



This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers [here](#) or use the "Reprints" tool that appears above any article. [Order a reprint of this article now.](#)

BABY CHANCE WALSH

'A proper memorial' for Baby Chance

By Michael Scott Davidson

scott.davidson@heraldtribune.com

Published: Saturday, January 9, 2016 at 6:04 p.m.

Nearly 12 feet tall, the handmade cross standing on Elliot Court cannot be overlooked.

It is a remarkable thing of beauty in an otherwise unremarkable place. A symbol of divinity decorating an empty and cracked cul-de-sac that is devoid of houses and overgrown with palmetto thickets.

Painted white, the cross is adorned with angels, butterflies and pale blue letters that spell "Baby Chance."

Baby Chance Walsh: A boy whose life tragically ended less than two months after his birth; a boy whose father allegedly buried his body not far from this cross; a boy whose grandparents dearly miss him.

Sally Susino, 51, and John Murawski, 50, erected the cross on Thanksgiving Day in memorial of Susino's maternal grandson, just weeks after the infant's disappearance and reportedly violent death gripped the nation.

On Oct. 15, Chance's mother directed detectives to a shallow grave in a remote area of eastern North Port. Kristen Bury alleged that Chance's father, Joseph Walsh, killed the boy and buried him there. Both parents are charged in Chance's death.

Susino said Murawski placed the cross nearby so the public had a place to leave mementos without disturbing the crime scene.

"We wanted to bring a proper memorial out near the street," Susino said.

The Sarasota County Jail is holding Walsh and Bury without bond. Their trial dates will be decided during case management meetings next month.

Meanwhile, Chance's funeral has passed, but his body is not in its final resting place. His autopsy remains unfinished, as the area's medical examiner waits for a forensic anthropologist's report.

So Chance's grandparents continue to improve his memorial.

Since mid-December, they've decorated the area around the cross with white stones, red mulch and butterfly bushes. Black marble steps have become crowded with ceramic figurines and stuffed animals. Susino's favorite is a pajama-wearing bear that recites the Lord's Prayer when she squeezes its paw.

On Friday, the grandparents arrived at the cross near sunset and assembled a donated concrete bench. A gold-colored plate was embedded in its middle.

"Sweet grandson: You captured our hearts, and hearts of a nation," it read. "Rest peacefully sweet angel, you will never be forgotten."

Creating this sanctuary has been therapeutic for Murawski. Tucked away from the city's traffic, he can only hear birdsong as he works.

He hopes others will use this place to reflect on Chance's life and death.

"I hope he's never forgotten," Murawski said. "This is a tragedy that should have never happened."

Differing stories

Chance's disappearance and death became national news for weeks last year.

Susino reported Chance missing on Oct. 4. Soon after, authorities arrested Walsh and Bury in South Carolina. Chance was not with them.

The investigation was grim from the start. The parents' stories about the location of their missing baby conflicted. Walsh told his mother that Chance died in a car accident. Bury told her stepmother that she had given Chance away at a Georgia motel.

But Chance died almost two weeks before his parents left Florida, Bury later told investigators.

She alleged Walsh had beat Chance following an argument the couple had on the morning of Sept. 16. Bury later found the baby choking on a diaper wipe. Chance died gasping for breath hours later, Bury told police. She did not call 911.

On Oct. 15, she directed detectives to a shallow gravesite near Elliot Court. Inside was a small body, consistent with a two-month-old child.

A long process

For Murawski, life has seemingly moved in slow motion since Chance's death.

"Every day there's pain," he said.

It's been like a nightmare, Susino said. Christmas came and went this year with barely any recognition.

"We didn't even put up a tree," she said. "Your whole world gets turned upside down, and it's hard to land back on your feet."

But there are moments that give the grandmother hope. Community members have hosted candlelight vigils for Chance. Strangers hug Susino while she's shopping.

"If people can gather and open their hearts to complete strangers, we're one step in the right direction," she said.

Walsh and Bury have remained in the Sarasota County Jail since authorities extradited them from South Carolina in October. Walsh is charged with murder in the second degree. Bury is charged with aggravated manslaughter of a child by culpable negligence.

Both have pleaded not guilty.

Case management court dates are set for Feb. 16, assistant state attorney Suzanne O'Donnell said. At that meeting, the co-defendants will be given trial dates.

Murawski said he hopes Walsh and Bury are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

"I'm just devastated that two people could do this," he said.