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### **KIDS DEAL WITH TEACHER'S DEATH, VISIT FROM BOOK AUTHOR PART OF TRANSITION**

Georgann Yara, Special for The Republic

Purple proved to be therapeutic for Susan Faith, and Tuesday she brought that magic to Nevitt Elementary students still dealing with the death of their teacher three weeks ago. Faith, a children's author, had the students act out roles and drew some laughs as she read her book Purple Puppy to 21 second-graders who were taught by Liz Ludwig.

Ludwig, 27, was killed in a car accident returning from a spring break vacation in California. She was in her first year at Nevitt.

Faith, the survivor of a life-threatening illness that restricted her to a wheelchair for eight years, credited her complete recovery to meditation and yoga. She said that during meditation she frequently saw purple, which is believed to be the color of healing and spirituality, and began to feel better when wearing the various shades of violet. Now, her wardrobe is almost exclusively purple.

Faith was inspired to reach out to Ludwig's students.

"I wanted to help get them to overcome this challenge, this loss," Faith said. "I want to let the children know that people who didn't know them or their teacher care."



Faith gave each student a bookmarker and a copy of Purple Puppy. She also gave them Purple Love, which deals with death and loss, and autographed the books. Faith also donated books to Nevitt that will be sold for the scholarship fund created in Ludwig's name.

Since Ludwig's death, language arts and technology teachers have come in to the classroom to offer additional projects to help students keep focused on school. A counselor visits daily.

"We got together to figure out how we can provide the best academic and emotional support, because they need both right now," said principal JoEtta Gonzales.

Student Arely Gomez-Caro, 8, said what she liked most about Ludwig was that, "When we went out to play, she would always jump rope with us." Classmate Tony Cardenas, 7, liked how Ludwig rewarded her class' good behavior. "She would throw popcorn parties. We had popcorn and watched TV," he said.

Teacher Erika Montana is the room's only indication that Ludwig is gone. In her second week, Montana deals with the usual second-grade academic and behavior issues, while also addressing unique inquiries. Students have asked if she knew their teacher had died, but also if Ludwig will be back next year. Her responses are sensitive, and she lets them know she is aware of what has happened.

"I tell them she's with us in spirit," said Montana, who never met the teacher whose class she inherited. "I say, 'You are a reflection of your teacher. I get to know her because she is in all of you.' "



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