

**DEREK GERTZ** ascended into the spiritual world July 27 as the result of injuries suffered during an accident, at the age of 18.

Derek was born December 14, 1988, in Arlington, Virginia to Bill and Debra Gertz. He has two elder sisters, Audrey (23) and Aleksandra (21). His family moved to Bowie, Maryland, when Derek was six months old. He attended Bowie public schools, New Hope Academy and was also home schooled.

From a young age, Derek has been a daring and active person. He loved riding bicycles and doing trick bike riding. Later, he rode dirt bikes and played numerous sports, including lacrosse, tennis, and snowboarding. He was also an expert ping-pong player. For a time he played the bass guitar for a music group called "Ear Infection".

His true passion, however, was skateboarding, which he loved above all his other activities. For four years, he was sponsored by the Velocity Skate Shop in Bowie and was a two-time winner of the local Mountain Dew Free Flow Tour in 2003 and 2004, traveling in 2003 to San Diego to compete in the national skateboarding contest. Derek also enjoyed DJ-ing with turntables and was involved in film and video editing related to skateboarding.

Derek is a true individualist in the American tradition. In his spiritual life, he was a member of the Unification Church community in Maryland until his mid teens. In the past year he had a spiritual experience that returned him to an awareness of God. Unfortunately, his life was cut short.

The passing of a child before his parents is always a sorrowful event for the family and community, but we may be comforted by the fact that Derek lived life to the fullest doing what he loved best—challenging his limits to express his freedom and creativity as a champion.

The Gertz' spiritual leader, the Reverend Sun Myung Moon, addressed Derek's passing during comments in Korea July 28. At early morning religious reading, Rev. Moon had spoken about the current time of transition when younger people will be playing a more active role in God's work. Upon hearing of Derek's passing later in the day, Rev. Moon repeated his comments about youth and said Derek is in a good place and that he was called by God during this transitional time.

It is our earnest hope that Derek's life and passing will also serve as an example to young people. While we mourn his passing, we rejoice in his courage, his creativity, and his love of freedom—qualities that will be with him eternally.