

VIRGINIA

Child Left Behind: Va. mom whose baby died in hot car shares her story

By Alison Starling May 20, 2015 - 01:47 pm

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WASHINGTON (WJLA) – As we head into the hot summer months, we think of vacations and fun in the sun. But there is also a terrible danger for children forgotten in hot cars; it happens an average of 37 times a year nationwide.



Lyn Balfour's son, Bryce. (Family photo)

Rarely do we hear firsthand from a parent involved in one of these tragedies. But one Virginia woman wants you to hear her story, no matter how hard it is for her to tell.

The recording of a distraught Lyn Balfour after realizing her 9-month-old son, Bryce, is dead is almost unbearable to hear. It happened eight years ago, but for Balfour, the pain is still raw.

"I prayed to God, 'Please take my place. Let me take his place,'" she recalled, crying.

It was March 30, 2007. Balfour, an Army reservist, had hardly slept in days. Bryce had a cold and was up all night. And Balfour's morning routine was unusual; the car and the placement of the car seat and the diaper bag were all different. Then, during her drive home, an important call came from work. It wasn't until she spoke to the babysitter that afternoon that panic set in. The high that day was only 66 degrees, but little Bryce did not survive.

"I was screaming and I thought to myself, 'There's no way I forgot my son. There's just no way. There's no way that he's gone,'" Balfour said.

On that terrible day, Balfour made her son a promise.

"No matter how hard it would be, over and over again, to relive this situation and the events of the day, I would tell my story as many times as I could, to make sure that his death wasn't for nothing," she said. "Because I was one of those parents that said, 'This could never happen to me.'"

Heatstroke is the leading cause of vehicle death for children not involved in crashes. Some devices can now alert a parent who has unwittingly left a child behind. But it's hard to convince parents to buy one, because, Balfour says, everybody thinks it couldn't happen to them.

Speaking to a group of new mothers in Alexandria, Va., Balfour said that putting a reminder, like a teddy bear in the front seat when a child is on board, can help.

"I share my story to honor my son's memory," she said.

After Bryce's death, Balfour and her husband had four more children. She says the pain of losing Bryce never leaves her; it's just something she's learned to live with.

"My 4-year-old, Chase, said to me the other day, 'You know, Mommy, Bryce is in heaven because he died in your car, right, Mommy?'" Balfour said. "He's 4 years old and he said, 'It's OK, Mommy. You're a good mommy.'"

Balfour was charged with second-degree murder. The charges were downgraded to involuntary manslaughter and she faced up to 15 years in jail. However, it took the jury just 90 minutes to find her unanimously not guilty.

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