

Heat stroke caused death of Milton toddler left in car

Two-year-old forgotten in car

Friday, June 28, 2013 By Molly Hayes



Rene Johnston, Toronto Star A body was found in a car parked in the attached garage at 874 Jempson Lane in Milton on Wednesday.

A Milton toddler was in his grandmother's care when he was left in a hot car and died of heat stroke.

The woman in her 50s was watching the two-year-old Wednesday while her daughter was at an appointment and her son-in-law was at work. Their other child, a five-year-old girl,

was at school.

An ambulance raced to the Jempson Path home just before 5:30 p.m. where the boy's body was removed from the family sedan, which was parked in an attached garage. Police followed shortly after.

Cruisers were parked on the street Thursday as homicide detectives investigated (as they are mandated to do, in the death of any child under five regardless of cause).

Police have not said how the child came to be left in the car — or who discovered his body. Halton police spokesperson Sergeant Dave Cross said the 911 call came from the home and said the investigation is ongoing.

No charges have been laid.

Temperatures peaked at 31 C in Milton on Wednesday, with a humidex of 34.

The news brings back tragic memories for Kristie Reeves, 38, in Austin, Texas, who lost her one-year-old daughter in May 2011 after her husband, Brett Cavaliero, accidentally left the sleeping child in his pickup outside his workplace.

"The public perception is that this only happens to bad, irresponsible parents who knowingly leave their children in the back seat ... I know he loved our daughter more than anything else in the world," Reeves said Thursday.

With one wrong turn that morning, Cavaliero missed the route to Sophia's (or "Ray Ray," as they called her) day care and absent-mindedly continued on his way to work. It wasn't until later that day, during a lunch break with his wife, that his stomach dropped and he realized what he'd done.

While Cavaliero did not face any criminal charges, Reeves said "it's a life sentence for someone. I could not even explain to you how horrific that is to have to live with that fact."

On average, 38 children die from heat-related deaths after being left in cars on hot days, according to U.S. organization KidsAndCars.org. There have been 15 such deaths so far this year.

According to Reeves, who now runs Ray Ray's Pledge — a non-profit organization that raises awareness about child heatstroke prevention — 80 per cent of these preventable deaths occur in the morning around day-care drop-off, especially when there is a change in routine.

Her organization promotes a call system between parents and day-care centres — if a child fails to show up at the usual time, they urge a call to be made to ensure there is a reason for the absence.

"As much as we would love to turn back time, we can't undo what has happened ... but what we can do is use our tragedy as a sounding board to hopefully make other families stop and think," Reeves said.

Today, with the help of counsellors and a psychiatrist, she and her husband are still together and raising nine-month-old twin girls, Giana and Kiara.

"He was a good loving father, he continues to be a good loving father," she said.

Reeves said her heart goes out to the Milton family, knowing the criticism they will inevitably face from people who do not understand.

The family's quiet Milton neighbourhood was rocked by the news. Bouquets of flowers were laid against their front porch and back garage Thursday, with a small note that said "thinking of you."

Around noon, a strip of police tape blocked off the front entrance, as two cruisers kept watch nearby.

Next door, Tehmina Haq remembered the little boy as "very cute, with light brown hair and colourful eyes." Haq, a mother of two young children, said she was heartbroken by the awful news. The parents are nice, she said. Friendly.

From the park across the street, Tiffany Sucipto and her son watched the news trucks that lined their street. "It's just sad. That's all I can say," she said of the tragedy that occurred so close to her home. She was sickened to read the hurtful comments made on social media about the family.

"Of course it could (happen to anyone). It's called crazy parent mornings. It's the life of a parent," she said.

As the investigation in Milton continues, Reeves said the family's heartbreak is likely just beginning.

"I challenge people to think of whether or not they've ever left their coffee maker running during a hectic morning. I'd say most people have ... then this too can happen to you," she said.

In Markham, a second child could have met the same fate Thursday, if not for the quick work of a York Regional police officer who pried a car window down with his baton to rescue a two-year-old girl.

That toddler was found abandoned inside a locked car at a plaza at Woodbine and 16th avenues around 11:30 a.m. and was taken to hospital. The girl's mother has been charged with abandonment.

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<http://www.thespec.com/news-story/3863709-heat-stroke-caused-death-of-toddler/>