

# THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

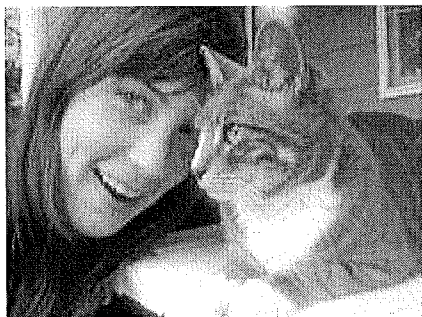
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## Capacity to love becomes teen's legacy

Lizzie Jensen died unexpectedly April 5

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Tags: Elizabeth Anne Jensen Lizzie Jensen Fund mead high school



Lizzie Jensen was the subject of the full-page ad this week following her death on April 5. A memorial fund is being established at Mead High School.



### To donate to fund

Donations to the Lizzie Jensen Fund can be made by calling (509) 465-7657 or emailing [info@meadeducationfoundation.org](mailto:info@meadeducationfoundation.org) (<http://foundation.org>).

Lizzie Jensen loved cats and kids, her school and teachers, but most of all, her family.

When she died unexpectedly in her sleep April 5, she left behind a community grateful to have been touched by her openness and generosity.

At 6-foot-1, Elizabeth Anne Jensen threw high-fives so powerful they would make your hand sting.

According to those who were closest to her, the 18-year-old special education student had a heart as pure as they have ever known.

"Lizzie was just so sweet," said her mother, Marcia Jensen, who on Friday was coming to terms with the loss.

"She was our buddy. We treated her as a regular kid," Jensen said, so the family took her swimming, skiing and rock-wall climbing.

She faithfully attended her brother's sporting events, calling them "Jimmy's games."

A full-page advertisement paid tribute to Lizzie in The Spokesman-Review on Wednesday, prompting many curious readers to call in wanting to know more about the girl.

"She was so willing to help, so willing to serve," Jensen said. "She'd be worried to see us all sad. She wanted everybody to be happy."

Lizzie had developmental disabilities and epilepsy.

Jensen found her daughter dead in bed on the morning of April 5. She apparently had suffered a seizure and was unable to breathe, family members said.

Her father is John E. Jensen. Brother Jimmy is 17. They live in the Shiloh Hills neighborhood.

In the days since Lizzie's death, the Jensen family has received an outpouring of love and well wishes.

More than 150 people turned out for a candlelight vigil at Mead High School on April 11. Participants released helium balloons into the sky that evening.

Mead students and staff were at her rosary the next day.

St. Thomas More Catholic Church was filled with mourners at the funeral Mass on April 13.

Now, a memorial fund is being established in her name at Mead High School through a substantial seed gift from an anonymous donor.

It is being called the "Lizzie Jensen Fund: For the Good of All." A committee of students and staff will annually choose a person or need to receive a gift from the fund, organizers said.

Another ad is scheduled for Sunday's paper, and it will announce the fund.

Mead Principal Ken Russell said the fund will be held under the umbrella of the Mead Education Foundation, a 501(c)3 organization. He said the fund's goal is a perfect way to memorialize Lizzie's legacy of cheerfulness and bringing people together.

"She was such a role model for our 1,600 students and our staff, and she didn't even know it," Russell said.

She was well-known in the Mead district, having attended many of the district schools through special ed.

She got on the bus every morning happy and stayed that way all day long, Russell said. "She loved the staff."

Russell said the school provided counselors to help those on campus mourn.

They sent the family a 6-foot-long card filled with thoughts like this one: "We now have an angel looking over us – Aria."

On Friday, Marcia Jensen placed a wreath she made on the grill of the bus that Lizzie rode.

"She would pop out of bed at 6 in the morning. ... She waited to go to school," Marcia Jensen said.

Her bus for special education students would come to life when Lizzie coaxed the driver into turning up the radio so that everyone could sing.

"She could sing like crazy," Jensen said, and had her own iPod for her favorites – The Beatles, Tom Petty, Crowded House and others.

Her pet cat, Juniper, was a stray who adopted her.

Her uncle, John Schreiner, said, "She was beautiful. She was our sunshine." He said that for Lizzie, every day was like Christmas.

Marcia Jensen said, "She was our gift from God. We are thankful for her. I'm so proud of Lizzie."

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