

Boy's death shocks Manilla

by Chuck Signs

Who would have believed that the worst tragedy to befall a parent — the death of a child — would strike Paul and Diane Joens not just once, but three times?

The Manilla couple's first child, April, and third child, Timothy, each died at or shortly after birth. But they did have David Travis, or Davey, who was born in 1973.

A bright 12-year-old, Davey became a fan of astronomy, an avid reader and a motorcyclist.

He was saying his farewells to friends last week, preparing to move with his family to Arizona.

Then, without any warning, the unthinkable happened. Davey had stayed home from school Thursday because he said he wasn't feeling well. The next day he collapsed at home, unconscious. After being rushed to the Manning hospital by his father, the seventh grader was helicoptered to Children's Hospital in Omaha, Neb.

He died there Friday without regaining consciousness. He was the victim, doctors said, of an aneurysm, or blood-filled dilation of a blood vessel, which caused a massive brain hemorrhage.

The boy's pastor, the Rev. Glenn Weichmann, recalled young Joens as being "very congenial and very intelligent. He was a nice guy to be around."

The Joens family, Weichmann said, has been helped by church and community. "They have a strong faith and great support system," he said.

Manilla school principal Bill Miller said Davey was "one of the top students in his class."

The funeral, held Monday, was the largest at Trinity Lutheran Church in Manilla since Weichmann became pastor four years ago, he said. "Every chair in church was in use," said Weichmann, who estimated attendance at 600. "They have a lot of friends," he said.

Classes in all grades at the Manilla school were suspended for the day.

Davey's seventh grade classmates sat together at the funeral and listened as their teacher, Gilbert Withers, read comments each had written about their late friend.

The sudden loss of a beloved student and friend hit hard the close knit class of 26 seventh graders. Science teacher Withers said the tragedy has forced the youngsters to learn an adult lesson.

Davey, it is reported, was a sensitive, trusted friend to his peers and a teacher's dream for someone like Withers.

"He was a really unique, enthusiastic and eager little guy," said Withers, recalling his student's insatiable desire for knowledge. "He would read beyond the assignments. He was a really unique, sharp kid."

"He was inspirational to a teacher," he added. "The kid already was motivated. He had a natural curiosity."

The youngster was "an A student," said Withers. He remembered another seventh grader telling him, with admiration, "Davey doesn't need to study for tests."

Withers credits Davey's parents for the boy's attitude. "This encouragement has to come from the home," he said.

But the many academic achievements aren't what stand out about this 12-year-old. He was interested in other people. He listened to friends when they were troubled. Withers said a fellow student told him, "When I had a problem I would go to Davey."

That is one reason this death is painful to Manilla's seventh graders, for whom Davey served as class treasurer.

In their grief and confusion, the youngsters have acted "very responsibly," said Withers. When learning that Davey had been stricken, Withers led the class through a lesson about what is an aneurysm. And when hearing about Davey's prognosis, class president Jason Ferry and other students took the lead in deciding to order flowers and make other arrangements.

Still, it has been difficult. Withers' voice broke as he described Jason and several other of Davey's friends visiting the funeral home in what was for most a first-time experience. Each friend, though "all welled up," was helped by Paul, Davey's father, in approaching the casket to offer a prayer, Withers said.

When asked to speak at the funeral, Withers thought of asking Davey's classmates to say a few words. "Jason said, 'I think that would be fine,'" he said. So, when each arrived for the funeral, he or she left a brief note describing their friend, which Withers read at the services.

At the funeral, Withers concluded by saying that those who knew Davey should be thankful to have had his friendship, even for a brief time. It will take time for the pain to ease for the seventh graders. And their teachers will be patient.

"We are going to talk about Davey in class Tuesday," Withers said.

It will take time, too, for others who knew Davey. "He went away," said Withers, his voice cracking. "But it wasn't to Arizona."

Funeral for Joens held Monday

Funeral services for David Travis Joens, 12, were held at 10:30 a.m. at Trinity Lutheran Church in Manilla officiated by the Rev. Glenn Weichmann and the Rev. Paul Krumm, pastor at Zion Lutheran Church in Manning. Burial was in Hayes Twp. A prayer service was held Sunday night at Ohde Funeral Home in Manilla.

He is survived by his parents, Paul and

Diane Joens; paternal grandparents, Clifford and Lois Joens of Manilla; maternal grandparents, Eugene and Elaine Smith of Coon Rapids; aunts and uncles, Richard Joens of Des Moines, Dave and Lila Shepley of Council Bluffs, Jeff and Shirley Joens of Manilla; Debbie Olson of Spirit Lake, Kandi Kautzky of Fort Worth, Texas, and Kirk Smith of Algona; and by several great aunts and uncles; and cousins.