

Elizabeth Grace Watson

Elizabeth Grace Watson, 21, of the City of Grosse Pointe passed away quietly and peacefully March 1 at her home, with her parents at her side, after succumbing to her courageous ten-year battle with Anorexia Nervosa. Elizabeth's sparkling blue eyes, her radiant smile, keen intellect, sharp wit, and her abundant kindness will be greatly missed.

Born in Grosse Pointe December 17, 1994, Elizabeth, named after her paternal great-grandmother, attended the Grosse Pointe Academy for pre-school and elementary school, was a middle school student at University Liggett School (ULS), and ultimately Cranbrook Kingswood School in Bloomfield Hills for high school, the class of 2013. She was very excited about the prospect of attending boarding school, however, her illness limited her time in the dormitory to a mere semester. She persevered as a day student, ultimately graduated on time, and was accepted to her dream school, Wellesley College in Wellesley, Massachusetts. She enrolled for her first semester, undertook a rigorous curriculum, did very well academically, but sadly had to withdraw when she became too ill to continue.

Elizabeth was gifted academically, particularly in the foreign languages, as well as science and mathematics, and was always at or near the top of her class. Over the years she won numerous academic awards including high placements and scores on the American Mathematics Contest, the National Latin Exam, and the National French Contest. She was a three-time Terrill Newnan scholar at ULS and was named the top student in Latin, Mathematics, Science and English Grammar at graduation, and was named a Liggett Scholar. She then won the Cranbrook Kingswood Crane Scholarship. There, she wrote several Prize Papers, all of which were published, was named the top French student, won the History Award, and was an AP Scholar with Honors. She was a National Merit Semi-Finalist, and was a member of the Cranbrook Kingswood's Cum Laude Society, Gold Key student ambassador program, model United Nations, was faculty-appointed to the Student Conduct Relations Board, and was president of the French Club. She received the Augur Pin for having one of the highest grade point averages in her class.

Elizabeth was very musically inclined, studying violin and piano for several years before concentrating on her beautiful soprano voice. She sang with Michigan Opera Theater Childrens' Chorus, was a member of the Kingswood Madrigals for four years, and sang with the Wellesley College Choir and the Grosse Pointe Memorial Church Choir in recent years. She furthered her vocal education at Blue Lake Music Camp, the University of Michigan School of Music MPulse Vocal Arts Institute, the Michigan Opera Theater's Operetta Camp and their Opera Workshop. She also studied privately with several of the Michigan Opera Theater's best vocal professionals.

Elizabeth enjoyed performing on stage and played Claudia in Mosaic Theater's production of *Crossing Alter* in 2007, was in the chorus in the ULS production of *Ragtime*

in 2008, and played a nun in the Cranbrook Kingswood production of *The Sound of Music* in 2010. Her favorite performances were the Michigan Opera Theater's main stage productions of *Carmen* and *Brundibar* in 2009.

Elizabeth pursued many interests and activities in her younger years, including swimming for the Grosse Pointe City Norbs Swim Team, playing youth soccer with the Grosse Pointe Soccer Association, and field hockey at ULS. Elizabeth shared her mother's passion for figure skating, and learned to skate at age three, spending many hours on the ice with her mother and



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instructor at the Grosse Pointe Skating Club. Elizabeth had a natural talent and mastered the single jumps and many spins.

She also shared her father's keen interest in sailboat racing, and was a member of the Bayview Yacht Club Junior Sailing team in 2008. She and her father restored an old club Optimist Dinghy, and she promptly won her very first race in a 30-boat fleet at the Crescent Sail Yacht Club regatta. Representing Bayview, she handily won the Bayview Yacht Club Riverfest Regatta (in only her third regatta as a skipper) in the green fleet Optimist Dinghy class, defeating a fleet of boys. The regatta was a Junior Olympic Regatta, making her father and coach extremely proud.

