

An angel for all

Mother hopes statue can bring peace to others in pain

By Patrick Lally
STAFF WRITER

Four years after losing her daughter in a motorcycle accident, Linda Bilodeau has found strength in an angel.

As a peace of mind for herself and the hundreds of other parents who have felt the pain of losing a child, she wants to erect an "Angel of Peace" statue in the area. Inspired by the Richard Paul Evans best-selling book "The Christmas Box," these statues stand across the country and offer a place to reflect, remember and grieve for those dealing with pain that Bilodeau said "you don't want to know what it feels like."

It's been four years since her daughter, Jill, died after being thrown from a motorcycle on Rte. 9, but Bilodeau said the pain is still hanging over her head. But the despair she has held inside for so long is now being put toward a noble goal, she said, one which she will work feverishly toward until it is accomplished.

"I just suffered so much and I still do. And it's the worst pain you could imagine. I need to do something positive," she said. "I just need to reach out to other people, that's my quest."

Jill Bilodeau was 27 and attending nursing school at Worcester State College when she got on the back of a motorcycle driven by Clinton Allard, 21, in the early hours of Sept. 9, 2001. According to police, Jill was thrown from the bike on Rte. 9 when Allard began "pulling wheelies" while driving. Though she was wearing a helmet, she died shortly thereafter from fatal



PHOTO BY SHANE GERARDI

Linda Bilodeau, whose daughter Jill was killed in a motorcycle crash, is hoping to build a park centered around an angel statue like the one from 'The Christmas Box.'

ANGEL, page 3

Mother hopes statue can bring peace to others

ANGEL, from page 1
damage to her brain.

Allard was sentenced to two-and-a-half years in prison in January and was released after four-and-a-half months served.

Jill's death sent Bilodeau into a depression. She didn't want to eat or get out of bed for weeks afterwards, she said. A Boylston resident, she moved to Shrewsbury to live with her older daughter, Tara, and her family. She found her way out of despair, she said, through a loose-knit support group, called the Children's Remembrance Group: part support group, part organizer of an annual candlelight vigil in Shrewsbury. A chance dis-

covery while at a book signing with the group at Tatnuck Booksellers led Bilodeau to the "Angel of Hope."

The Angel was introduced to the world by Evans' worldwide best-selling book "The Christmas Box," about a family that befriends a woman who grieves for her lost child at a statue in Salt Lake City. Though mostly a work of fiction, the statue was real, though it had disintegrated long ago. As the book's popularity grew, parents dealing with loss would contact the author, wanting to know where the real "Angel of Hope" statue could be found. Evans commissioned a replica to be made and it stands today in the Salt

Lake City cemetery.

The author offers similar statues through his non-profit organization, The Christmas House International. For a \$12,500 donation, individuals and organizations can purchase the 4-foot three-inch angel. The money is used to fund the non-profit's home for orphaned children.

Bilodeau sees a grand vision for the statue: a serene park, with a brick walkway and benches, a place where a sleepless person can reflect and gaze upon the stars. Now, the bereaved mother is seeking not only donations but also land where her dream can be realized.

A fundraising drive was launched

less than a month ago, but already Bilodeau's received many responses, from people who knew her daughter and strangers who were touched by her story and her goal to make something positive out of the loss of a free-spirited, fun loving, daughter.

"It comes from the heart," Bilodeau said of her efforts. "It's a passion.... It brings you some sense of solace knowing that it helps other people."

Anyone wishing to donate to The Christmas Box Angel can send checks care of Westborough Bank, PO Box 670, Westborough, MA 01581. For additional information, contact Linda Bilodeau at 508-842-6001 or daisy0909@aol.com.