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Victim remembered as devoted mother, aspiring teacher

MARK R. FLETCHER
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Friends and relatives remember Elizabeth Garcia as the one who always had a ready smile and a positive word of encouragement.

Garcia, 26, died in the early morning hours Wednesday at the hands of an unknown abductor.

Her mother, Victorina Garcia, said her daughter had recently decided to return to school at New Mexico Junior College, and took a night job at All-sup's so she could attend classes and still have time to spend with her three

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Victorina Garcia, mother of murder victim Elizabeth Garcia, holds granddaughter Cene Mendoza, 4, on her lap Thursday at her home. Cene is one of three children who lost their mother.

Victim

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children — 7-year-old Xavier, 5-year-old Jerome and 4-year-old Cene.

Victorina Garcia also said Elizabeth, or Liz as her friends generally called her, always tried to help take care of her family — even calling regularly through her day to talk to her mother or sister to see how they were doing.

"She was always taking care of the family and checking if they were OK," Victorina Garcia said.

Most of all, friends and relatives say Liz always had a positive attitude, even under trying conditions.

One friend, Cindy Ingle, said she recalled a time when she and Elizabeth got stuck in a McDonald's drive through in Las Cruces. While she and Elizabeth's sister became angry and started fuming about the slow pace and bad service, Elizabeth just laughed.

"I'm ready to blow up and she's calm and laughing," Cindy Ingle said. "She just has a calm temperament; she said 'Just be nice.'"

When their father died about a year and a half ago, Tito Garcia — a senior at Hobbs High School — went to live with Elizabeth.

For Tito Garcia, who plays football for the Hobbs Eagles as a linebacker, Elizabeth became almost like a second mother.

"To me she was my mother for a year and a half," Tito Garcia said. "I don't know where I would be today. I completely relied on her for everything."

Tito Garcia also said Elizabeth gave special attention to her children. Her care

for her children shows in the neatly furnished home — complete with a kid-pleasing trampoline — she shared with them.

"I would baby-sit for her," Tito Garcia said, "and when she got home she would baby-sit for all of us. ... We were happy."

Tito Garcia added that his sister returned to school at NMJC for her children's sake, and agreed to take the late night job only because it would allow her to spend more time with her children and still take day classes.

"The reason she got that job at Allsup's was so she could go to school," Tito Garcia said, "(and) be with her kids."

Tito also said his sister hardly ever missed a game of his, and he could always depend on her for encouragement.

"That's who I'd look for," he said, "(and) I always saw her in the stands," he said.

Tito Garcia's description of his sister also reveals a deep respect for the hard-working young college student. He explained that she not only juggled the duties of keeping her three children involved in school and athletics, but also held two jobs, looked after her brother and went to school at NMJC.

"An average person couldn't do it with the lack of sleep and all. I think she was tired, but she wouldn't admit it. ... Her whole thing was to make the family better; she always wanted more for her children," Tito Garcia said.

Tito said Elizabeth wanted to complete her studies and go on to teach literature in junior high school or high school.

When her family found out she decided to take a job at Allsup's, they all tried to talk her out of it — citing a recent string of robberies at the con-



TAMMY MCKINLEY/HOBBS NEWS-SUN

Cene, 4; Jerome, 5; and Xavier Mendoza, 7, play in their back yard as their uncle Tito Garcia, a senior at Hobbs High School, watches over them Thursday. The mother of the three children, Elizabeth Garcia, was murdered Wednesday after being abducted from her job as a clerk at a local convenience store.

venience store chain in Hobbs. Elizabeth had only worked for Allsup's three days when she was killed. Family members say she had already begun looking for another job, and that they had set up a routine where someone would regularly check on her while she was working.

Elizabeth's boyfriend, Jaime Pacheco, discovered her missing at 3 a.m., only 36 minutes after the last register transaction occurred.

Some of Elizabeth's former teachers at Hobbs High School remember her as a smart kid who generally stayed out of trouble.

"As I recall, she was a really good person," said Paul Baker, one of Elizabeth's former teachers.

Baker said he found Garcia's death especially troubling because, "things like this just aren't supposed to happen in Hobbs."

Another teacher and coach at Hobbs High School, Janice Brooks, also remembered Garcia as a good kid and said she also found her death troubling.

Ken Ingle, a longtime friend of Elizabeth's, said he especially respected her devotion to her children.

"She was the best mom ever; her family came before anything," Ken Ingle said. "She was a giving person; she would think of somebody else or her kids before (herself)."

Like many who knew her, Ingle also said Elizabeth's smile had a unique, almost magic quality to it.

"She had the most beautiful smile you will ever see," Ingle said. "She just had a gleam about her. When she walked into a room, the room lit up. ... Nobody has touched my life like Liz. ... She was someone you would feel very fortunate to have in your life."

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