

5 Years Later: Remembering Baby Bryce

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Reported by Laura French lfrench@nbc29.com Veteran NBC29 anchor Laura French returns to WVIR after spending two years in Pennsylvania. There, Laura was home with her 3 boys and worked as a reporter for WNEP.



Five years after a deadly mistake that changed her life forever, a Greene County mom reflects on where she has come since that fateful day and what could have been.

On March 30, 2007, 9-month-old Bryce Balfour was accidentally left in a car for seven hours by his mother, Raelyn Balfour. He died there. Now five years later, Balfour sits down exclusively with NBC29's Laura French as she did right after a jury acquitted her of

criminal charges.

The last time they met, after the trial in 2008, a grieving Balfour had just avoided jail and was about to deliver her second child with her husband Jarrett. Now Balfour, still grieving - and pregnant for the sixth time - takes us back to that tragic day and the promise made to her baby and this community.

Five years after an attempt to revive her lifeless baby from her sweltering car, Balfour says the hurt is as agonizing as it was then:

"The pain that I felt from losing him back in 2007 is just as real as it was then. There are days when I feel like it was just yesterday that it happened."

Pain that was self-inflicted on March 30, 2007 by Balfour when she accidentally left her 9-month-old baby, Bryce, in her car at work at the Judge Advocate General School at the University of Virginia for seven hours. He died from hyperthermia.

She would escape criminal charges for his death, but says she is living everyday in her own prison with the guilt that she killed her child.

"I never got to hear my son say, 'Momma,' I never got to hear him say 'I love you,' I will never see him graduate, I will never see his children and that is my fault."

Balfour gets through daily life now trying to keep the promise she shared with us the last time we sat in her living room.

"When I was holding Bryce after he had passed away, I made him a promise that I would educate parents to include the ones that don't think it could happen to them, that it can and this is real."

Despite her efforts to educate parents through advocacy groups and the media, statistics show that last year was one of the deadliest on record for accidental hyperthermia deaths.

"As this anniversary started to come closer, I just felt like I haven't done enough, I haven't educated enough," she said.

Evidenced through the many calls she gets from parents in Virginia and around the world who share a bond with her they never intended - parents like Miles Harrison, whose newly adopted son, Chase, died after being left in a northern Virginia parking lot for hours. Lyn and Jarrett Balfour named their youngest son after Chase.

"I tell them it's not going to get any easier," Balfour said. "It's something you learn to live with. You still feel that loss; you still feel that pain because that child is never going to be there again."

Balfour says thinking about what would have been is the hardest part.

"Seeing other children the age that Bryce would have been and wondering what he would have looked like, wondering how his personality would have been, being able to interact with him and seeing how he would interact with his siblings."

Bryce would be in class now at Ruckersville Elementary, wrapping up his kindergarten year and planning his sixth birthday party in June.

Bryce's siblings will only know their brother by home videos and snapshots. Four-year-old Braiden Balfour and his siblings tell of balloons they just sent to heaven for their brother Bryce. Braiden, who was in utero during his mother's trial for Bryce's death, sent his brother his drawing of a castle. "They do know that they have a brother in heaven, they know his name, and they refer to him sometimes in pictures, but I don't think they really comprehend yet that there was a boy, a baby before them that had died." Balfour said.

"I am scared of when they get older that when I do actually get the opportunity to sit down with them and tell them what happened I am always fearful that they won't understand. I am hoping that my husband and I love them enough and they understand what kind of parents we are that they will understand but there is always that fear that they will come back and say 'Mom I don't understand how you could do that' and be resentful or mean or not understand."

The Balfour's surprise - and, they say, final - baby number six, a boy, is due June 24, a week after Bryce's birthday. Since the tragedy, Balfour quit her job at the JAG school and started her own cleaning business so she can have a flexible schedule and focus on her family.

Being pregnant and having three kids under the age of 4 can be challenging at times but when things get hectic Jarrett, who she says she has never been closer to, reminds her:

"He just tells me that I need to focus on the children and we need to spend time with them. The importance of knowing what we lost and feeling blessed with what we have. You could lose everything as long as you have your family and they're healthy and happy, everything else can be replaced."

Meanwhile, Balfour is involved with the organization Kids and Cars. The advocacy group is urging legislators to pass the transportation bill ([Senate Bill 1813](#)) with a provision to have a seat belt reminder system in all seating positions in vehicles, and to require the government to examine whether it is technically feasible to have a driver reminder system in vehicles.

Balfour says this community has been extremely supportive, but she understands there are always those who will judge her. She explains:

"I have had parents very judgmental in the past, that after I explain it personally about my story, they say 'wow I never thought of it that way' and they completely change their perception of what they thought in the past.

You can judge me, and that's okay, no one is going to judge me more than I do myself. However as long as you take the safety precautions and you realize it is possible - you take the precautions that are needed - that's all I care about.

I have one judger [sic] and he's in heaven and I will meet that fate one day but for now I am not concerned about what people think, I am concerned about educating them."

NOTE: Earlier this week, we asked viewers on Facebook for comments about this story. Raelyn and Jarrett came to our studios and addressed the comments. Watch the two segments of web exclusive video listed above to hear their responses.

Web Extras

[Link: Cars-N-Kids](#)

[Link: Kids and Cars.Org](#)

[Link: 4 R Kids Sake Website](#)

<http://www.nbc29.com/story/17744936/5-years-later-remembering-baby-bryce>