

Iowa State student remembered for faith, passion for weather

Phillip Sitter

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The Lutheran church in Atlantic, Iowa, where an Iowa State University student who died in a car crash two days before Christmas was a member posted on social media the day of his visitation, "Each person is given the gift of time on this earth to live, to learn, to love and to leave a legacy."

While the one-line message didn't specifically mention the late Avery Andersen, it seemed fitting as people turned out in numbers that surprised even Andersen's parents to remember and honor their son's life, learning, love and legacy — including as a man of faith, an avid Cyclone fan and a chaser of cyclones and other



Andersen

extreme weather events.

Andersen, 20, died Dec. 23 after his car lost traction on a frost-covered road about a mile from his home in Atlantic and rolled into a ditch.

Andersen was a member of Atlantic High School's Class of 2019, studying meteorology at Iowa State and a life-long member of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Atlantic.

His mother, Sue Andersen, said the church was set up to accommodate 400 people for her son's funeral Tuesday, and that the church was full.

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She and her husband, Steve Andersen, Avery's father, said members of their son's fraternity, youth from the church, members of the Bible camp he worked at and some of his fellow Atlantic High School alumni all volunteered to sing at the service without being asked.

In addition to his visitation the day before, friends had gathered for a candlelight vigil at the church the night of Avery's death, and Steve said the church was full then, as well.

He and his wife recalled after the funeral service what their son would want to be remembered for and what they hope he's remembered for.

'We have more weather radios in this house than I think they have at Best Buy'

Avery's obituary notes he was born in an ice storm on Feb. 24, 2001, during the state wrestling tournament in Des Moines. Steve explained he was working for a radio station covering the tournament and had been live on the air before he got a call from Sue, informing him that her water had broken while at their hotel.

He said he dropped his headphones and was out the door, beating Sue and a friend who was with her to the hospital after what Sue described as a "very slow and scary trip."

She said what really started Avery's interest in weather, though, was the summer of 2004, when Avery was 3 years old and the family spent a lot of time in their basement under tornado warnings.

They tried to explain to their scared little boy what was going on, and from then on, they said, that's all he wanted to talk about.

Steve said Avery could identify the model of a weather siren just by the sound it made. "We have more weather radios in this house than I think they have at Best Buy," Sue added.

Once he could drive, Avery chased storms in his 2005 Buick Century — "He didn't really care what his car was," Steve said, "just that it ran."

Avery had a separate Twitter profile



Avery Anderson, pictured, an Iowa State University who was killed in a car crash Dec. 23, is being remembered for his Lutheran faith, passion for meteorology and performances for central Iowa hockey teams. COURTESY STEVE ANDERSON, SUBMITTED TO THE AMES TRIBUNE

for his storm spotting, which featured a pinned tweet explaining he wanted to use the account to document the experiences he had "while out doing what I enjoy."

Steve said Avery was excited when major national news outlets picked up some footage he captured of a wind-storm sweeping up dust from a dry cornfield near town.

While storms were his calling, his faith was his cornerstone

Avery's passions included more than storm chasing, though.

He played the trumpet for the Cyclone Hockey Pep Band and piano. He also sang the National Anthem at Des

Moines Buccaneers games, including the team's home game against the Omaha Lancers the Friday before he died.

Steve said Avery couldn't skate, but he was learning. Despite that, he embraced the sport. An aunt had taken him to Bucs games at an early age and he was a Boston Bruins fan, too.

Avery was also a counselor and lifeguard at the Ingham Okoboji Lutheran Bible Camp.

Sue said he worked primarily with families who would spend a week at the camp together, helping them with activities and leading Bible studies. Being a lifeguard allowed him to continue working during the pandemic, even when the camp reduced the numbers of people who could attend.

"He'd have done it for free," given what Avery got out of the camp, spiritually, Steve said.

The camp's director, Rod Quanbeck, wrote on social media that when Avery was young, he'd "already touched so many lives with his continuous encouragement, love for creation (especially the skies and weather) and sharing God's love and life with others! Well done, good and faithful servant."

Steve said he hopes Avery's remembered for "the man of faith that he was."

Avery, like his father, was involved in Greek life and was a member of the Iowa State chapter of the Lutheran Beta Sigma Psi fraternity.

Trevor Roubadeaux — Avery's roommate, fellow fraternity brother and fellow classmate in meteorology — said Avery represented the spirituality of the fraternity well.

Roubadeaux said Avery always made notes about God having a reason and a plan for people's lives, and that he kept Bible study updates on his whiteboard.

Avery 'wanted to be a scientist' — and meteorology is what called to him

Steve said that while Avery loved preaching and sharing the Word, "he wanted to be a scientist" and meteorology is what called to him.

Sue said she knew Avery's goal in meteorology was to be able to warn people of violent weather and give them the time they needed to get to safety.

She also said that Avery specifically wanted to be a broadcast meteorologist. Having been a performer since his days

in school plays, choir and band, "I think he was a natural — he loved being in front of the camera."

"There was too much performance in that boy to be behind the scenes," she said.

Videos shared on Avery's storm-spotting Twitter account showed his work on-air with "Cy's Eyes on the Skies," a student-run TV weather program produced by the Iowa State student chapter of the American Meteorological Society.

The chapter tweeted on Christmas: "Avery will be dearly missed around our program; he always brought laughter and energy wherever he was, and he was emerging as a key member of our broadcast show this semester."

Roubadeaux said Avery "put his heart and soul into everything he did," setting himself apart in meteorology with his excitement and smiles.

"I hope that people remember how kind he was, how much of a gentle soul he was," he said.

Roubadeaux added that Avery also had a strong self-motivation to be a hard worker, something he hopes to carry forward in his own career and his faith.

Avery was disappointed to have not been home for December's derecho, when one of many tornadoes that day touched down nearby and Steve said storm chasers were within a mile of their house.

Avery posted on Facebook: "Yes, there was a tornado north of Atlantic today. Passed just to the north of my house. Of course it's when I'm not home, though."

Like that tornado, the people who knew Avery called his life powerful, even though it was short.

"Obviously, we're crushed," his father said. "But we are also very proud of our son."

"Knowing him meant a lot," Roubadeaux said, adding that it's tough that he had just gotten to know Avery and now he's passed. "I wasn't expecting it to be so soon."

Phillip Sitter covers education for the Ames Tribune, including Iowa State University and PreK-12 schools in Ames and elsewhere in Story County. Phillip can be reached via email at psitter@gannett.com. He is on Twitter @pslifeisabeauty.