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Remembering a 'special angel'

## Family, friends honor DJ Lucken, recall cherished moments

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Family, friends honor DJ Lucken, recall cherished moments

By Brandon Santiago bsantiago@HanfordSentinel.com Hanford Sentinel | Posted: Friday, July 29, 2011 11:15 am | (0) Comments

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"Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away," was repeated often during the memorial services held Thursday morning for Douglas "DJ" Lucken at South Valley Community Church in Lemoore. The quote was even engraved on one of the frames holding Lucken's pictures inside. (Gary Feinstein/The Sentinel)



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“Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away,” was repeated often during the memorial services held Thursday morning for Douglas “DJ” Lucken at South Valley Community Church in Lemoore.

The quote was even engraved on one of the several frames holding Lucken’s pictures inside. The pictures lined the church halls, and family and friends gathered in small circles around them, holding each other and remembering the life of a young man who had inspired so many.

“For the life of Douglas Lucken, that simple phrase sparks countless unforgettable memories,” said Craig Myers, a family friend. “Fond memories of a boy fascinated with trucks and trailers, a child’s love for bikes that give him the determination to save his money and eventually buy his own racing bike and a young man that had his own journey as a ‘special angel’ who has now gone home to take his place with the Lord.”

Lucken, whose struggle against a debilitating genetic disease was chronicled in The Sentinel, died Saturday at his home in Lemoore surrounded by his family. He was 19. In September 2006, he had his first seizure while outside washing his mother’s truck. He was rushed to the hospital and put on eight different medications — mostly all to help control seizures.

The doctor caring for him advised that he undergo genetic testing for the extremely rare and “unlikely” disease Lafora — an inherited and progressive type of epilepsy caused by a mutated gene. The gene is created when two rare genes, one from each parent, are combined.

On Aug. 6, 2007, nearly six months after the tests, he and his family were devastated by the news that he did have the Lafora-causing gene.

Since then, there has been an outpouring of support from the community for Lucken and his family. Lemoore High School raised \$10,000 to go toward Lucken's treatment; students elected him to be the 2010 prom king; Naval Air Station Lemoore donated \$8,000 to Chelsea's Hope, a special charity foundation for those with Lafora disease; and Tachi Palace Hotel and Casino was responsible for getting Lucken's family in touch with the Make-A-Wish foundation. The wish the organization made come true for Lucken was for him to meet his idol, NASCAR driver Dale Earnhardt Jr.

"He adored Dale Jr.," said Christina Zigler, Lucken's mother. "His favorite thing to do every Sunday was to watch NASCAR, and we are so grateful that Tachi Palace and Make-A-Wish made that meeting happen."

That support continued after Lucken's death — Lemoore High students organized a candlelight vigil, created several "DJ Lucken Memorial" pages on Facebook and close to 100 people attended his memorial services on Thursday.

"I looked out the window on the way to the cemetery at the long line of cars in the procession, and I could do nothing but feel proud," Zigler said. "He [DJ] did that — he inspired so many."

Lucken even had a profound effect on his 5-year-old cousin, Ciara Quintana, who was compelled to speak during his memorial. She made her way to the microphone with help from Lucken's mother and said through tears, "DJ was our 'special angel.'"

"Ciara and DJ were extremely close," Zigler said. "She would help us give him his pills, which she called 'pillows,' and whenever he had a seizure and if she was there, she would hold him, gently rub his leg and tell him everything is going to be all right. 'DJ, it's going to be OK,' she would say. She loves and misses him so much.

"Seeing how much DJ has inspired others is overwhelming," Zigler said. "I am such a proud mama and have been blessed to have had such a son."

The reporter can be reached at 583-2427.

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