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Kaitlyn's benefit concert proves that Silicon Valley has a heart

By Julie Davis Berry
 Editor

Organizers of a unique benefit concert say that approximately 1,000 people turned out on March 1 to celebrate a very special little girl with an afternoon of music, poetry and laughter. Kaitlyn's "I Am" concert was the brainchild of Erica K. Weil and Romeo Ducher co-owners of ROCK101 Promotions who had read newspaper reports of the third grader's tragic health struggles.

"When we read about Kaitlyn I wanted to make a song based on Kaitlyn's poem and Erica focused on the need for a benefit," said Ducher.

That one song led to an entire CD. The benefit CD includes songs from all of the artists who per-

formed at the concert as well as two brand new songs; one written around the "I Am the Same Inside" poem authored by Kaitlyn. The poem talks about Kaitlyn's feelings and how she just wants to be a normal child. The other song was written by Robert Berry, inspired by Kaitlyn and everybody who has come together to help.

Kaitlyn suffers from Toxic Epidermal Necrolysis, a severe form of Stevens Johnson Syndrome. A rare disease, it attacks the skin and mucous membranes as the immune system turns on itself, forming blisters and lesions throughout the body that resemble second-degree burns. The mortality rate from the disease is very high.

In Kaitlyn's case, doctors believe
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An exhausted but happy Kaitlyn Langstaff poses after her concert with Don Altier (in wheelchair) and (back, from left) her mother Kerri and the CD's cover artist Karen M. Haughey.

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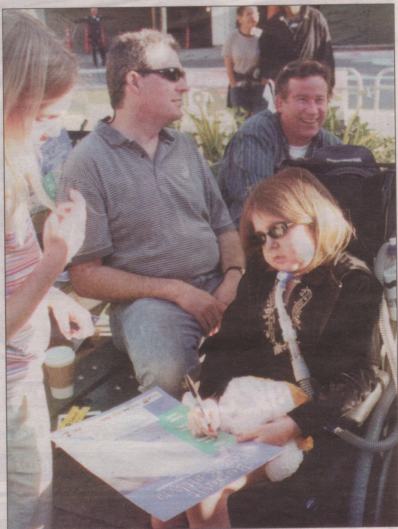
the cause may have been an extreme allergic reaction to ibuprofen. The disease has left her blind and unable to speak and has caused permanent and massive scar tissue in her lungs and airway. She has a trachostomy and requires constant oxygen just to breathe. She cannot eat through her mouth but has a feeding tube in her stomach to provide daily nutrition. To make matters worse both of Kaitlyn's parents lost their Silicon Valley marketing jobs the summer of 2001 and have been unable to go back to work because of the time spent caring for their daughter.

The community gathered around Kaitlyn and her family as word spread of her tragic illness. The family was deeply involved in their daughters' school communities, as well as local Bobby Sox, Girl Scouts and Indian Princesses. Each of these "communities" pitched in over the ensuing months to help the family with meals, house cleaning and fundraisers.

The concert was a great way for everyone to get together and celebrate the progress that had been made by the courageous little girl, her devoted family and the many friends, neighbors and even strangers that had been touched by her story.

"It was an absolutely perfect day," said Kaitlyn's mother, Kerry. "The weather, the music, the love and support from everyone was incredible. It was great to see so many people we had worked with, and been in school or activities with. It was really a celebration of Kaitlyn's life and it is amazing that she made it to her ninth birthday."

"It's great to see Kerry and Brad smiling," said John



Her mother said that the favorite part of the event for Kaitlyn was signing her autograph on the CD. "She put hearts over the 'i' which was a bit of a challenge since she can't see what she is signing," said Kerri.

Medalen of Campbell. "You can tell they feel really supported by the community."

Micah Beverly of Miggs was very happy to see the large turnout for the concert. "We've never played something like this before, and we didn't know what to expect but the turnout was great," said Beverly. "This just proves that you can't say Silicon Valley has no heart!"

Don Altier met the Langstaff family while volunteering at his son's school, Forest Hill Elementary School. Although confined to a wheelchair himself, as a result of ALS, the enthusiastic Altier felt compelled to help in some way. Because Kaitlyn's poem was the inspiration for the Miggs' song, Altier decided to coordinate a poetry contest for school chil-

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Families with small children mingled with 20-something rockers and smiles were the norm for the day as Miggs sang the song inspired by Kaitlyn's poem "I Am The Same Inside."

dren throughout the valley in honor of Kaitlyn. He read several of the heartfelt poems at the concert and they can be read on the Kaitlyn's web site.

"It's a real celebration, a wonderful get together," said Rolling Hills Middle School Principal Nancy Atkinson. "The leadership of the people who put this together is inspiring."

The finale to this fine day was when Kaitlyn Langstaff addressed the crowd, speaking with the help of a voice aid. "I

just wanted to say thank you to everybody who's been helping me and praying for me and who came to the concert," said Kaitlyn. Then, the crowd gave a rousing rendition of *Happy Birthday to You* to the little girl who had fought so hard to make it to her ninth birthday.

To find out more about Kaitlyn and to order the CD or to make donations to the family visit the web site at www.kaitlyn-langstaff.org

I AM THE SAME INSIDE

I am the same inside, as some people can see.

But some people think I'm weird because they don't look inside of me.

I am the same inside. That's what I want people to know.

So I'm going to start letting it show.

I am the same inside.

I'm not dumb in any way.

I just want to be like a normal kid and play.

I am the same inside, just like a normal kid.

And I want to let everybody know, this is what I did.

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