

Honoring Hallie's Spirit of Kindness Sunnyside Fest Includes All the Things 11-Year-Old Girl Liked: Volunteering, Painting, Music & Community

Newsday

September 19, 2004

Daniel Hendrick

Daniel Hendrick is an editor at Greenwich Time, a Tribune Co. newspaper.

Hallie Geier may be gone, but the kindness, creativity and community spirit she was best known for were alive and well during the first "Halliestock" in Sunnyside yesterday.

Hundreds of friends, family members, classmates and neighbors braved the inclement weather to gather in Sunnyside Gardens Park and remember the popular 11-year-old who was struck by a sport utility vehicle near her Sunnyside home in May. Halliestock had its introspective moments, but it was much less a memorial service than a celebration of the girl through activities she enjoyed: painting, reading, listening to music and volunteering.

Organizers hoped the event would encourage people particularly the young - to make a positive difference in their communities. "The idea is to get inspired by the stage, do something right on the spot that will help people ... and then sign up for a nonprofit, where you can be involved in the long term," said Ted Geier, Hallie's father.

Two hundred volunteers, scores of in-kind contributions and months of planning pulled together the \$80,000 celebration, which featured live music and readings from Hallie's written works. Organizers, led by Hallie's mother, Sofia Geier, also published a booklet of the girl's copious writings, which covered everything from the futility of war to the joys of cooking.

Young people and adults alike also took part in crafts projects that benefited others. Tristan Friedman, 9, of Manhattan, created a greeting card for a hospitalized child.

Tychell Dickerson, 11, Samantha Stone, 13, and Emily Schuman, 13, worked together on a painting inspired by Geier, who studied dance with them. Meanwhile, Alex Guyton, Lucas Vaz and Peter Camilleri, all 12 and of Astoria, circulated among the crowd with video cameras and sold children's books to encourage literacy and self expression.

" It's about showing other young people that there are more things to do than to just sit in front of the TV every day, that you can go out and you can help others, and you can make a difference in people's lives," said M.J. Geier, 15, Hallie's sister.

Attendees such as Tahiris Deluna, 12, of Manhattan, a close friend of Hallie's who went to school with her, said they turned out to support her family as much as to celebrate a girl whom they recalled as "spunky," and who rarely spoke ill of anyone.

" It means a lot to me to see a lot of people here, and I think it will mean a lot to everybody else to see how a lot of people are supporting Hallie's family and Hallie, and how they really cared about her."

Technical glitches and an afternoon downpour put a damper on things somewhat. But Josh Guarino, 18, Hallie's brother, described Halliestock as an "incredible" event that let the family return the kindness of friends while helping themselves heal. He and others hope to make Halliestock an annual event.

" Just look around," Guarino said. "All these months and months of preparation are finally paying off now, with the weather and everything. We are getting a real sense of satisfaction today. We are really happy."