March 2, 2012. This day effected many people in many different ways. Some lost property. Some sustained serious life changing injuries. But one young lady experienced it all; fear, injury, courage and loss.

This Friday began as any normal school day for 11 year old Ashlynn (Lizzy) Jackson. The oldest of four children, Lizzy was accustomed to helping out and watching over her three younger siblings. After a hectic morning of picking out clothes for the day, getting ready and making sure everyone had their backpacks, Lizzy and her sister Ally began their day at New Washington Middle and Elementary schools.

Their four year old brother, Daylynn was dropped off in Hanover for pre-school. The baby, Raylynn age 2, got to stay with a family friend this morning.

The morning continued as normal, but the weather was anything but normal. Warnings and talk of severe weather was heard everywhere. As the threat of tornadoes grew, Lizzy’s mother Amanda left to gather her children. Picking up Lizzy and then to Hanover to get Daylynn. Ally was picked up by her father.

While driving back to New Washington on State Road 62 and nearing her grandparents’ house on West Jackson, Amanda came face to face with an EF4 tornado heading directly into her path. Amanda moved quickly to provide protection for her children.

Amanda rushed her two children into her grandparent’s home to seek shelter. Amanda, Lizzy, Daylynn and Terry and Carol Jackson all huddled in the bathroom of the two story home. All were scared and terrified knowing the only things protecting them from one of the strongest forms of devastation, were shingles, siding and lumber. As the debris and the winds began punishing the home, all five huddled together exchanging encouraging words and saying ‘I love you’ one last time.

The house took a direct hit from the tornado. A low rumbling sound was followed by the house groaning and shrieking, then boom! The house was pulled apart nail by nail and sent flying nearly 250 feet, scattered across the field that Terry and his family had farmed all of their lives. The last thing that Lizzy recalled was being thrown through the air. The last thing Amanda recalled was having 4 year old Daylynn being pulled from her arms as they were tumbling through the air.

Lizzy, lying in a muddy debris riddled cornfield immediately went into helping mode. Struggling to her feet; battered, bleeding and confused she began to find her family. Great grandparents Terry and Carol, dead due to injuries they sustained while protecting two generations of their family. Looking through the remains of the eviscerated house, she located her mother, but Daylynn could not be found.

Amanda was severely wounded. Lizzy stayed next to her mother, surrounded by the horrific sights until she heard the sirens of approaching first responders. Making a decision that no 11 year old should ever have to make, she got her bleeding, barely breathing mother to her feet and helped her towards the sirens to save her life. Lizzy left her great-grandparents and her brother in the field to help save her mother’s life. It was not until later that Lizzy realized that she would no longer be a big sister to her baby brother. Daylynn’s life ended at the age of four.

Help arrived and began treating them both. Even while her mother was being treated, Lizzy was still being the protector in asking the firefighter that was caring for her mom, “Hey turn the heater on, she’s
cold, these things (fire trucks) do come with heaters right?, Can you turn it on?”

Amanda spent nearly a week in intensive care. Broken ribs, punctured lung, broken arm that required surgery and numerous cuts and bruises. Lizzy was bruised and cut, but suffered far more than physical injuries. Not only did Lizzy lose loved ones, her house located a half-mile down the road was also destroyed along with all of her belongings.

“She is my hero, my survivor, my champion,” Amanda said describing her oldest daughter.

While this story has not made national headlines and there have been no invitations for talk shows, Lizzy, the quiet hero, has quietly day by day tried to put her life back together.

Please join the New Washington Volunteer Fire Department in honoring Lizzy as the Grand Marshal for the annual New Washington Fireman’s Picnic parade this Saturday at 12 noon in New Washington.

“While it’s not a trip to meet the President, it’s your chance to say, ‘job well done!’ to a young lady that grew up in matter of 10 minutes on March 2,” stated Randy Burton, Chief of the New Washington Volunteer Fire Department.