Emilie

James Parker said, it was with a ballerina doll. Two gifts in one.

“Emilie,” her uncle added, “was one of those who, if she couldn’t find a gift, she wouldn’t stop until she got it.”

But the events of Dec. 14 did stop her. And Emilie (“I’m Emilie, with an ‘e’ because my daddy is Robbi with an ‘e’,” she often said), came back to Utah to be memorized Thursday and buried Saturday in a horrific turn of events that the Parker family can barely comprehend.

The Art of Love • The Parkers — parents Alysia and Robbi and their daughters Emilie, Malekine and Samanthia — seemed to be always on the move.

In 2008, they left Ogden for Oregon — when Emilie was nearly 3 — for Robbi’s job as a physician assistant. In 2010, they moved to Albu- querqee, N.M. Then, almost eight months ago, the family went to Connecticut, where he landed a job with a hospi- tal. They bought a house and, when Emilie told her mother she wanted to paint her bed- room pink, Alysia shriv- ed and negotiated a deal with her. Make the walls white and then put pink accessories in the room.

James Parker’s wife, Nata- lie Parker, said it worked. But her nurses didn’t exactly sleep on the pink accessories, either. (“She had pink everything,” she said, “a pink dresser and, well...” Chiming it with other words, is a big, pink four-post bed.)

But the room also reflected Emilie’s other passion: draw- ing.

Natalie Parker said the walls were adorned with the young girl’s artwork. Her room was filled with mark- ers, crayons, a canvas she received on her last birthday: a paint. All kinds of paints. All kinds of colors.

“Alysia encouraged her ar- tistic side so much,” James Parker said.

But the drawings weren’t always just for self-expression. Many times they were for self- less expression, creative acts designed to lift others. When her grandmother died earlier this year, she made a card for him and inserted it in his casket so he has something from her — forever.

When her family moved to New Mexico and would visit James Parker in neighboring Arzona, she made a point to fuss over the dogs, Luke and Jack. When the family left, she cried. She worried the dogs would miss her.

She also noticed the small- est details when she drew the dogs, her uncle said, match- ing the colors of their collars blue for Luke, red for Jack. Her uncle recalled Emilie once staying up past her bed- times drawing, so her father told her to go to sleep.

The next morning, Robbi Parker woke up to find a card at her door.

It read simply: “I’m sorry.”

Heart of the Class • Before the family left Ogden, Emilie attended West Wonders Pre- school. She was enrolled for only four months, according to West Wonders owner Lori Waldo, but it was more than enough time for the bubbly child to leave a mark there.

“Sometimes kids just have that about them,” Waldo said. “They’re just special.”

Emilie’s teacher, Melanie Okelberry, said her pupil was a friend to everyone in the class. She remembered all of their names — a feat teachers can struggle to match.

“She had a heart of gold,” Okelberry said, “for everybody.”

On Emilie’s last day at West Wonders, the class threw her a going-away party. Okelber- ry remembered that it was an emotional, tearful goodbye with Emilie and her parents.

“We cried and they cried,” Okelberry said. “and then they went.”

That would mark the last time the teacher would see or hear of Emilie until Fri- day, when she heard her name mentioned during news cover- age of the shooting.

“Then her picture popped up,” Okelberry said, “and then it was ‘Oh my god. That is our Emilie Parker’.”

A boundless future • The Parkers lived for a short time in Portland, Ore., only a few hours from Alysia Parker’s brother, Brady Cotte, in Eu- pemia.

Emilie and Cotte’s son were about the same age. They enjoyed concocting elaborate stories about daring ad- ventures and princesses who needed rescuing.

Quite recently, Emilie was delighting in stories her mom read to her about another fa- mous adventurer: a young win- ned named Harry. They were on book two of the Potter se- ries, Natalie Parker said.

“Cotte can’t remember how many times his energi- zing niece would run up to him, saying, “Uncle Brady, I gotta tell you something!” Her intri- cate plot lines impressed him, and he couldn’t help but look at her and wonder at her fu- ture, it seemed boundless.

“She had so much potential and so much creativity and so much energy,” Cotte said. “You just didn’t know where it was going to take her and lead her.”

While the Parkers lived in Portland, they also befriend- ed Jacob Weidert.

The 32-year-old physician assistant recently had talk with Robbi Parker and was struck by Em- ilie’s story.

When Weidert said he was getting mar- ried next summer, he wanted the three Parker sisters to be flower girls in the wedding.

He laughed when Emilie showed him the white dress she wanted to wear.

“I was like, ‘That’s a white dress and she’s like, ‘Awww!’” But now he give anything to change what will happen Saturday when the 6-year-old is buried next to her grandfa- ther in Ogden.

She will be wearing that white dress. And buried with her will be her favorite Amer- ican Girl doll — with a match- ing dress sewn by her grand- mother.