Elizabeth loved to travel. She enjoyed trips to the upper peninsula of Michigan to the family's remote cabin in Grand Marais, multi-generational family get-togethers at Camp Michigan and Fireside Inn, as well as many vacations in Florida and Mexico. Her favorite family trip was to London, England where she was captivated by the Tower of London and enjoyed a performance of *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*.

Elizabeth was a truly caring and sensitive person. Even when ill, she volunteered at Beaumont, helping patients be comfortable. She cried easily when deeply wounded, was often overcome with anxieties and feelings of inadequacy. She was likely more fragile than anyone ever knew, but she hid it well behind her enormous ambition and accomplishments, all while her eating disorder was raging in her head incessantly. No stone was left unturned in her treatment, but the intensity and duration took an enormous toll on her ability to learn to thrive as a young woman. Perhaps her best quality was her innate ability to sense when someone was feeling poorly. She always knew exactly what to say to make that person feel better in a difficult moment. Her capacity for

kindness knew no bounds. She made people smile and laugh in normal conversation and had a silly side, including a wicked sense of humor which included playing hilarious practical jokes and satirically imitating those nearest and dearest to her. She loved the color pink, fashion, shopping, Lady Gaga, Christmas, anything Starbucks, and enjoyed reality TV as an escape from her anxiety.

Elizabeth had aspired to become a psychiatrist. The gross inadequacy of the standard and largely ineffective treatment protocols for eating disorders frustrated her enormously, as she believed there had to be a better way.

Her treatment experience included fifteen lengthy hospitalizations at the best facilities in the country and the services of more than 50 inpatient and outpatient healthcare professionals coast to coast. She wanted someday to be able to positively impact the countless young women suffering from this insidious illness, through the development of new treatments and perhaps even a cure. Eating disorders are very serious illnesses that are misunderstood and feature the highest mortality rate of mental health disorders. Ironically, National Eating Disorder awareness week was in late February, yet no landmark building lit up in Michigan for the occasion, while significant landmarks like the Empire State Building were lit nationally. Awareness is far too low, so please take a moment and contemplate what this disorder is costing our society. Everyone knows someone who is suffering and needing help.

Elizabeth is immediately survived by her loving parents, Glenn and Martha (nee Hein) Watson, devoted grandparents Gerhardt A. Hein MD and Rebecca P. Hein (Grosse Pointe), her caring great aunt Annette Watson (Huntington Woods, MI), her aunt and godmother Jill (nee Watson) Zwiernikowski, and her uncle and godfather Rick Zwiernikowski (Hastings, MI), her aunt Katherine D. Hein MD (Boston, MA) and her uncle Benjamin E. Hein (Miami Beach, FL), as well as her cousins Rebecca and Lincoln Hein, Amy and Zachary (Alaina) Zwiernikowski, and several additional aunts, uncles and cousins. Her Persian cat companion Cocoa-Puff will miss her greatly.

Her family is grateful for the enormous emotional support from family members, friends, professional colleagues and the communities of Grosse Pointe, Denver, CO, Ann Arbor, MI, Milwaukee, WI, Boston, MA, Princeton, NJ and the Ronald McDonald House during her illness; and they are extremely grateful for the kind support of Metro Hospice Care during Elizabeth's last days. Visitation will be held at Charles Verheyden Funeral Home in Grosse Pointe Park on Thursday, March 3, from 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm. A memorial service celebrating the life of Elizabeth will be held at Grosse Pointe Memorial Church on Saturday, March 5 at 1:00 pm.

Memorial donations in Elizabeth's memory can be made to Cranbrook Kingswood's vocal music program by writing a check payable to Cranbrook Schools, and sending to Cranbrook Schools Office of Development, PO Box 801, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48303-0801, or online at schools.cranbrook.edu/givenow. Additionally, donations in Elizabeth's name may be made to the benefit of educational programs at Michigan Opera Theater and Detroit Opera House, 1526 Broadway, Detroit, MI 48226.