

# Honoring Claire Davis

*Sidelines Magazine is honored to be the first magazine to speak with Claire Davis' parents, Michael and Desiree Davis. It is with heavy hearts that we tell the story of a beautiful young woman who lit up the hearts of so many and who continues to inspire us all – even after death.*



**A fallen angel.** Claire Davis and her horse Graphite Gran Grannus. All photos by Desiree Davis

By Dani Moritz

*The world lost a beautiful young woman on December 21, 2013. Seventeen-year-old Claire Davis died eight days after she was shot by a student gunman at Arapahoe High School. Claire, who even in her last moments demonstrated kindness and graciousness by asking the gunman why he intended on shooting, was a beautiful soul and she will never be forgotten. To honor her and her family, this is the story of Claire Davis.*

**T**hose who knew her describe her as a happy spirit, someone who was thoughtful, courteous, genuine and kind. She could light up the room. She loved to laugh and smile. With no effort at all, Claire brightened the day of everyone around her.

Claire was the kind of rider who enjoyed every moment, win or lose, and who stood ringside to cheer for all of her friends, even those competing against her. She took the time to make everyone feel special, whether they were six years old and trotting over ground poles or adult amateurs getting back in the ring.

Claire Davis was one-of-a-kind and she will forever hold a special place in the hearts of so many lives she touched.

Claire's parents, Desiree and Michael, explained that, because of this, Claire was everyone's best friend. "In so many of the letters, even from adult women who knew her, people said that they thought it was just them who had this special relationship with Claire, but upon her death realized that everyone had a special relationship with Claire," Desiree said.

Claire was a social butterfly. When she wasn't spending time at the barn or practicing piano, she was with her friends enjoying movies or at a concert with her dad. She loved comedies because, as Michael explains, "Claire had a real passion for laughing and

having fun." She enjoyed pop music, particularly Jackie Greene and even, to her parents' dismay, Justin Bieber. Although her parents jokingly recalled, "She was growing out of Justin a little bit, thank goodness!"

Education was also one of Claire's passions. Claire enjoyed school and already had offers to attend the University of Northern Colorado and the University of Wyoming. She planned on studying nursing and to continue riding in a school club.

"Claire was very studious," said Desiree. "She never missed an assignment. She was diligent, self-motivated. Her school calendar is still in her backpack and it's perfect. She would write everything down and, if it was done, she color-coded each class with a highlighter."

Without a doubt, she would have continued to shine in college.

Of course, Claire's greatest passion was her riding. She was an accomplished hunter, jumper and equitation rider and an active member of the Colorado Hunter Jumper Association.

But as her mother Desiree explained, you would never know of her daughter's many accomplishments, such as placing in the top six in Colorado three years straight on three different horses, unless you searched the CHJA archives. "Claire was never boastful or chased points just for the sake of winning," Desiree said. "Instead, she mostly competed against herself, striving to hone her talent as a rider, to jump higher, to hold that perfect position. Gaining in confidence and skills is how Claire measured her success, not by the color of her ribbon."

When Claire Davis rode out of the ring during the Deborah L. Donoghue Medal at what would become one of her last horse shows, you would have thought she took the blue. The flat portion of the class required the 13 riders to counter canter for several minutes in each direction – a challenging feat for Claire and her horse, Graphite Gran Grannus. Ironically, they didn't take the



**A bright smile.** Claire will always be remembered for her beautiful smile that lit up the room.





**Always do your best.** *Claire's motto was to compete against herself. She was happy as long as she performed to the best of her ability.*

blue. They didn't even place. But in that ring, Claire proved to herself that she could do it – and that was an achievement worth celebrating.

Michael explained: "We always taught Claire – and she learned this – to always be the same person coming out of the ring that you were going into the ring. That really resonated with her." He added, "It made me realize that she rode horses and competed them just because she loved doing it. She would ride in happy and thankful for the experience and she would come out the same way – no matter what."

