

WATCH NOW: Friends, family gather to remember late Crown Point girl

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URGENT

WATCH NOW: Friends, family gather to remember late Crown Point girl who was always smiling

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Josie Knezevic, 11, holds a sign on Monday as she and scores of others wait for the funeral procession for Emberly Brazil to stop at Lake Street Elementary School.

John J. Watkins, The Times

CROWN POINT — Emberly Brazil smiled so much that it's often the first thing people mention when you ask about her.

They also might talk about how she was always happy, or how much she loved her friends and school, or maybe how she could be a little mischievous.

What they don't mention, though, is that she's gone. It's a silent acknowledgement marked by signs, purple balloons and a massive crowd of people waiting to say goodbye to their friend.

On Monday, at least 100 people gathered in the parking lot of Lake Street Elementary, waiting to wish Emberly farewell.



The 7-year-old, who was going to be a second grader at Lake Street, died June 30 from underlying health conditions. At 2 years old, she was diagnosed with Rett Syndrome — a neurological disorder that affects primarily girls and their ability to eat, speak, walk and breathe.

A parade of law enforcement officers from across the county escorted Emberly's casket to Lake Street, as dozens looked on.

"I wanted to thank everybody who came out today," Michael Brazil, Emberly's dad and a Crown Point police officer, said while crying. "I knew not everybody could make it to the funeral home, but I knew everybody loved Emberly, and she loved you guys so very, very, very much. This school meant more to her than almost anything."

"The last thing I want this next five minutes to be is sad. This is an exciting time right now for her. ... Her entire life, she's been more than welcome in this community. You've treated her like everybody else. It means the world to me, my wife, her sister, my parents, our entire family. I can't say enough. But I love you. If you ever, ever, ever need anything, I'm always here. I will be here for you."

After his speech, "High Hopes" by Panic! At The Disco played over speakers at the school's entrance — the family originally picked the tune to honor the day Emberly was able to walk.

As the song played, mom Rachel Brazil sang while holding Emberly's older sister, Adelyn. The two embraced as some in the crowd sang along through tears, others clapped or waved purple flags.

When the song was over, Michael Brazil thanked everyone. As the family got back in their vehicles, purple balloons were released by those in the crowd.

Sassy, spunky and always happy

Though the disorder affected Emberly's diet, speech and ability to walk, she kept her sparkle, her parents said on Sunday afternoon.

"She was beautiful. She was spunky and sassy," Rachel Brazil said. "She just was always so happy."

A lover of hair bows and jewelry, unicorns and the color purple, Emberly made you forget she had Rett Syndrome, Michael Brazil said.

"I think when she was first diagnosed, it didn't seem real. Like how are we going to do this? And she made it all possible," Rachel Brazil added. "She gave us, I think, some strength that we didn't even know that we had to help her with all the struggles that she had."

Emberly also loved watching football, going on vacation, dancing, swimming and playing school — math was her favorite subject, her parents said.

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Rachel said the family agreed they wouldn't let Rett Syndrome control their lives. If other kids were riding a horse, so was Emberly. If the fair was in town, Emberly was riding the attractions along with others.

"I think sometimes you could see a little sadness in her eyes when the kids were outside riding their bikes around or things that she just couldn't go off and do," Rachel Brazil said. "But for the most part, she just was happy."

"Full of life," Michael Brazil added.

Right now, Rachel Brazil said the family is having a hard time because Emberly was the schedule.

Rachel, Michael and Adelyn would greet her every morning by opening the sparkly curtains in her unicorn-themed, pastel purple bedroom before breakfast. Before bed, they would close the curtains and turn the night light on.

They still find themselves following that routine, Rachel Brazil said, adding she laid out Emberly's Fourth of July outfit out on Saturday.

"I know she's not gonna put it on, but we always hung up her pretty things for her," Rachel Brazil said. "It just feels so weird to not have her."

The house is quiet, Rachel Brazil said. Before, Emberly would watch cartoons in the morning or listen to Panic! At The Disco while getting ready.

On Sunday, "Moana," one of Emberly's favorite movies, played in the background as Rachel and Michael shared stories about their late daughter.

"We've tried to kind of fill some sound because it's just — you just keep thinking you're gonna see her in here, playing with her babies," Rachel Brazil said. "Every time you go to do something, you think, 'Oh wait, someone needs to check on Emberly. We need to get Emberly.' I don't know how to do things without her."

Community love

You can't go anywhere without finding someone who knew Emberly, Michael Brazil said.

Since her death, the community has been so helpful, from sending messages to flowers or food and sharing stories, he said.

"We knew she was popular. We didn't know that she was like a celebrity," Michael Brazil said. **WATCH NOW: Friends, family gather to remember late Crown Point girl**

"We have shared Emberly with the community since she was little, but I still don't know that everyone knows what it was like for her. ... It's just hard for people to understand what it's like. It's never hearing your kid say that I love you," Rachel Brazil said a few minutes later.

The family never thought they would lose Emberly so young, Rachel Brazil said.

"Rett deteriorates our children over time, and I just thought you would know, but up to the day she was spunky as could be," she said. "It feels wrong to be mad because I'm so thankful that she doesn't have to live in that body that didn't work anymore. I know that she's running and dancing and doing all the things that she loved, and I hope she's screaming and talking someone's ear off, but we just miss her so much."

When it comes to Emberly's legacy, Rachel and Michael hope to bring awareness to Rett Syndrome and children with special needs. They also hope people remember her smile and unconditional love.

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"I hope people will always remember why Emberly was in their life," Rachel Brazil said.

"She changed our life for such the better. She made us better parents, more patient, more caring. I mean, there's so much," Michael Brazil added. "I wonder what she did when she was involved in other people's lives. Her teachers, her friends or friend's parents — everybody seems have a story about what she's done for them."

Gallery: Memorial at Lake Street Elementary for Emberly Brazil

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