

Remembering Faith Moor

A community that couldn't help but welcome this sunny child now honors her memory

BY CLAUDIA CARAMIELLO

WANTAGE — Every day after recess, when the bell chimed at the Clifton E. Lawrence School, the children would abandon their play, begin to make the walk across the playground and dutifully line up to go back indoors. All except a spunky little second-grader named Faith Moor.

Faith would sprint across the blacktop to her favorite spot, ironically, the farthest spot from the school. Once there, she would pause, then playfully look over a shoulder, her wide eyes peeking out from behind wisps of blond bangs, as if to say, "Who's coming to get me today?" The teachers would smile. They knew the routine. Faith didn't want to come in from recess. Someone was going to have to get her.

Today, at that same spot where Faith would wait, a crab tree is growing. The bright afternoon sun shines down on the dark leaves the same way it shined on Faith's glossy hair. The tree was planted on June 8 to honor and celebrate the brief life of a little girl who did not speak much, yet through her actions was able to communicate volumes, and take the breath away from everyone who knew her.

Faith Moor was 8 years



PHOTOS COURTESY THE MOOR FAMILY

Faith Moor

“

I want people to be able to take the time to see the potential in people with disabilities, because if you do, you may be amazed.”

Joe Moor
Faith's father



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**Faith Moor, in a
favorite shirt.**

Remembering

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old when she passed away on May 20, 2012, after a brief illness. Faith was born with Down Syndrome and mainly communicated through American Sign Language, or ASL. However, for the people who knew her, this was such an insignificant aspect of who Faith was.

Knowing Faith

"People always say that it must have been difficult for her, they may think 'Oh this poor little girl,' but she was not that poor little girl, there was nothing pitiful about Faith," says her second-grade teacher, Jessica Musilli.

"Her having Down Syndrome did not define Faith, and her illness was only a small portion of her life. It is not how she will be remembered," says Musilli. "She was a robust, engaging little girl who had a very rich, full life and she knew how to enjoy life."

Faith's teacher fondly recalls the way the second-grader, who loved Spongebob, and Woody, would greet her every day with a smile and a light of mischief in her eyes. It was that smile that Musilli will remember most.

"Her smile and that light in her face made you feel so loved," says Musilli. "She was a mixture of love and spunk, and when you were one of her people you just got love from her. Faith's ability to care for others through her



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Joseph Moor

actions, to never leave anyone out was amazing.

You didn't just say hello to Faith, you had to say hello to all of her friends. She would never just get a book or a cup of water for herself, but for all of her friends as well," Musilli recalls.

Although Faith could be shy at times, her care and concern for others and ability to forge strong social connections made her adored by all who came into contact with her. She had many friends and didn't just stay with one group of peers. Often using her uncanny skill of subtle humor, Faith leaned on her strengths to help get her through times when she felt shy or uncomfortable. Faith's strength profoundly affected her second-grade teacher.

"She had a love for life and the ability to appreciate

every moment, even if those moments were uncomfortable," says Musilli. "She was a strong, clever girl who was able to figure out what worked for her and use it to help her through things."

And she made many friends among the teachers and her classmates.

Faith's father Joe is especially happy when he thinks about just how well she fit into the school. "We never expected a school, community and the students to embrace and include a kid with special needs the way that they did," he says. "One little girl at the (memorial) service said to me 'Everyone kept saying Faith had Down Syndrome, but there was nothing wrong with her, she was the best.' Kids have a greater grasp on seeing how things really are and how to reflect what is in their soul, not what society has taught them to see."

Faith's classroom aide, Nancy Richeda, says she will always remember Faith as a happy, empathetic, daddy's girl who often wore a T-shirt with the words, "Mad about Dad" printed across the chest. Richeda says she will most miss the way Faith greeted her in the hallways at school.

"Faith called me 'Keda' and whenever I was walking in the hall with her and somebody would say hello to Faith, she instantly would gesture her hands to me, and say 'and Keda!' She always made sure I was given my props," laughs Richeda. "You never just could say hello to Faith, she made sure I was acknowledged as well."

Remembering Faith

In the bright, busy second-grade classroom, as the school year wound down, Faith's picture and name tag still hung on the wall, with the schedule she followed every school day underneath.

"We didn't want to take it down," says Richeda.

And in Faith's classroom cubby her special hairbrush and de-tangler spray remained. Those two simple items bring a broad smile to Richeda's face.

"Oh Faith hated to have her hair brushed," laughs Richeda. "She had a special bean brush and hair spray to help with the tangles....she is going to be missed."

On a warm early summer morning, at the same spot on the playground where Faith would run to, the school community gathered for a memorial service for Faith. Guided by school principal Barbara Cimorelli, the children, the staff and Faith's family sang the school song, planted a young crab tree, and then, on the count of three released Monarch butterflies into the balmy air. As the school community watches the tree grow, they

will think of Faith.

"We couldn't have asked for a more beautiful day for the ceremony," says Cimorelli. "We had prepared ways to honor Faith that was child appropriate. Every class was outside, we read poems, released the butterflies; it struck the right tone."

When Faith became ill, it was Cimorelli who organized a "loss management plan" to help the students as well as staff prepare for the loss of Faith.

"We were optimistic at first; but then started to get a sense that we may need to start planning, to start thinking about preparing a loss management team," says Cimorelli. "We are hoping to keep a relationship with the family and help them with the financial strain."

Faith's father says of Cimorelli: "She deserves so much credit...What the community, and school did for our family went above and beyond the call of duty."

That family who Faith left behind includes brother Johnathan, sisters Abigail and Jessica, her mother Susan, and father Joseph Moor. Faith had an especially close bond with her dad, who began a blog in

early March when Faith became ill. There he shared updates, photos of Faith and most touching, stories about his daughter that captured the essence of Faith's spirit and personality. Although these were and still are heart wrenching times for the family, the blog, titled faithsfolly.com is quite uplifting, moving and at times funny.

Faith's father, through his writing, is able to convey more than just his grief. He also brings out the joy that Faith brought to everyone who knew her.

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"In this world filled with so many empty words this little girl was able to speak volumes with just her actions alone," Moor wrote recently.

Faith's family, her school and community, have chosen not just to focus on the pain, loss and brevity of this child's life. They have decided to remember Faith as that spunky girl with the luminous eyes, running across the playground in order to catch a couple more minutes of play time.

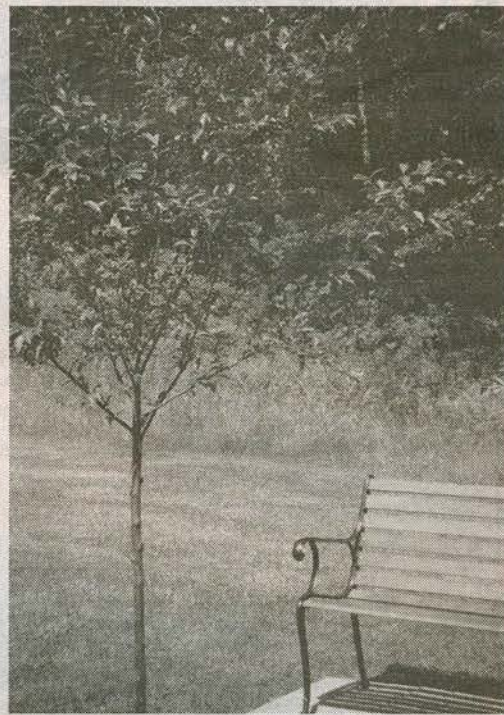


PHOTO BY CLAUDIA CARAMIELLO

This crab tree and bench at the Clifton E. Lawrence School will help children remember Faith Moor.