Owner of Savoy Stables (where Claire rode), Mary Dunahay, agreed that Claire was a special kind of rider. "I know she had goals, as most of the kids do, but they didn't eclipse her joy of just being with her horse. You could see it from a mile away. I know there has been a lot said about Claire's beautiful smile, but it's what I will miss most about her. It was so sincere and genuine, you felt like it started from the inside and just spilled out. And looking back, I don't think I recall ever seeing her without it."

Mary said it's hard not to notice her absence at the barn. Those who loved Claire can still see her greeting her horse, Graphite, and walking up and down the barn aisle. They can feel her as they walk by the jump they created for her during her memorial service. For them, Claire's memory will never fade away.

"Claire was consistently sweet and true, and was always a supportive teammate," her parents said. "She cheered for every rider she knew, and was always the first to celebrate their successes or support them in spite of their losses. She was a fabulous role model to the younger riders through her quiet, focused demeanor, her attention to details and her competitive spirit. Claire enriched the life experience of not only her friends and family, but just about everyone that knew her or came within her sphere of influence. She was a friend to many, and she loved

so much."

Her parents laughed when recalling her barn nickname. She was so sweet and kind that when she finally earned her nickname from trainer Rebecca Johnson, she was deemed Fluffy Rainbow Child. "It was really very fitting for Claire because that's who she was," Desiree laughed.

Looking back, Desiree and Michael are glad to have had shared so many wonderful memories with their "fluffy rainbow child." For Michael, he will forever remember the laughs they shared at concerts. Desiree will never forget all the days and nights spent at the barn, she attended every lesson and every single horse show. She will recall Claire's desperate need to blast music to get in her zone (despite Desiree not having had her first cup of coffee)

and the enjoyment they shared when Claire stepped into the ring. Claire's parents are lucky to say they have no regrets and they encourage other parents to follow that same path.

"One thing I am so grateful for is that

we have no regrets because

we put our child first," Desiree said, tearing up. "We put her first above our own needs. Nothing else mattered. She wasn't spoiled – well, she was kind of spoiled because everyone who rides horses is – but she never acted spoiled. We just gave her every advantage and spent so much time with her."

Michael and Desiree miss their daughter with every ounce of their being. Her 21-year-old brother, Alexander, misses his sister. Her two dogs, who still keep her bed warm, miss their best friend. Her horse, Graphite, still waits for her arrival. Her friends at the barn and even those who barely knew her at all miss this stunning, beautiful woman. But everyone who knew her is grateful, because they are lucky to have known her at all. Not everyone has the opportunity to meet an angel like Claire Davis.

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- Michael and Desiree Davis

# How You Can Honor Claire Davis Through The Arapahoe High School Community Fund

Claire Davis' parents, Michael and Desiree Davis, have established the Arapahoe High School Community Fund honoring Claire Davis through the Denver Foundation. The fund will support mental health care, anti-bullying programs and other community needs.

"Our plan is to use those contributions to both support existing programs and possibly create new programs to try to put an end to school shootings and school violence," said Michael. "The idea is to focus on behavior health and mental health and anti-bullying programs. We want to help kids – particularly teenagers – to do what we can to stop the violence."

In a statement on the Denver Foundations' website, President of The Denver Foundation David Miller, said: "The Denver Foundation offers our deep sympathy to the Davis Family and the entire Arapahoe High School community for their tragic loss. We are honored be able to help the Arapahoe High School community honor Claire Davis and help with needs that extend beyond the immediate. We will be working with Claire's family to determine where contributed dollars will make the greatest difference."

To contribute to the community fund, visit <http://www.denverfoundation.org/mediaroom/announcements/charitable-fund-honors-claire-davis>. Or, you can send a check made to the Arapahoe High School Community Fund honoring Claire Davis and mailed to The Denver Foundation 55 Madison St., 8th Floor. Denver, CO 80206.





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