

AMY CALDER



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Amy's Christmas story wish list is focused on the missing

The person who took Ayla Reynolds from home six years ago tops the list, followed by the remains of Pauline Rourke and two dangerous dogs, writes Amy Calder.

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Honey Rourke of Lewiston, on July 26, holds a photograph of her mother, Pauline Rourke, taken in 1970. Pauline Rourke disappeared in 1976 and is believed to have been murdered by Albert Cochran who died in June in prison. *Staff file photo by David Leaming*

It's exactly three weeks until Christmas and I've been working on my wish list.

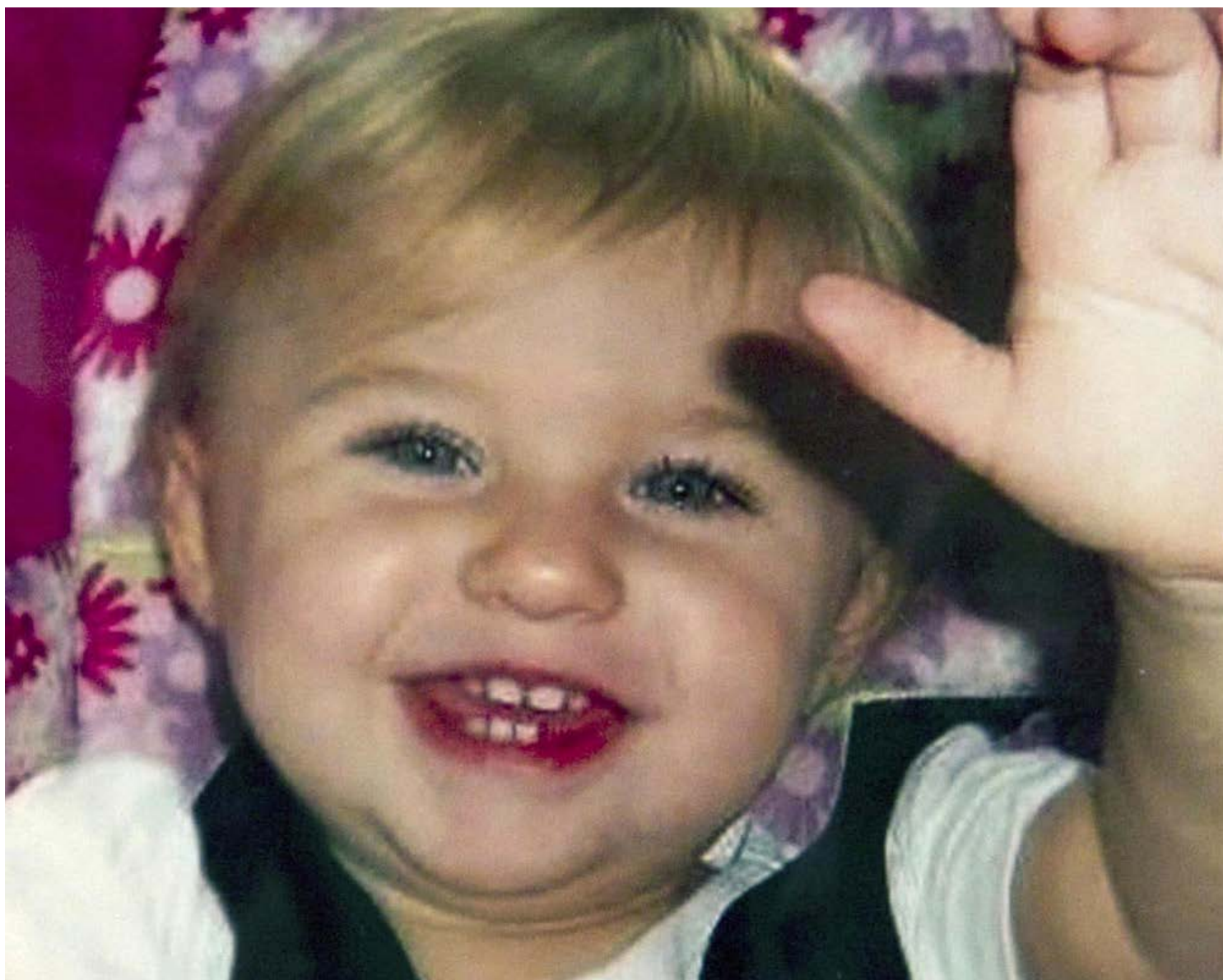
First, I want the person who took Ayla Reynolds from her Violette Avenue home six years ago to call me and set up a time for an interview.



