The greatest love of all

Beautiful teenager Tesh was taken by an illness in less than a day. Her final wish enabled others to live. Here, her mum Lisa, shares her story...

Lisa Gallagher, 40, Levin

Dishying up the extra potatoes, I smiled. Sunday family dinner was my favourite day. Watching my eldest daughter Letitia – or Tesh as we called her – cuddling her brothers, Caleb, 12, and Andrew, 10, always warmed my heart.

‘Extra potatoes Teeshy Weeshy?’ I asked, using Tesh’s nickname. ‘My favourite!’ said Tesh, 18, laughing. ‘By the way, I’ve applied for my full driver’s licence and I’m an organ donor.’

‘That’s fantastic,’ my husband Mark, 44, smiled. That was our Tesh – she had a heart so big it was bursting with kindness.

Ever since she was little all Tesh wanted to do was help people. She loved kids and her brothers idolised her. It didn’t surprise me that she wanted to own a childcare centre one day.

That night Tesh and I sang our song – Whitney Houston’s The Greatest Love of All.

‘I found the greatest love of all inside of me,’ Tesh sang. She was such a beautiful singer that both her school and the college would coax her into doing solos.

The next week, Tesh brought over her boyfriend Kaye, 28. She had just moved in with him and a friend of theirs. ‘Can we look at the photo albums?’ Tesh asked. So we scrolled through all the old photos of Tesh as a baby, and a beautiful toddler. First day at school, birthdays and Christmases – her favourite times. She was always smiling.

As Tesh left to go home, she spluttered. ‘I just can’t shake this cough,’ she wheezed. ‘Make sure you go to the doctor,’ I said. She may have been 18, but I still worried about her. When she texted me on Monday to let me know that the doctor said there was nothing wrong, I was relieved.

When her flatmate called at about 4am, I was in a daze. ‘Tesh is in hospital!’ she said. ‘Kaye is there with her.’ ‘What?’ I cried, shaking Mark awake. I rang Mum to sit with the boys and then sped to Palmerston North Hospital.

When we arrived, I took one look at Tesh thrashing around on the bed delirious and nearly passed out. ‘She woke with a terrible headache, vomiting,’ Kaye said. I felt sick. What was happening to Tesh? ‘We’re testing for suspected meningitis,’ a doctor explained. ‘You’re all right Tesh, we love you,’ Mark said. Tesh calmed down for a moment, and then began convulsing again. ‘What’s wrong?’ I cried helplessly.

‘We need to sedate her to run a CT scan,’ the doctor said. The scan brought good news. ‘There’s no sign of meningitis,’ the young doctor said. We all breathed a sigh of relief. He told us to take a break until the consultant arrived.

I didn’t want to leave Tesh, but I knew we needed a break. We were just pulling out of the car park when Kaye texted us to come back. Back in the hospital, the doctors took us into a side room. To my horror, they had discovered Tesh did have meningitis after all. The doctor explained that Tesh was one in a million where the disease had taken hold so rapidly that barely any symptoms were detectable.