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## Caprice became a silent spokesman

### 8-year-old girl would communicate with her laugh, smiling eyes

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Caprice May Hort had a way of winning hearts, something she did in the only ways that she had to communicate. Her smile shone like a beacon on a dark night. Her laugh danced out in waves. Her eyes did the talking that her voice and hands could not manage.

She could not make conversation, but she could make friends. The child who could not speak became the silent spokesman for United Way of Racine County, appearing in videos, posters and mailings.

Now all those hearts she won are breaking.

Caprice died Thursday. She was 8. Her mother found her in bed, not breathing. Efforts to revive her failed.

Patricia Stoneburner, her great-grandmother, spoke for the family. She told the story of one day when Caprice's mother took her to the mall.

"So many people would come up to her and say, 'Hi, Caprice!' " Stoneburner said Monday. "My granddaughter had no idea who many of these people were, but they knew Caprice. . . .

"The parking lot at the church isn't going to be big enough tonight," she said Monday, anticipating the funeral service for the girl.

Caprice was the only child of Brian and Marcella Hort, both now 29. She was diagnosed with cerebral palsy about six months after she was born.

The cause of her death is still unknown.

"I think her little heart just gave out," her great-grandmother said.

A feeding tube to Caprice's stomach provided the calories that her body burned at a furious rate.

"She was consuming enough calories for an active 250-pound man," Stoneburner said. "Her little body was working so hard all the time, but she weighed only 40 pounds."

Medical personnel discouraged the family from feeding her regular food, saying Caprice's body used more energy digesting it than she received in calories. Her family knew that she loved to taste food, sharing tiny bites of pizza, butter, cheese.

"Her eyes just danced when she got the topping on the pizza," Stoneburner said. "She would look you straight in the eye, very intently, and then look at what she wanted. And then look back at you. . . . All you ever had to do was look at her and look at her eyes and know that she understood you. She talked with her eyes."

Caprice could answer "yes" and "no" with a look or head movement. At West Ridge Elementary School in Racine, she was

#### Caprice Hort



*Photo/File*

#### Quotable

“ I think her little heart just gave out. ”

- Patricia Stoneburner, great-grandmother of Caprice May Hort (above)

beginning to use a board to answer questions by looking at the appropriate spot.

"She knew what was going on," said Rorie Daams, the teaching assistant who was her personal attendant at school. "I always told people that she understood."

Caprice was mainstreamed in some classes, and she loved learning to read. She worked hard at her physical therapy. She would have started third grade this fall.

"The kids would take turns at recess, pushing her in her wheelchair," Daams said.

Along with her fellow classmates, Caprice would go to the Becker-Shoop Center and Lincoln Village facilities for an intergenerational program. And, along with her classmates, Caprice received certificates of appreciation for her visits at the Becker-Shoop Center.

"When they see a child with special needs - someone else in a wheelchair - they really can relate," said Debra Wilkinson, activities director.

Once again this summer, Caprice was a happy camper at Camp Kinder, held at the DeKoven Center in Racine with support from the Cerebral Palsy Agency, a local United Way agency.

It was there that she first caught United Way's eye.

"It was probably three years ago, when she was 5," said Carol Olson, of United Way of Racine County. "She became sort of the focal point of the video. She was so happy and so glowing, just vivacious."

Caprice's other favorite things included anything yellow, SpongeBob SquarePants, and her two dogs. Dusty, an Australian Shepherd, would go for help if Caprice needed assistance. A tiny Lhasa apso, called LaLa because Caprice could say the name, would snuggle into her jacket, where they could cuddle and exchange kisses.

In addition to her parents and great-grandmother, survivors include her grandparents, Linda Stoneburner, Hanes "Hank" Robbins and Darlene Sorenson; great-grandfather Ed Stoneburner; and generations of other relatives.

If desired, donations are suggested to the family, in care of Patricia Stoneburner, 3919 Ruby Ave., Apt. 319, Racine, WI 53402.

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