

Ethan M. Seitzer, 2000-2010

Fourth grader loved Greek mythology, Egyptology and Beethoven

By Margaret Ramirez, Tribune reporter

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In his short life, 9-year-old Ethan Seitzer discovered the beauty in Greek mythology and Beethoven's music.

He wrote poetry and compositions for piano and dreamed about visiting the ancient Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

Ethan also loved cartoons and Legos.

Family and friends who knew of Ethan's maturity and intelligence felt he was destined for something great.

But Ethan's life came to an end Aug. 16 when he was caught in a rip current and drowned in Lake Michigan while swimming with his father Jeffrey in Union Pier, Mich.

"We were both drowning and fighting the water," his father said. "To me, it seemed like he was taken by Poseidon, like some angry god took him away."

Ethan was one of nearly 70 people who have drowned in Lake Michigan this year, a dramatic rise from 39 drownings during a cooler summer in 2009, according to Coast Guard officials.

Ethan McGinnis Seitzer was born on Sept. 3, 2000, in Chicago's Edgewater neighborhood to law librarian Janet Smith and college professor Jeff Seitzer.

Ethan was a fighter from the start.

Shortly after birth, he was diagnosed with several organ defects including tracheal esophageal fistula, a rare disorder of the digestive system in which the esophagus does not develop properly. Ethan also had aortic coarctation, a narrowing of the major artery leading out of the heart.

He spent the first month of his life in the neonatal intensive care unit at Children's Memorial Hospital, covered head to toe in medical tubes and devices. But to the amazement of hospital staff, Ethan survived and thrived.

He became a voracious reader and his parents prepared for family outings by packing the essentials: water, snacks and Ethan's books. When Ethan was about 7 years old he read Edith Hamilton's "Mythology," a university-level text, and began making unexpected references to ancient Greek mythology in casual conversation.

Last year, in third grade at Northside Catholic Academy, he was honored with the class reading award.

Ethan's interests ranged from children's games to Egyptology and hieroglyphics. His recent favorite book was "The Red Pyramid," by Rick Riordan, the first in a series of fictional adventure and fantasy books based on Egyptian mythology.

He played piano and adored classical music. During a hip-hop music class, when the instructor asked his favorite recording artist, Ethan answered proudly, "Beethoven!"

To pass time, Ethan created obscure memory games with his friend Augie. In one game, the boys counted out street addresses and linked the numbers to episodes in history.

"1560 ... the Renaissance," Ethan shouted.

"1492 ... Christopher Columbus," answered Augie.

In addition to his passion for reading, Ethan's other love was Legos. As a tribute to him at his wake, his friends created Lego projects and placed them in his casket.

"I will really miss his loving nature and how he would snuggle up to me on the couch while reading a book," said his father. "He was destined to be a fine young man. He just had so much wisdom for a young boy."

Ethan was looking forward to his 10th birthday on Sept. 3, which he planned to celebrate early, before school started.

He had asked for an elaborate Lego set called the "Portal of Atlantis." In his memory, his buddies created a Lego version of the underwater civilization and dedicated it to their remarkable friend.

Ethan is also survived by his mother, Janet Smith; and a sister, Penelope.

Services were held.