the heart-wrenching possibilities of what may have happened to her daughter, whose whereabouts remain unknown as her second birthday approaches.

Trista Reynolds says she continues to pray for Ayla's safe return but needs answers — good or bad — about her daughter's fate. She believes Ayla's father, Justin DiPietro, has the answers. Police also believe DiPietro knows more than he's told investigators.

ADDITIONAL PHOTOS



Jeff Hanson pauses while talking about his missing step-granddaughter, Ayla Reynolds, at his home in Portland on Tuesday. AP





A poster showing missing toddler Ayla Reynolds hangs in the back window of Jeff Hanson's truck at his home in Portland on Tuesday. AP

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“I’m tired of wondering and I’m tired of worrying,” she told The Associated Press. “It’s just not fair. And Justin is the one who could end all of this in a matter of minutes.”

DiPietro didn't return a message left on his cellphone today. Steve Bourget, a lawyer representing some of DiPietro's family members, didn't return a message at his Augusta office.

Ayla was 20 months old when she was last seen in DiPietro's home on the night of Dec. 16 in Waterville, 75 miles north of Portland, where the Reynolds family lives. She was reported missing the following morning when her father said he discovered her bed empty.

Police say DiPietro and two other adults who were in the house when Ayla disappeared know more than they've divulged. The three also stopped communicating with state police investigators, said Stephen McCausland, spokesman for the Maine Department of Public Safety.

Last weekend, about 100 volunteers aided by tracking dogs renewed their search for Ayla, who turns 2 next week.

Although searchers found no signs of Ayla, the receding snow revealed the remains of a 53-year-old Waterville man who was reported missing in 2004.

Ron Reynolds, Trista's father, says he's grateful that searchers didn't find Ayla because that means there's hope that she'll be found safe and sound.

"It's a good sign that they didn't find anything," Reynolds said, adding that the family needs answers one way or the other. "Family members need to have closure."

The passing time hasn't brought many answers.

State police declared Ayla's disappearance a crime, confirmed the presence of her blood in DiPietro's bedroom and debunked the possibility that someone sneaked into the house and whisked the little girl away.

But there have been no signs of Ayla. Nor have there been any arrests.

Investigators continue to work on the case every day, said Lt. Christopher Coleman, commander of the state police major crimes unit for the northern half of Maine.

"This case remains very active," Coleman said today from his office in Augusta. "We're still getting results back from the Maine State Police crime lab. We're working as hard as we can on it. We're hoping we get that one lead that helps to break the case wide open."

Ayla was placed in her father's care after Trista Reynolds entered a substance abuse rehabilitation program in Lewiston in October. Reynolds completed the program and filed court paperwork seeking Ayla's return

two days before DiPietro reported her missing.

Trista Reynolds says she initially gave DiPietro the benefit of the doubt — despite a broken arm that occurred while Ayla was in his care — and acknowledges that Justin was “amazing” at times with Ayla.

But she worries that DiPietro may have had a difficult time dealing with Ayla because she was high-strung and used to being the center of attention in her home.

“What’s really on my mind on a daily basis is I’m wondering every day whether my daughter is dead or alive. That’s what I want to know. Is she alive or is she dead?” Reynolds said. “... At least tell me that little bit.”

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