

# Tragedy braces need for pool safety

By Janice Brunson  
staff writer

The funeral program for 10-year-old Rachel Reynolds of Detroit began with a verse from Ecclesiastes: "To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under the heaven."

A month after Rachel drowned under ironic circumstances May 6, Mary Chill of Farmington Hills said she is still pondering why.

"It was such a pointless tragedy," she said. "It should never have happened. It doesn't make sense."

The circumstances that claimed Rachel's life and nearly that of her friend, 11-year-old Alyna Nelson, are indeed ironic.

Chill and the girls were among 500 adult and youth delegates attending the annual convention of Michigan Parent Teacher Association and Parent Teacher Student Association May 5-7 at Sugar Loaf Resort.

Chill is secretary of the PTA Council for Farmington Schools.

THE GIRLS, accompanied by the three-day affair by Rachel's mother, Althea Reynolds, represented Mark Twain Elementary School in Detroit, where both attended school.

Youth delegates add so much to the convention," Chill said. She describes adult delegates as "people

who spend a lot of time and energy on children. To lose one at the convention was a tremendous loss and shock."

The loss has been particularly profound for Chill because of the role she played in trying to save Rachel and Alyna.

The first hint anything was amiss came in an announcement during the convention's opening session Wednesday afternoon. Delegates with medical training were asked to go immediately to the pool area.

The opening session, Chill said, "is always a real snoozer," particularly for younger delegates who customarily do not attend.

Rachel and Alyna asked permission to go swimming. Rachel's mother cautioned the girls not to enter the pool until a lifeguard was present.

AFTER THE announcement, Chill, a registered nurse who has worked in hospital emergency rooms and who is now a home health care nurse in Oakland County, raced to the pool.

She was joined by another delegate, Lynette Clason of Royal Oak, who is also a registered nurse. It took the two women 2-3 minutes to locate the pool.

Chill instantly assessed the situation.

**"Everyone should look closely at pools and pool safety. Very few people understand the risks or how profound drowning is."**

— Mary Chill  
PTA member



"One girl (Alyna) was unconscious but moving her arms and legs. People were warning her. Another girl (Rachel) was prostrate. CPR was being administered improperly. Her stomach was bloated. Her pupils were fixed and dilated."

"It was clear she was in trouble. I went into automatic," Chill said, and the nurse in her took over.

For the next half hour, she and Clason alternately applied cardiopulmonary resuscitation, until

paramedics from North Flight Emergency Services arrived by helicopter.

AN AMBULANCE had arrived earlier from the nearby town of Cedar but Chill said the crew was trained only in basic emergency care and unable to relieve Chill and Clason.

They took Alyna to a nearby hospital, where the girl was attached to a respirator. She recovered and was

released from the hospital the following week.

By the time Rachel was evacuated by helicopter to Munson Medical Center in Traverse City about 4 p.m., Chill said the girl was "breathing spontaneously and it looked like she should come back."

"But it doesn't work that way. The crisis from drowning is profound. The damage is profound."

Rachel's body was unable to cope. She died early the following morning, at 2:14 a.m. May 6.

Convention business continued. Sessions were scheduled through the following day.

"It was important we finish our (convention) work. It's expensive and takes a great deal of effort to get that many people together at one time."

"There was much crying and other manifestations of grief," Chill said. "It was particularly difficult for the younger delegates to understand why we continued (the convention)."

A GRIEF counselor arrived from Munson to counsel them. Ministers in the crowd comforted adults. Delegates left for home after the close of convention business Thursday afternoon.

Many gathered together again the next week for Rachel's funeral on May 13 at New Greater Bethlehem

Temple in Ecorse.

"Hundreds of people attended," Chill said. "Rachel was evidently a real bright little girl."

The memorial program spoke of a season and a purpose for everything. Chill felt anger. "I am personally very angry. All the kids did was go swimming. It seems a heavy punishment for disobedience."

The accident has been particularly painful for Chill because Rachel was similar in size and age to Chill's only child, Tina, 12.

"When I estimated her (Rachel's) weight and size (while applying CPR), I was only off by two pounds and two months."

WHILE AINYA has no memory of the accident, it is believed the two girls waited for a lifeguard. When none appeared, they entered the pool to play a game of tag. They were discovered floating face down by two other youth delegates planning a swim.

Chill said Sugar Loaf management told her the fatality was the first in the resort's pool. There is no lifeguard on duty and a warning is posted.

"Everyone should look closely at pools and pool safety," Chill said. "Very few people understand the risks or how profound drowning is."

## Vet remembered for helping less fortunate



Herbert Viergutz  
community activist

Herbert Viergutz never sat still for very long.

Even in retirement after 48 years as a veterinarian, he made house calls to neuter dogs and cats for longtime customers who wouldn't let anyone else do the procedure, said his wife, Beulah.

Mr. Viergutz died June 4 in William Beaumont Hospital, Royal Oak. He was 79.

The Farmington Hills resident never dropped his involvement with the Lions, a civic group dedicated to helping the less fortunate, including deaf, blind and handicapped people. In recent years, the club also has fought juvenile diabetes and substance abuse.

Mr. Viergutz founded the Farmington Area Lions Club 40 years ago this September. The charter membership was 39, 14 more than today. He never tired of talking about the

Lions, which helps fund Leader Dogs for the Blind in Rochester Hills and Welcome Home for the Blind in Grand Rapids. He was proud of the Lions' work with the Eye Bank, which finds corneas and eyes for needy people.

"Even though we assist many organizations for the blind and visually handicapped, we are always looking for new, worthwhile causes," he said in an interview shortly before his death.

MR. VIERGUTZ helped organize many Lions fund-raisers. Last year, the club raised \$10,000.

At its 40th annual installation dinner June 2, the Farmington Area Lions Club gave Mr. Viergutz the Melvin Jones Award for 40 years of hu-

manitarian service, the club's highest honor. As a symbolic gesture, Mr. Viergutz, two days before his death, applied the gavel to the bell that called the meeting to order.

Orphaned as an infant, Herbert Viergutz was raised by his grandparents. "They raised me with a strict Baptist hand," he said.

It was his aunt who provided emotional help, he said.

The Colorado native earned a degree in veterinary medicine from Colorado State University. "The financial burdens were often so bad that I thought I might have to drop out, but my aunt helped me out so I made it," he said.

His wife, Beulah, said: "Herbert's aunt was more like a mother to him."

IN 1941, Mr. Viergutz started a veterinary clinic in Detroit. A year later, he was drafted and served in the Army for four years, from 1942-46.

When he returned from serving as an inspector of the food for troops in Australia and the South Pacific, he found his clinic condemned. "They told me that they were putting Davidson Road on the same spot that my hospital stood on, and I had to make other plans," he said.

Mr. Viergutz then decided to start the Farmington Dog and Cat Hospital on Grand River. He retired in 1985.

He was a recognized breeder of the cross-bred Ocicat cat, recognized by the Cat Fanciers Association. He also served as veterinarian for the Detroit Police Department Mounted Division. He also enjoyed flowers.

In addition to his wife, Mr. Viergutz is survived by one daughter, Marie Grossman; two step-children, Carol Cranston Van Hartsvelt and Dr. Raymond Cranston III; four grandchildren; and one sister.

He donated his body to the University of Michigan Medical School. A memorial service was held June 8 at Heeny-Sundquist Funeral Home, Farmington. Members of Farmington Masonic Lodge officiated.

The family asks that memorials be made to Leader Dogs for the Blind, Rochester Hills.

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