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Ayla Reynolds' birthday draws big crowd

PORTLAND -- It was a birthday celebration writ large at Monument Square, but the guest of honor wasn't there.

BY [BEN MCCANNA](#)



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Ayla Reynolds turned 2 years old Wednesday. She has been missing since mid-December.

ADDITIONAL PHOTOS



FOR AYLA: A rally was held in support of missing toddler Ayla Reynolds in Portland's Monument Square on Wednesday, her second birthday. Ayla's mother, Trista Reynolds, right, and her friends, including Ashley Pouliot, left, listen to a song written for Ayla by musician Alan Pouliot, of Fairfield. Ayla was reported missing from her Waterville home on Dec. 17. *Portland Press Herald* photo by John Ewing



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More than 100 people — friends, family and complete strangers — joined in the outdoor celebration. Ayla's maternal family hosted the event and served pizza and birthday cake, played music and handed out balloons, bracelets and other mementoes to help keep awareness for their missing relative within the public consciousness.

Ayla's mother, Trista Reynolds, encircled by a ring of cameras and microphones, said the celebration helped mask the pain of not knowing.

"I'm really hurt, more than anything, today. I've got a lot of hate towards certain people today," she said. "I wasn't able to wake up with Ayla ... and play with her and get her ready for her birthday."

Ayla was reported missing by her father on the morning of Dec. 17. Police believe foul play was involved

and they say the three adults who saw her last — father Justin DiPietro; his girlfriend, Courtney Roberts; and sister Elisha DiPietro — aren't forthcoming with information. Ayla's grandfather, Ron Reynolds, said it's time for someone to speak out. He said he doesn't believe the three adults' claims that they've told investigators all they know.

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“You're clamming up when you should be open,” he said. “You should sit down and talk with them, but it's not happening. ... We suffer every day. We don't know where she is, but they do. They have the answers. Why not come out and say something? Why make us suffer every day? Why make this family hurt every day? Why make my granddaughter hurt every day, wherever she is?”

“Answers need to come out now.”

Members of Ayla's paternal family did not attend the event.

Cynthia Caron, the founder of LostNMissing — a nonprofit group that works with families of missing persons — has been working closely with Ayla's maternal family, and she helped organize the event. She also works closely with the Laura Recovery Center, another nonprofit that had been collaborating with Justin DiPietro.

She said communication with DiPietro ended in late January.

“We don't know why conversations stopped,” she said.

Caron said being in the media spotlight is difficult for families of the missing, and people generally react to the pressure in one of two ways.

“They either withdraw from it, or they do the opposite — they just dive right in,” she said.

Staying in the spotlight serves a purpose, she said.

“Someone always knows something, so the more you get the information out there, the better the chance the person who knows something will come forward,” she said.

Ronne Reynolds said he's watched he's watched his sister endure a lot over the past three months and she's holding up well.

“Trista is probably the strongest woman I’ve met in my entire life,” he said. “She has her moments, her breakdowns; but other than that, she’s very strong.”

Ben McCanna — 861-9239

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