

Fauquier, VA

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Neighbors mourn young drowning victim

By Alexandra Bogdanovic

The haunting sounds of a violin solo filled the chapel at Moser's Funeral Home in Warrenton on Sunday afternoon.

As the last notes faded away, Dr. Decker Tapscott, a senior pastor from the Faith Christian Church International Outreach Center in Warrenton, searched for words to help Ashton Freidline's parents cope with the loss of their preschool son.

"Even though Ashton's life was cut short and he left us in such a tragic way, this is a temporary separation. You and I will be able to see Ashton again," Tapscott said. "You will be able to hug him and laugh and play with him again. The hard part is not being able to do it here and now. But the great consolation is that this is not the end."

Ashton was just 4-1/2 years old when he died in a tragic accident last week.

Police and family members have said that the little boy, who had autism, was found in a pond near his Morrisville house last Wednesday. The accident occurred after he apparently ran away from his mom, Vicki Freidline, who was watching him outside their house that night. He died at Fauquier Hospital.

In addition to family and friends, dozens of people attended his funeral on Sunday afternoon. They began to arrive 20 minutes before the service. Some went to greet Vicki and Wade Freidline immediately. Others filed into pews and chatted quietly until the service began.

The service itself lasted just half an hour. Afterward, mourners drove to Midland Cemetery to witness a graveside service and burial.

As they arrived, a plane soared high overhead. An American flag in the cemetery fluttered in a steady breeze. While the family was seated, mourners gathered around the tent set up to shelter the little boy's grave. The sounds of "Amazing Grace" played on a bagpipe sounded across the cemetery as Ashton was laid to rest.

'A happy little boy...'

Less than a day after the accident, Vicki Freidline shared memories of her son.

"He was a very happy little boy, a wonderful, sweet little boy," she said. "He had a wonderful disposition."

Ashton was born early and had brain damage, according to his mother. He was diagnosed with autism before he was 2 years old.

But he was bright, Vicki Freidline stressed. He loved puzzles and blocks. He had attended preschool at Mary Walter Elementary School near his house in Morrisville. He would have started kindergarten in the fall.

She also recalled how Ashton loved to use his dad, Wade, as a "human jungle gym."

Ashton loved to be outside, and he loved to run, his mother added.

"Children with autism don't understand fear, pain or danger. That makes it very difficult to protect them. On the bright side, they will never be hateful, mean or cruel. They are all such beautiful children and they all have so much to give," Vicki Freidline said. "I don't want anything like this to happen to anyone else's child."

Contributions in Ashton's name may be made to Faith Christian Church International Outreach Center, 6472 Duhollow Road, Warrenton VA 20187.

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