



JIM GENSHEIMER — MERCURY NEWS ARCHIVES

Karen Herzog holds her daughter, Sophia Herzog Sachs, in 2002.

# Child inspired with her spirit

## GIRL'S PLIGHT BROUGHT PEOPLE TOGETHER

By Jessica Portner  
*Mercury News*

PALO ALTO

Sophia Herzog Sachs couldn't talk, walk or swallow.

But the frail 4-year-old who died this week from a rare genetic disorder communicated powerful messages to a vast community who came to honor her at a memorial Saturday in Palo Alto's Greenmeadow Park.

More than a hundred relatives and friends walked silently in the grass, tossing pennies into a "Well of Wishes" for children in need. Others painted goodbye notes shaped like hands in prayer while a musician played Tibetan bowls that vibrated with long, low hums. After the testimonials to the brown-eyed child, Sophia's parents released fluttering

butterflies into the clear blue sky.

"Sophia had a soul and spirit that called to people," said Karen Herzog, 45, Sophia's mother. "She brought the community together. How could you keep someone so sweet here?"

Sophia died at 2:40 a.m. Monday after her liver stopped functioning and her breathing failed, her family said.

The Greenmeadow neighborhood, where the family lives, supported Sophia as she battled Niemann-Pick disease Type A, a genetic disease so rare that Sophia's is the only case her doctor at Lucile Packard Children's Hospital had ever seen. The metabol-

ic condition is so lethal that children with it rarely live past age 3.

Karen Herzog said that from the moment neighbors learned of Sophia's illness, they began rallying to her aid. They stitched multicolored prayer flags that hang throughout the family's house. Neighbors planted an organic vegetable and herb garden to keep Sophia healthy. A fleet of nurses showed up to feed, clothe and diaper Sophia — at a cut rate.

Health professionals from every specialty — neurologists, Chinese medics, homeopaths, occupational therapists and herbalists — donated hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of care. Sophia even inspired people around the globe, from Japan to Australia and Bulgaria, to pray for

See **SOPHIA**, Page 4A

## SOPHIA | Frail girl inspired neighbors

Continued from Page 3A

her.

At the memorial Saturday, Margaret Boeddiker, a nurse who worked with Sophia for two years, remembered how Sophia liked baths, looking at flowers and listening to children play.

"I am sorry to lose her," said Boeddiker, "but she is in a better place. She is at peace."

Sophia's parents said they plan to set up a foundation in their daughter's honor to encourage research and share information for parents of ill children. Holistic healing techniques helped to extend their daughter's life, they said, and they plan to use the foundation to promote these methods.

In her home Saturday, Herzog displayed her file cabinets stuffed with enough information to write a medical thesis. Her kitchen cabinets are still packed

From the moment neighbors learned of her illness, they began rallying to her aid.

with "brain teas" and anti-inflammatory creams she used to rub on Sophia.

Richard Sachs, Sophia's father, said Sophia's send-off was far more celebratory than sad.

He hadn't decided yet what to do with Sophia's ashes, but thought that he might keep them in a bottle that has a glass image of the Earth.

Sophia Herzog Sachs, who died Monday at the age of 4, inspired her Palo Alto neighbors with her spirit.



RICHARD KOCI HERNANDEZ — MERCURY NEWS ARCHIVES

"Maybe some ashes will go into that vase with a picture of the world," Sachs said, "because she gave everything to the world."

Contact Jessica Portner at [jportner@mercurynews.com](mailto:jportner@mercurynews.com) or (650) 688-7505