

Honoring a Life Cut Short

Friends, Family and UNH Community Gather for Jessica Santos Memorial

By Jonathan Cascio, Staff Writer

WEST HAVEN — This year, one of our own did not return to UNH on move-in day. Jessica Santos, who would have returned as a sophomore, fell victim in a street shooting the day before. Jessica was pursuing a degree in Criminal Investigations and her life-long dream was to serve in the FBI.

A memorial service was held for her on the evening of Tuesday, Sept. 19 in the Upper Student Lounge. Friends and family, including her mother Gisela Marin, stepfather Ed Zayas, grandmother, aunt, uncle and cousin, watched a slide show of the 19-year-old woman that paid homage to Jessica's short life. Throughout the memorial, attendees would walk to the podium and speak about Jessica.

The room was filled with rainbows and butterflies, two of Jessica's favorite things. The Rev. Martin O'Connor spoke about the first rainbow. He mentioned that the rainbow is a sign of God's covenant between Him and every living creature. A butterfly bush will be planted in the Quad in her memory.

Friends recounted their experiences with Jessica. Each dealt with the loss in her own way. One friend said that she believes Jess fulfilled everything God had planned for her.

Jessica Fields, a life-long friend from Arizona, was unable to attend the service but asked a student to speak on her behalf. Fields and Santos met each other at the age of one. As neighbors, they were constantly together. "I always knew she was my best friend and that we would be Spice Girls forever," a friend said on Fields's behalf.

Marin, Jessica's mother, was the last to speak. She thanked everyone for their support and mentioned how all the cards and words of support really helped. She was especially surprised to see UNH students wait an hour at the funeral home to pay their last respects. "A beautiful life that came to an end; she [Jessica] lived as she died everyone's friend." Marin told the group it is never too late to call home or to reach out to someone. She also wanted to mention how appreciative she was for all those "who were present to honor and remember Jessica's short life."

President Kaplan also spoke at the service. He expressed his condolences and said that what happened to Jessica was a tragedy. "All of us are committed to creating an end to these crimes," he said, as he mentioned that approximately half of the students at this institution are Public Safety students. The president also mentioned that one of the criminal justice classrooms will be dedicated to Jessica.

Jessica had a big heart. She always made time for those she loved or for those who needed her help. She saw no colors, no racial differences. She was an innocent victim in the wrong place at the wrong time. Now she is "a diva on the red carpet of heaven." These were the thoughts lovingly expressed by those who came to pay their respects to the young woman who will forever be an important part of this university.

