

columbine - tragedy and recovery
Act of kindness lead to death

By Beth Barrett
Los Angeles Daily News

April 27 - Daniel Lee Rohrbough, 15, held the school door open long enough for many of his classmates to flee the two gunmen who invaded Columbine High School last week. He never made it out.

On Monday, more than 2,000 friends and relatives gathered at Grace Presbyterian Church to honor his heroism.

Nick Foss, a Columbine senior who was with Rohrbough at the end, said the final moments with the teenager he'd never known at school were worth a lifetime.

"I only wish I'd had a chance to walk him down the hallway here," said Foss. "But I know he'll walk me down his hallway someday into the light."

Rohrbough was remembered as a devoted grandson who liked to fish, a hard-working son who shared his father's passion for electronics and a classmate with an infectious laugh.

"Everyone who met him wanted to see him again," said Bill Gansemer, one of his grandfathers.

Gansemer recalled how, 14 years ago, Rohrbough came to visit in Kansas City, where he met a little girl. That girl, now a teenager, was among the mourners Monday.

"He was about a year old, and she was three and she picked out this toy for him to have," Gansemer said, the tears choking his words before he could finish the story. "He kept that toy for years. And today, she is here."

Herb Petrone, Rohrbough's brother, called him his best friend.

"I loved him and I miss him so much, but I know he is with God," Petrone said.

Daniel's father, Brian Rohrbough, said he had a series of pet names for his son, who worked with him after school at his electronic shop, among them "the kid" and "punk kid."

Despite his grief, Rohrbough said he realizes how blessed he was to have his son for 15 years.

"Daniel Lee Rohrbough, in life and death, I'm proud of you," his father said.

Pastor Dwight Blackstock said Rohrbough lived and died in the highest Christian tradition.

Quoting from the Bible, he said Jesus told his followers nearly 2000 years ago that there is no greater love than that of a man who lays down his life for his friends.

"That's what Danny did," Blackstock said. "He might have lived, but he held the door so that others could go out before him. They made it. Danny didn't."

But Blackstock also told the Columbine students in attendance that no one should feel guilty they lived.

"They should thank God, and they should thank Danny," he said. Beneath a huge cross suspended from the ceiling and surrounded by flowers, the teenager's closed coffin stood as a somber reminder of the senseless killings, even as the healing words of hymns and scripture filled the sanctuary.

"God has not abandoned us, and we turn to God to find safety in this community God has called together," those in attendance recited together. Prayers and songs of worship and praise followed, as the service closed with the Ville Du Havre's hymn, "It is Well with My Soul."

"When sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say, it is well with my soul."

As mourners streamed out of the church to join a miles-long funeral procession to Littleton Cemetery, followed by a reception at Governor's Hall, many came to hug Foss and to thank him for being with Rohrbough as he died, and for speaking.

"It's really hard to describe love in a word or so," Foss said. "But in those moments, I knew it."