

## Mom, 6-year-old who started fire face intensive road to recovery

Written by Valerie J. Morgan

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CONYERS—Reeba Glass has begun the long journey to recovery, undergoing surgery and other medical treatment for the severe burns she received in a house fire that killed four of her five children on Jan. 8. Conyers officials say the tragedy was the first fatality fire of the year and one of the worst in the city's recent history.



Glass, who suffered burns on her arms, legs, stomach, back and forehead, was scheduled to undergo surgery at Grady Memorial Hospital on Jan. 14, friends said. She has been able to get out of bed and sit into a wheelchair. But now the 28-year-old mother is faced not only with her own recovery but that of her surviving 6-year-old son who set the fire. The state Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) is working with the family to provide him with counseling and treatment, those close to the case say.

The 6-year-old son started the blaze around 11 p.m. while playing with a cigarette lighter in the family's two-story duplex in Conyers, Fire Chief Dan Morgan announced during a Jan. 11 news conference. He would not provide any details about where the child obtained the lighter or what he lit with it, saying that because the case involves a juvenile, there are certain questions that he is not permitted to answer.

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Sources said, however, the little boy was playing with an “imaginary friend” when he set a laundry basket of clothes on fire. Frightened, the child awoke his mother after the blaze got too big. Neighbors said the 6-year-old was dressed in regular clothes and barefoot, leading them to believe he had never gone to sleep as everyone in the house had done.

Glass tried to rescue the four other children, but could not reach them in the thick smoke and intense heat. She suffered burns on 40 percent of her body as she and firefighters battled the blaze in their rescue attempt, authorities said.

Along with Glass and the 6-year-old, the children’s grandmother, Rosetta Mitchell, survived. The grandmother was sleeping downstairs when the fire occurred, authorities said. The 6-year-old suffered a fractured arm and was treated and released from Children’s at Egleston Hospital the day after the fire, authorities said.



***Pictured above: Supporters at a recent vigil pray for the Glass family***

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### **Neighbors tried desperately to reach trapped kids**

Neighbors said they could see Glass' 9-year-old daughter, Ah'Dariya, standing in front of an upstairs window as they stood outside the family's burning home. They tried to coax her into jumping from the window. She was screaming for help, they said. Ah'Dariya perished with her three younger brothers: Dar'Shawn Glass, 7 years old; Armoni Roberts, 3 years old; and 8-month-old Deon Glass.

Leslie Slater said her family is devastated by the children's deaths. Her sons, Lamonta Stroud, 18, and Richard Slater, 20, put their own lives on the line. Stroud broke out a window and cut himself as he tried to rescue them. Slater rushed to assist him.

"They tried so hard to save them, but they just couldn't," Slater said.

Slater, said her young daughter is grieving over the 9-year-old girl and will likely need counseling.

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“They played and rode the bus to school together every day,” Slater said. “She’s still asking about her. They were best friends.” Rockdale Coroner George Levett said all four children were so badly burned there would be no viewing for a memorial service that is planned for them. The family made the decision to have the children cremated because of the severity of their injuries, relatives said.

Authorities said the 6-year-old would not be charged with a crime because of his age. DFCS is now working with the child. Authorities said it was unclear if the youngster would be placed in foster care or remain with relatives under state supervision. He was living with relatives as of Jan.14, family members said.

### **Investigators pieced together information**

Morgan said investigators interviewed family members including the 6-year-old and “pieced together” information to determine how the fire started, in addition to examining and testing evidence at the scene.

“The lab results from the investigation have been thoroughly examined and test results show no accelerants were found in the samples submitted,” Morgan said in a prepared statement at the press conference. “Investigators also have determined there were no electrical malfunctions and all accidental causes have been eliminated. All tips, leads the public provided have been investigated fully and ruled out as the cause of the fire.”

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Investigators said there were no working smoke detectors in the family's home. There was one smoke detector on the main floor, but there was no battery in it, they said.

Authorities said the landlord would have been responsible for making sure the duplex had a smoke detector. State law, they said, requires that smoke detectors be placed outside of any bedrooms, but the maintenance of those smoke detectors depends on the tenant-lease agreement.

### **Community efforts under way to help**

Pastor Billie Cox, who heads Macedonia Baptist Church and is the Glass family's pastor, said several efforts are under way to assist the family. They lost everything—from clothing to appliances and furniture, she said. The grandmother has relocated to an apartment and has received several donations of furniture and other items, friends said.

Clerk of Courts Ruth Wilson and her staff have promised to donate \$1,500 to assist the family.

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A benefit concert will be held for the Glass family on Jan. 18, 7 p.m., at the Rockdale Auditorium, 903 Main St., Conyers. Saxophonist Jaylen Gilstrap and pianist Xavier Gordon, two local musicians, will perform. Tickets are \$10.

On Common Ground News is a drop-off site for clothing, giftcards, checks and small household goods for the family. The newspaper is located 1240 Sigman Road, Suite 107, Conyers. 678-526-1910.

A memorial has been set up in the Glass family's name at Wells Fargo Bank. Any monetary donations made be made at any branch.

The memorial service for the four children will be held Saturday, Jan. 19, 11 a.m., at Springfield Baptist Church, 1877 Iris Drive, Conyers.