



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

A self-portrait painted by Melissa Jo Szucs in various shades of purple, her favorite color, won her a merit award and advanced to the state fair in 2013.

FAIR

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when she was immersed in the sights and sounds of the Shawano County Fair. Seeing old friends, trying new foods, attending 4-H functions and watching the crowds brought her a happiness that seemed immeasurable.

"She lived and breathed the fair," said Terri Brunner, 4-H program assistant in Shawano County. "As long as we were at the fair, life was good."

Melissa consistently performed well in 4-H competition with her baked goods, photography, bird studies and other projects. She was especially gifted as a visual artist, winning a merit award in 2013 for a self-portrait painting that later advanced to state fair competition.

When health problems put Melissa in the hospital during the 2014 fair, her parents and doctors made sure that she did not miss out entirely. Her face lit up when she arrived at the fairgrounds and saw

another merit award hanging from one of her paintings — this one a silhouette of the main character from the movie "The Karate Kid."

In early June of this year, as she was completing her freshman year at Shawano Community High School, Melissa remarked to her parents that she wanted to get started on a woodworking project for the 2015 county fair. The next day, she was admitted to the hospital again.

Sixteen days later, she died.

Her parents plan to attend the county fair, which opens Wednesday, as always this year, although they recognize how difficult it will be without Melissa. The family has installed a granite memorial to their daughter outside the main office on the fairgrounds. That way, the little girl who loved the county fair will never really have to leave again.

"She can have every day," Vicky said, "as a fair day."