

Thousands rejoice in Jaycee's release from captivity

By Kathryn Reed and Susan Wood

The community needed this.

That was the overwhelming sentiment expressed during and after the pink ribbon parade through South Lake Tahoe on Sept. 6

The late morning walk from the county library to South Tahoe Middle School was the reverse route of the 10-year anniversary walk marking Jaycee Lee Dugard's disappearance. Sunday's walk, which brought out more than 2,500 people, was a time to celebrate her Aug. 26 release from captivity.

She left her Meyers bus stop June 10, 1991, an innocent 11-year-old. She came back to the world a 29-year-old woman with daughters ages 11 and 15. Her story is one that will reveal itself in the coming months and years as she begins to peel back the layers of abuse that have been inflicted upon her for the last 18 years, and as she and her family add new chapters to their lives.

Chris and Kathy Champion said they weren't surprised to see the community pull together for the parade. Champion, the Tahoe FBI agent who has been involved in the case since the beginning, is convinced Jaycee Lee will eventually return to South Lake Tahoe for a visit.

That is also the hope of Melody Ulman, who was walking with husband Eric and their two dogs adorned with pink ribbons.

"I would hope she'd come back so we could let her know we love her. I hope she feels this. We never stopped looking," Ulman said.

Brooke Laine would also like the now 29-year-old woman to

return to Tahoe.

“It’s not important she come back now. She’ll come back when she’s ready. And maybe we’ll have another parade,” Laine said.

Laine is one of the many people instrumental in coordinating the parade. Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe gets the bulk of the credit. They put up the pink ribbons that dotted the side of the highway.

Carl Probyn, Jaycee Lee’s stepfather, showed up at the end of the ceremony. Her mom, Terry Probyn, was not in town. (The Probyns have been separated for years.)

It was a sea of pink up and down Highway 50 before the throng turned on Al Tahoe Boulevard and ended the trek at the track. Honking motorists blared their support. It was a festive event – something so many commented on – adding they were so glad to not be at a memorial for Jaycee Lee.

During the procession Laurel Manzola carried a sign saying “Nevada Loves Jaycee”.

“I have a daughter the same age. I’m a mom. That’s all it takes to be here,” the Sparks woman said. She was living in Auburn when the abduction occurred. “We don’t get to celebrate too many of these.”

Sergio Rodriguez, 9, stayed up the night before making a sign that said, “Hope never left our hearts.” He walked with his family and neighbors.

Robert Karkheck’s pink hat and shirt seemed a little out of place with his black leather vest – but he was more than comfortable to walk through town in that attire to remember Jaycee Lee. Pink was her favorite color.

Pink parasols, dogs in pinks, pink on bicycles – pink was everywhere. A fire truck drove by and the driver was holding a pink balloon.

Ray and Sandi Dudonis of Folsom sat on the edge of the highway near El Dorado Beach as the crowd passed.

“I’m impressed by the number of people,” Ray Dudonis said. The couple heard about the parade when they came into town the Thursday before. They delayed their plans to go cycling to show their support.

When Jaycee Lee was taken, Loreen Norberg was teaching at Al Tahoe. (She’s at Bijou now). A student of hers was good friends with Jaycee Lee.

“After this happened she was terrified. She wouldn’t go to the bathroom by herself. She was terrified to go in public,” Norberg said as she walked on the highway.

Emotions ran the gamut. Many are still in shock she was found alive.

Roberta Mason and Karen Houser agreed that children being snatched or in danger may happen more often than what is reported.

“If anything, it’s taught our kids to be more aware,” said Houser, the Lake Tahoe Boys & Girls Club executive director.

El Dorado County sheriff’s Lt. Les Lovell echoed that sentiment from the podium at the track. He said complacency is the enemy.

“Fight, kick, scream. I don’t care what you do. Fight your way out it,” Lovell said to a chorus of cheers.

As the four speakers wrapped up their short remarks, the song “Celebration” boomed from the speakers, people cheered and many of the pink balloons they had been carrying were lifted into the blue sky that was streaked with white clouds.

One could only wonder what Jaycee Lee was thinking, if she was watching the television coverage, if some joy is returning to

her life.

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