Mother Aims To Raise Awareness of Fatal Heatstroke In Children After Toddler Son's Death

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In the aftermath of her son's death by heatstroke, a Ridgefield mom decided to share lessons learned from 15-month-old Ben.

Lindsey Rogers-Seitz has started a blog called "The Gift of Ben" in honor of her son, who died July 7 after he was left in the car by his father, Rogers-Seitz's husband, Kyle Seitz. The blog aims to raise awareness of the issue of children's deaths by heatstroke. Seitz has not been charged in Ben's death.

"Ben was such a beautiful little boy," Rogers-Seitz said Friday. "I only got 15 months with him, but I think about the peace and happiness he gave me, and I want to find some solution so no one else has to go through this."

"I think parents are still thinking 'it won't be me' who leaves their child in a car, she said Friday. "I don't think it's something the human mind can admit could happen to them, and that's a huge public awareness issue."

One of the lessons she learned from Ben, Rogers-Seitz wrote on her blog, is to "love — life and those around you."

Rogers-Seitz said she decided after a week of mourning that she would not fall apart. She couldn't afford to, she said, because she has a husband and two daughters whom she loves.
An attorney, Rogers-Seitz turned to research to understand how such a tragedy could happen. The more she learned about heatstroke death and the theories about how parents could forget a child in a car, the more she realized she wanted to raise awareness of the issue.

As of July 30, 19 children have died from heatstroke in the U.S. in 2014, according to the child advocacy group KidsAndCars.org.

Kyle Seitz was supposed to drop Ben off at day care on July 7, but instead he drove directly to work and left the boy inside the vehicle, police said.

When Seitz discovered Ben in the car after he left work, he drove him to Danbury Hospital, about 11 miles from Seitz's workplace, police said. The child's death was reported by the hospital, and he was pronounced dead at about 6 p.m.

There were no 911 calls, police said.

Although the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration runs a public awareness campaign on the issue, Rogers-Seitz said more needs to be done.

She has drafted what she calls Benjamin's Bill to use as talking points with members of Congress. It includes suggestions for round-table discussions between members of the automobile and car seat industries along with child safety advocates, victims, academic and medical professionals.

Rogers-Seitz said she would also like to see more funding for the research and development of technologies that would alert parents if they leave a vehicle with a passenger in the backseat.

In a 2012 report, NHTSA determined that the technology currently available was not reliable enough. The study included a review of sensors that would detect the weight of a toddler in a car seat and activate an alarm when the driver leaves the vehicle.
Rogers-Seitz supports having such a device installed in new cars because, she said, she would not have bought an aftermarket device because "you think I would never be one of those parents."

"If we want to stem the rising tide of these deaths, the most foolproof way to do this is to require some device in cars or car seats," Rogers-Seitz said.

An attempt to pass legislation requiring cars to include an alert device failed in 2007.

Rogers-Seitz said she plans to continue pushing for a public and political conversation. And she reminds parents to be vigilant.

"Don't continue every summer to see examples of this and say 'That would never happen to me,'" she said.

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