

JENNER

Inseparable couple united for eternity

Friends, relatives gather in Ohio to bury slain pair

- Pamela J. Podger, Chronicle Staff Writer

Saturday, September 4, 2004



Lindsay Cutshall and Jason Allen will be buried today -- together.

In the two years since they met at Appalachian Bible College in West Virginia, friends said, they gradually became inseparable and dreamed of a life together while running a Christian youth camp.

Their dream brought them to California this summer, where they worked at religious youth camp in the Sierra. In mid-August, the couple were found fatally shot in their sleeping bags on a damp Sonoma County beach.

The couple would have been married next Saturday. Instead, hundreds of friends and relatives will gather in Coshocton, Ohio, today for a memorial service. Their parents have created a special fund to be used as seed money for future young missionaries.

Like many young couples, they met on a college campus.

Cutshall, a sophomore, spotted Allen, a lanky Michigan river guide, and knew right away that he was the one. She was flattered by the attentions of Allen, who had recently graduated but remained to live near the campus.

Cutshall, 22, was a pastor's daughter with a taste for bungee jumping. Allen, 26, had eclectic tastes, from rolling sushi and sledding behind cars, to reading the Bible and steering his kayak over whitewater rapids.

They were a good match, two free spirits on a mission for the Holy Spirit.

"They loved the same things," said Lindsay's older sister, Kerry Croghan. "They didn't care what people thought. They were just themselves."

They went to church together, rappelled down cliffs together, chased whitewater together. They unwound together, cooking dinner with Cutshall's sister and brother-in-law, also at the 350-student college.

Both had majored in Bible studies, Allen earning a four-year degree in 2001 and Cutshall earning a two-year degree in 2003. Their Bible education capped years of preparation. Cutshall was home-schooled after fifth grade by her devout parents in rural Fresno, Ohio, and Allen was involved in his church's youth group while attending public schools in Zeeland, Mich.

As children, both told their parents that they wanted to be missionaries. And they did so as young adults, Cutshall to South Africa and Allen to Grenada. After they were engaged in February, they spoke of starting an outdoor adventure ministry in Costa Rica or Jackson Hole, Wyo.

Then came California and the seemingly random killings on Fish Head Beach a few miles north of Jenner. No suspect has been arrested, and Sonoma County Sheriff's investigators remain tight-lipped. Detectives said early that they had no motive for why the two would be shot in the head while asleep.

Faith defined both Cutshall and Allen, but they shared quietly and didn't proselytize, those who knew them said.

Allen lived life on the edge, "the higher the risk, the better," said his former youth choir teacher and high school superintendent, Gary Feenstra.

Ned Horsfall, a friend of the Cutshall family, and other folks have said the pair could easily have befriended someone, helped a hungry drifter or talked about faith with a stranger.

"But there is simply no way Lindsay or Jason created a target of themselves. They are not involved in a lifestyle that would have gravitated toward danger," Horsfall said. "I mean, sure, the danger of rafting or rappelling down a mountain, but not in interpersonal relationships."

During their high school and college years, friends recalled, material things and personal comfort mattered little. Kind acts -- like Cutshall's buying Thanksgiving groceries as an anonymous gift or Allen's giving \$200 to friends leaving on missionary work in Australia -- were important.

The two honed their rafting skills in the summer of 2003 along the Gauley River and New River Gorge in West Virginia at the rafting camp Ace. Cutshall lived in a tent, storing her Honda Rebel motorcycle under a tarp. She declined Allen's offer of living in his blue school bus that had been outfitted with a TV, couch and kitchen.

"That was pretty high-class living for Jason," quipped his sister Elizabeth Westra, 23.

Allen was raised fishing and bird hunting with his father and camping in a trailer on family outings.

Childhood friend Heidi Feenstra said the Lake Michigan beach was a big draw for Allen and several guys in their church youth group. They cut loose one day and snowboarded down the 40-foot dunes. In 1994, the high school sophomores went to a West Virginia camp associated with the Appalachian Bible College. That started Allen's yen for outdoor sports, the high-risk thrills and, eventually, the responsibility of guiding young people at those same camps.

Allen loved to travel, working at a ski shop in Vail, Colo., picking up construction jobs in West Virginia, exploring British Columbia. Five years ago, he drove home from California subsisting on "some moldy old bread," recalled his father, Bob Allen.

His son was frugal, preferring to save about \$6,000 of his \$8,000 earnings from a recent year. Tall and slim at about 6 feet, 2 inches, Jason Allen lived off macaroni and cheese or peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

College friend Gabe Garrison, 26, was going to be Allen's best man for the wedding. He recalled a 2002 winter in Vail where they both tuned skis, lived in a Christian group house and went "turbo sledding" on plywood dragged behind a car. "We even did it with a Christmas tree and got four people riding it," he chuckled.

When the two went to Puerto Rico last winter, Garrison said, Allen missed Cutshall and called her frequently. Allen later confided to Garrison that he would ask Cutshall to marry him. Allen flew home early from Puerto Rico and surprised Cutshall in Fresno, carrying an orchid with an engagement ring carefully placed inside a box.

"Jason wanted to make sure she had her special flower," recalled her mother, Kathy Cutshall. "We didn't know that Jason was such a romantic."

Garrison said, "Jason was so fearless and strong -- physically and spiritually. But Lindsay told me later that he was shaking when he proposed. It was kind of funny -- he seemed like someone who would never get nervous. I learned a lot from Jason. I never knew him to doubt God in any situation."

Cutshall and Allen did daily prayer and Bible readings, something they learned from their parents.

"They were very disciplined and adventuresome and up for fun," said Emily Warken, who would have been a bridesmaid. "But she was quiet and laid back. She could chill out and wasn't always looking for stimulation."

Bob Allen said his son was attracted to Cutshall's "love for the Lord" and her interest in outdoor adventure sports and working with children. His mother, Delores Allen, said the couple even listed camping gear on their wedding registry at Target.

The couple had spent this summer at Rock-N-Water, a Christian youth camp in the Sierra foothills, about 40 miles east of Sacramento. Both sets of parents will visit the camp next summer and celebrate Kids in Creation, a memorial fund set up for their children.

Chris Cutshall recalled how his slight 5-foot, 4-inch daughter had proudly flexed her biceps after so much kayaking and rafting. He said his daughter was tough, mentally and physically.

"They are with the Lord," he said. "The grief is pretty intense and will be for a long time. We're not looking to get over it, but we will carry on."

Chris Cutshall paused briefly, his anger flashing.

"We want this cold-blooded killer off of the streets," he said. "Whoever did this was a coward, finding them helpless, sleeping and at night. I can't think of a more cowardly deed."

Fund established

The parents of Lindsay Cutshall and Jason Allen have started a memorial fund to be used as seed money for Christian youth missionaries.

Donations for "Kids In Creation" can be made payable to Bob or Delores Allen and mailed to the Wyndotte Federal Credit Union, 114 Waverly Road, Holland, MI 49423

E-mail Pamela J. Podger at ppodger@sfchronicle.com.

Page B - 1

URL: [http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?](http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/a/2004/09/04/BAG6H8JUL71.DTL)

[file=/chronicle/a/2004/09/04/BAG6H8JUL71.DTL](http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/a/2004/09/04/BAG6H8JUL71.DTL)

[©2004 San Francisco Chronicle](#) | [Feedback](#) | [FAQ](#)