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Statue Brings Comfort to Grieving Parents

March 2nd, 2004 @ 5:44pm

Kim Johnson Reporting

A couple from Illinois who lost their child to cancer have found a little bit of comfort here in Utah. Some local artists created a lasting tribute to the little girl with a message for all parents.

Ten-year old Erica passed away last May after a bout with cancer. Her parents commissioned a couple of Utah artists, Richard Young and Lena Toritch to do the work. They communicated strictly by phone and email. This past weekend, Erica's parents flew in from Illinois to meet the artists, and to see the statue for the first time.

At first glance the Mikhails are overcome with the statue's perfect likeness of their beloved Erica.

Edmond Mikhail, Erica's Father: "I just want to jump on it right now and start kissing her and feel her hug on my chest. She used to just grab me around."

Edmond and Stella searched the internet for the right artists to sculpt a lasting memorial of their only child. When they saw what Richard and Lena had in mind, they knew they'd found them.

Edmond Mikhail: "I just wanted Erica to be next to the angel, and when I saw this, I said, 'This is it.'"

Stella Mikhail, Erica's Mother: "It's beautiful. It shows that she's going to paradise. I know she's there, she's in a better place, absolutely."

The statue will mark Erica's grave in the cemetery where she's buried. The Mikhails say commissioning the project and watching it take form has brought them comfort.

Stella Mikhail: "I would say because this is all I have to grasp to, and it's something we'd be able to worship as we have in the past."

Edmond Mikhail: "I want to go visit her every day. I don't want to go and just see a rock there, I want to see her there."

And Richard and Lena hope their work will uplift all who see it.

Lena Toritch, Sculptor: "Erica was known for her beautiful smile, her sunny disposition. That statue shows the way she was, as if she's telling us I'm fine, I'm going home and she's ok."

Richard Young, Sculptor: "She's actually waving. She sort of senses she is going to a better place. She has the sort of grasp on her hand where she's going freely, and I think it has a peaceful feeling to it."

Edmond Mikhail: "She told me 'Daddy, I'm going to die', I mean every parent I know doesn't want that for their kid."

They continue to grieve, and in their religious tradition, wear only black as they mourn. But they have hope and a message for all parents.

Stella Mikhail: "To cherish their kids and love them. Just worship them, I mean we take our kids for granted. My child was



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preached to us by the schools and educators that she wasn't doing well in school and I put so much pressure on her, and I regret that so much. I think every parent should consider that, don't pressure their kids, let them grow and be what they want to be."

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