

Saying good-bye to an angel

BYLINE: TIFFANY BARTISH Journal Staff Writer

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* Hundreds attend the funeral service for 13-year-old Kaitlyn DeCubellis, who, along with a friend's mother, was killed in a car crash Friday.

SOUTH KINGSTOWN - While memorializing his daughter, Kaitlyn, yesterday, John DeCubellis used her own words — words that she penned for an English class just last week.

His voice broke as he read the first two lines:

"I am a friendly girl whose name is Katie," she wrote. "I wonder how old I will live to be."

Not nearly old enough.

Katie, 13, died Friday in a car crash that police say was caused by a driver high on alcohol and drugs.

Yesterday, mourners spilled from doors and hallways of Christ the King Church in Kingston as hundreds came to say good-bye at the funeral service for the popular Narragansett Pier School eighth grader.

Said the Rev. Joseph Creedon of the accident: "There are no words that can be said. It all gets reduced to a hug, a shared tear, a weak smile."

According to police, Katie and her friend Rebecca Bowman were on their way to the Warwick Mall with Rebecca's mother, Marsha, when their Honda Accord was hit from behind by Stephen Reise.

The Honda veered across a grassy median on Route 4 in East Greenwich, where it was hit broadside by a car heading south. Both Mrs. Bowman and Katie were killed, and four others were injured, including Rebecca, who suffered a broken jaw.

While Reise sat in the Adult Correctional Institutions yesterday — charged with eight felonies, including drunk driving — friends and family of Katie gathered to mourn and remember.

"Her smile would light up a room. Her personality was overflowing and entrancing. There was nothing about her that was ordinary," John DeCubellis said from the front of the church, his wife, Meg, by his side.

DeCubellis remembered his daughter as a smart and vibrant student and athlete, who read voraciously and loved horseback riding and basketball.

"We come here to celebrate, and celebrate is an appropriate word because her entire life was a celebration," he said. "God puts people on the earth to do good, and when you do good he calls you back. I truly feel Katie has done a lifetime of good in 13 short years."

Katie's father said that, to her family, the responsible and generous girl often seemed like "an adult trapped in a child's body" — with an uncanny wisdom, a strong desire to help others and a deep love for family and friends.

"She had a way of making us feel better about ourselves," he said.

Katie, who volunteered to raise money and collect toys for needy children, dreamed of attending Brown University and becoming a pediatrician.

Katie's poem reflected her empathy and optimism: "I pretend it's sunny when there is rain. I feel other people's pain."

This week, Katie's friends and classmates remembered her as "an angel" — and it was a description her family treasured.

"She has been promoted from an angel on earth to an angel above, and I'm betting... she'll be promoted to head angel by the end of the week. And of, course, she'll try to take over," her father said, eliciting tearful smiles.

Katie's family thanked friends for their outpouring of love and support since the accident. Nearly 3,000 people attended her calling hours Monday. Yesterday, many of them returned to comfort her parents and her younger brother and sister. While paying their final respects, they heard her father say:

<http://archives.projocom/cgi-bin/display.cgi?id=3ef106cb66b96Mpqaweb1P11004&doc=...> 6/18/2003

"Lord, please take care of Katie and Marsha. Katie and Marsha, please take care of each other.... Heaven will never be the same."

Journal photos / WILLIAM K. DABY

PAYING RESPECTS: The casket of Kaitlyn DeCubellis is taken from Christ the King Church, in Kingston, after funeral services for the popular Narragansett Pier School eighth grader. Below, a long line of cars form the processional.