

Murdered Yale student recalled as young woman full of life, promise

EL DORADO HILLS, Calif. – Murdered Yale University graduate student Annie Marie Le will always be “in our hearts and in our prayers,” Dan Nguyen told the congregation gathered at a California Catholic church for her funeral Mass Sept. 26.

“I think that I speak on behalf of all of us gathered here when I say I will never fully understand why this has happened ... but since those questions are beyond our understanding, I think it is best to consign ourselves to the will of God and put faith in providence,” Nguyen, a cousin of Le’s, said in a eulogy at Holy Trinity Church in El Dorado Hills.

The body of Le, who was a graduate pharmacology student at the Connecticut university, was found behind a wall in a Yale building that houses the lab where she worked. Her body was discovered five days after she was reported missing Sept. 8. A lab technician named Raymond Clark has been charged with her murder.

The Connecticut medical examiner determined that Le died of asphyxiation.

The day her body was discovered was the day she was to have married Jonathan Widawsky, a graduate student in physics at Columbia University. The two had known each other since college.

Nguyen, whose parents were Le’s guardians, considered Le his sister and said that in the weeks since she was found murdered he had reflected on what she meant to him.

“Only now do I realize how important she was to me, to my brothers and to her many cousins,” he said. “Annie’s academic achievement, while significant, was truly inconsequential. That is not to say that it was not impressive but it was the silly girl that she always was (who) made us all love her.

“I think that it would be fruitless to list all her virtues and all the good deeds she has done,” he continued. “Let it suffice to say we are all here today because, by the

grace of God, Annie has touched our lives in some way, whether it be in the lab or at school or at home.”

Monsignor James C. Kidder, Holy Trinity’s pastor and the celebrant of the Mass, told the congregation that Le “wanted to do the best and be the best. If we take those special qualities that were hers and continue to make them our own, then she will continue to live in us.”

According to the Sacramento Bee daily newspaper, Le was born in San Jose and graduated first in her class of 362 from Union Mine High School in El Dorado in 2003. She was awarded \$160,000 in scholarships to go to the University of Rochester, N.Y. There she majored in bioscience and met Widawsky, her fiance.

She went to Yale as a graduate pharmacology student in 2007 and would have earned her doctorate in 2013. According to the Bee, Le’s goal was to better understand diabetes, arthritis, cancer and other diseases so she could help discover cures for them.

The daughter of Vietnamese immigrants, Le was raised by an aunt and uncle in Placerville. Her parents, Hoang and Vivian Van Le, were divorced.

The Bee and other news outlets said the funeral Mass reflected Le’s Vietnamese heritage with many prayers and hymns, including “Amazing Grace,” in Vietnamese.

Le was eulogized by her mother, who recited a poem she had written in Vietnamese. Le’s brother Christopher then translated it into English.

It said in part: “You were born in my loving embrace, the most wonderful gift that God had sent to me. You left life at too young of an age, all your dreams and hopes of your future gone with you to your resting place.”

In English, Le’s mother told Widawsky, who did not speak at the funeral, that she loves him like her own son.

Yale University announced Sept. 25 that it will hold a memorial service for Le Oct. 12 in Battell Chapel on campus and that a scholarship fund in her name will be established.

Besides her parents, her guardians, a brother and several cousins, Le is survived by two half-siblings, other aunts and uncles and a grandmother.