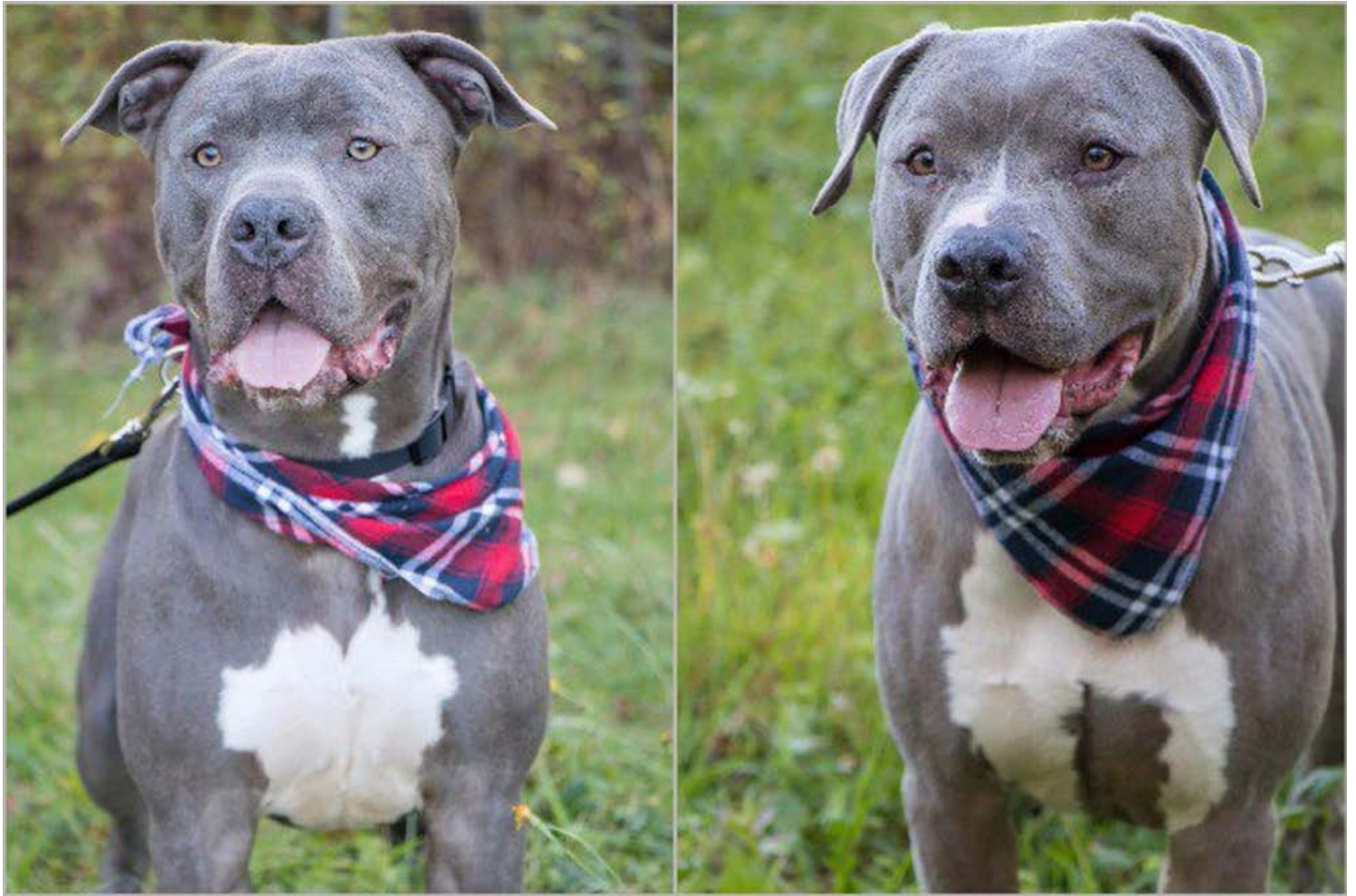
REPORTING A SIDE

ASIDE

Amy Calder



This undated photo provided by Trista Reynolds shows Ayla Reynolds, her two-year-old daughter, who went missing on Dec. 16, 2011, from her father's home in Waterville. *AP file photo*



Kole, left, and Bentley are two pit bulls owned by Danielle Jones that the state's courts have ordered put to death. Jones said both dogs got loose while on a walk with her Tuesday, minutes after the Supreme Court upheld an euthanasia order against the pit bulls. *Photos courtesy of Danielle Jones*

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It can be in a neutral place, like a cafe in downtown Waterville, where the holiday lights are shimmering in Castonguay Square and Santa's mini-village of Kringleville is all decked out for Christmas.

