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Ayla Reynolds Birthday: Vigil To Be Held For Missing Maine Toddler On Day She Turns 2 (EXCLUSIVE)



By Steven Hoffer

Trista Reynolds can picture herself at this time last year, sitting around the kitchen table, eating cake and singing her daughter's first rendition of "Happy Birthday."

Today, there will be no cake. There will be no song. Her child, who should be celebrating a second birthday Wednesday, has been missing since December 2011.

"I've found myself crying a lot more than I was before, but I know that's going to happen around this time," Reynolds recently told The Huffington Post.

Wednesday evening, the extended Portland, Maine, community will join the mother for a birthday vigil dedicated to Ayla Bell Reynolds, who was last seen at her father's home on Dec. 17, when he tucked her into bed.

"I think about her every day, more and more," Reynolds said. "I just wonder if she is coming home to me. My mind never stops."

Despite ongoing efforts by Maine authorities and private investigators, a multistate billboard campaign, donations from nonprofit groups and [extensive efforts on the Web](#), the Reynolds family is still without their daughter.

"At this point in the investigation, we're at 988 leads that have come in from around the state. We've followed each of them up," Steve McCausland, a spokesman for the Maine Department of Public Safety, [told HuffPost in March](#).

Justin DiPietro, Ayla's father, reported the child missing at approximately 9 o'clock on that December morning. DiPietro told authorities that he found an empty bed when he went to wake his daughter up. Authorities say that DiPietro, his girlfriend and his sister were all home the night Ayla disappeared. Trista Reynolds was in rehabilitation for substance abuse at the time.

Reynolds said she is currently not speaking with Ayla's father, but the former couple's relationship remains a part of the public Ayla narrative.

"I want people to know that this isn't about me and Justin," she said. "I've come to notice a lot of people more interested in knowing what me and Justin are doing. Are we talking? Are we texting? It's not about me or him. It's

about Ayla, where she is and if she is coming home."

Still, DiPietro's reported lack of cooperation with authorities has troubled the girl's mother. Investigators say that the father has [stopped cooperating with police](#). DiPietro has maintained his innocence throughout the investigation.

"He's putting himself up as 'Mr. Innocent,'" Reynolds claimed. "But the way he's acting, everyone knows he's guilty."

On difficult days, Reynolds counts her mother, sister and two close friends among a close-knit support group. She said the community offers "good support," but sometimes she wishes she could have more privacy.

"I feel like everyone out there knows everything about me and Ayla," Reynolds said. "But people don't have the right to know everything."

Nevertheless, as the family marks the child's second birthday, Reynolds wants her daughter's story to be told. "I also know that Ayla is now a part of everybody," she said.

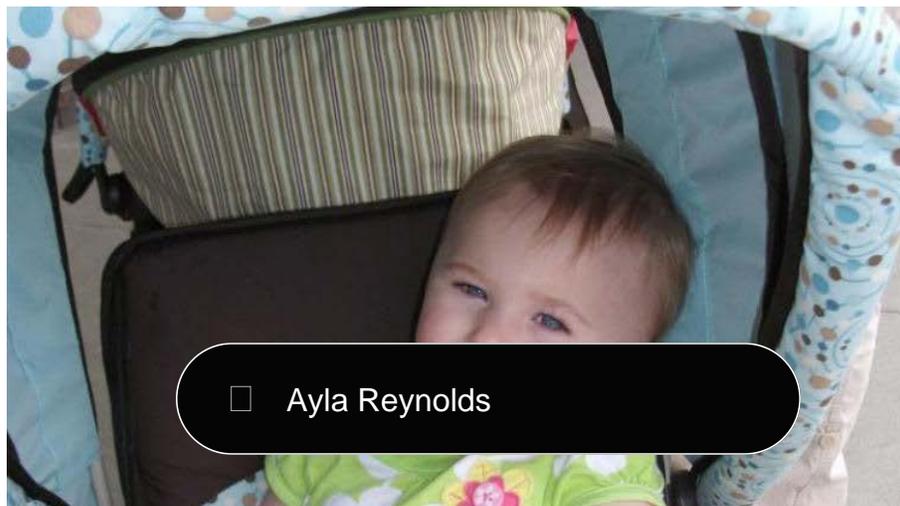
Lately, Reynolds said, she speaks to police detectives and her own private investigator two or three times a week. After so many months, she struggles with hearing the hardest news over and over -- that there is no news at all.

"I don't like hearing about them searching for her. I can't watch the TV when I know they are going to have a press conference about searching for Ayla. I can't deal with that. I can't believe that my little girl is being searched for right now," she said.

"It is a nightmare that no mother should ever have to go through, and I'm experiencing it."

Details regarding [the birthday vigil can be found here](#). The event is open to the public. Guests are asked to wear purple, yellow and green.

Any individual with information regarding Ayla's whereabouts should call the Waterville Police Department at 207-680-4700 or the Maine State Police at 207-624-7076. A \$30,000 reward is being offered.



[Suggest a correction](#)



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