It's a nice, comfortable setting, no stress, no pressure.

I'll ask the questions and take notes, and you can just talk.

Don't worry about being articulate or organized in your thoughts or afraid of not speaking in full sentences. Feel free to just unload.

Ayla was 20 months old when she disappeared into thin air in December 2011. She never got to sit in a downtown cafe with friends and sip hot chocolate and plot and scheme about what they would get their parents and siblings for Christmas.

She never got to experience the thrill of waking up to snow coming down and discovering it was a day off from school and she could spend it building forts or sledding and skating. She didn't have a chance to decorate a tree or feel the excitement of knowing Christmas is coming. She didn't learn how to sing Christmas carols or make cookies or send holiday cards.

I'd like to learn, for her family's sake, what happened to her that third week of December not so long ago.

We know she is gone, but where? And why? And how?

It is tough, learning to move on after someone dies. When a loved one disappears with no rhyme or reason given, and no clues as to her whereabouts, closure never happens. Her family can never completely enjoy every day of their lives without wondering, pondering.

It has been six years. Ayla would be in school now. She might be riding a school bus, her long, blonde hair pulled up in a ponytail, her blue eyes happy as she gets off the bus and runs to greet her mother, or maybe her brothers and grandparents. She might be learning how to dance or play the piano. Maybe she loves to ski or swim or ... ride a bike.

We can only wonder what Ayla would have become, who she would be.

You, who knows the secret of her demise, are saddled with a huge responsibility. You carry a heavy burden that can be lifted by setting the truth free.

It would lift a burden from Ayla's family and from all of us. I'm here to help make that happen — to help tell your story.

Please call.

My second Christmas wish: To see the remains of another central Mainer who disappeared years ago found. Pauline Rourke was last seen by her daughter in Fairfield Center 41 years ago. Acting on information given to them by the man they believed killed her, State Police this year scoured water wells in the Smithfield, Mercer, Oakland and Norridgewock areas but did not find her remains. Albert P. Cochran, Rourke's live-in, distance relative, told police before he died June 27 this year that her remains are in a well in the Smithfield area, though he did not admit to killing her and disposing of her body. Rourke's daughter has spent many sleepless nights

wondering what happened to her mother and will not rest until she knows for sure.

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It's a cruel burden to bear for families who suffer with the "not knowing" and they can never properly grieve or lay their loved ones to rest. And because they suffer, so do we all — and not only for Ayla and Pauline, but for the families and friends of all those reported missing but never located.

My final Christmas wish, speaking of police searches, is that the whereabouts of two dogs that disappeared from the animal shelter in Waterville in October this year be disclosed.

The dogs seriously injured a woman and killed her dog in Winslow last year. In October this year, the Maine Supreme Judicial Court upheld an earlier court decision ordering them euthanized.

But the day the court made its decision, the dogs' owner went to the shelter on Webb Road and took them for a walk, returning later to report they had slipped their leashes and run off into the woods.

The tragic part of this case is not only that those dogs killed another pet and maimed its owner, but that they could strike again. Wherever the dangerous dogs are, there's another death waiting to happen. And if someone is harboring them, he or she holds the power to prevent it — and a responsibility to all of us to come clean to police.

And by the way, I'd be happy to tell that story too.

Please give me a ring. It would really make my Christmas.

Amy Calder has been a Morning Sentinel reporter for 29 years. Her column appears here Mondays. She may be reached at . For previous Reporting Aside columns, go to centralmaine.com.

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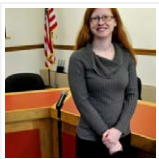
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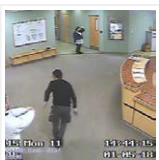
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