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Catch-A-Dream:

A program for youth with precious little time to lose!

by Martin W. Brunson



Bruce Brady, of Brookhaven, MS, an attorney, sculptor, poet and outdoor writer, was an icon in the outdoor world. As a field editor for Outdoor Life magazine and free-lance correspondent for several other publications, he hunted and fished across the continent. Countless readers re-lived those adventures with him as they read his skillfully crafted works for more than three decades. Bruce's bronze sculptures adorn the display shelves of many prominent collectors, and a Brady Bronze is among the most sought after wildlife sculptures.

Many of Bruce's fondest experiences were hunting and fishing with family and friends. As the father of three and grandfather of thirteen, he was especially aware of the need to provide young people with opportunities to enjoy the wonder of nature. As Bruce faced his own arduous battle with cancer, he took great comfort in time spent in the outdoors. He drew strength from these experiences and was able to "recharge his batteries" as he hunted and fished in his last days. Shortly before his death, Bruce Brady articulated his vision for a program that would provide outdoor opportunities to youth with life-threatening illnesses who, unfortunately, were no longer served by the world's largest children's wish-granting organization. Bruce felt a great burden for these children who, when faced with the same physical challenges he encountered, may not have the opportunity to experience

outdoor adventure.

Bruce, like many who love the outdoors, was disappointed that the Make-a-Wish Foundation had been forced to abandon this segment of our youth population and sought to establish a mechanism whereby all children who suffered from life-threatening illness could still be granted these types of wishes if they desired.

Bruce lost his battle with cancer in February 2000, as initial plans were being laid to establish a program that he had already dubbed "Catch-A-Dream." But his family and friends were dedicated to creating Catch-A-Dream as a memorial to Bruce that would eternally provide a message of hope at a time when children with life-threatening illnesses need to know that hope does, indeed, exist. In mid-2000, the Bruce Brady Memorial Catch-A-Dream Program was founded as a unique and unprecedented partnership among the Brady family, the MSU-Extension Service, the Mississippi Wildlife Federation and the Mississippi 4-H Clubs Foundation. The Catch-A-Dream mission is to provide



not only the opportunity to "catch an outdoor dream," but also, spiritual encouragement that is often so badly needed by these children and youth.

It is this very message of hope, as promised in Isaiah 40:31, that we seek to instill in these children and their families. We use hunting and fishing as opportune



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***“There’s a high country that
awaits your coming;
There’s awesome beauty to
fill you with bliss;
There’s a golden chance in the offering—
Go, or these wonders of
God you will miss.”***

**Excerpted from “The High Country,”
a poem by Bruce Holmes Brady**

tools to expose these children to the “. wonders of God...” that await them in “The High Country,” as they spend time in the outdoors, away from the bleak and sterile world of medical facilities, treatments and hospital gowns, but in the presence of The Creator who is the Author of real hope.

On each trip, these children and their families, are surrounded by outdoors-minded people who understand that these children are often “...sick and tired of being sick and tired!” A volunteer Catch-A-Dream host accompanies each family. Together with outfitters and local volunteers, hosts facilitate the dream experience; love and nurture the children; establish the strong personal relationships that inevitably are forged in the lodge, on the stream or in the woods; often become their best friends; and remain a part of their families long after the dream trip has concluded. As one volunteer has eloquently stated, “We can’t change the whole world; but we can change someone’s whole world for at least a short period!” Many parents have confirmed that the mission is consistently accomplished!

Catch-A-Dream becomes aware of a child’s wish through referrals, which are accepted from parents and guardians or medical and social work professionals. Eligibility requirements are simple: the child must be a U.S. resident, age 18 or under,

and suffer from a physician-certified life-threatening illness.

As a non-profit program, Catch-A-Dream is dependent upon charitable contributions and fund-raising events. Basic funding comes from the generosity of donors who have caught the vision. A significant portion of the cost of each dream trip is covered by in-kind contributions from the many partner outfitters and outdoors enthusiasts who donate the hunting and fishing opportunities and become an integral part of each child’s wish experience.

Catch-A-Dream has touched dozens of families to date. We have granted outdoor adventures for children from 23 different states, ranging in age from 4 to 18 years. Trips have encompassed destinations from deep in the Gulf of Mexico to the interior of Alaska and have included whitetails, mule deer, elk, caribou, bear, wolf, bison and turkey hunts as well as snapper, mackerel, shark, halibut, salmon, trout, and bluegill fishing.

For additional information, to make a contribution or to refer a child, contact Catch-A-Dream at 662-325-3174, write us at Box 9690, Mississippi State, MS 39762, or visit our website at www.catchadream.org. Catch The Vision!

Dr. Martin Brunson is an Extension Leader/Professor and Extension Specialist in Fisheries, Recreational Fisheries, and Pond Management in the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries at Mississippi State University.

Andy's Catch-A-Dream Experience

Andy was a fourteen year old from California's Sacramento Valley whose leukodystrophy had left his body limp and essentially useless. Confined to a wheelchair, with use of only his right hand, Andy's dream was to hunt whitetails in Mississippi or Alabama. His father and grandfather are avid deer hunters, but no one in the family had ever hunted anything but the mule deer and blacktails found near their home. Andy had accompanied the family to the field, but had never hunted. His desire was to experience the mystical whitetail of the southern pine-hardwood forest, which he had read about but, never seen.

Andy and his family made the long flight from Sacramento, CA to Birmingham, AL where I met them for the first time. After introductions, we were off to Columbus, MS where Andy and the crew would be lodged at Lake Lowndes State Park, compliments of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks. Andy's hosts and hunting guides, Chris Glenn and Jason Hollis, both businessmen from Columbus, graciously provided everything the family would need for their four day visit to the Magnolia state. Andy would be hunting on Hollis Farms property just across the state line in west Alabama.

It was late January, 2003, and we were experiencing the coldest weather of the winter, with wind chills below zero as Andy's dream trip materialized. A quick visit to meet Andy's TV hero, Ronnie "Cuz" Strickland at the Mossy Oak retail store in West Point to pick up some warm clothing was followed by a short session on the rifle range. Because of his physical incapacity, Andy was able to fire his rifle only by sitting in his "Papa's" lap with Papa steadying and aiming the rifle. Andy's trusty right index finger squeezed the trigger. The set-up was awkward and difficult, but a dedicated Papa and a determined Andy formed an accurate and effective team.

After lunch at Little Porky's Barbecue in New Hope, MS, which would become the family's favorite restaurant, Andy, Papa and guide Jason Hollis headed for the stand in single digit temperatures, while Chris and I spent time with Andy's father and two brothers. My wife, Janice, had Andy's stepmother, grandma and little sister on a tour of antebellum on the Columbus Pilgrimage trail as the hunters climbed into the stand at 2:40 PM in the face of bitter northwest winds.

Upon settling into the frigid box stand, Andy remarked that he'd like to make this a quick hunt because it was "...cold, cold, cold!" Jason asked how quick he intended to make the hunt, and Andy retorted "...about 15 minutes!" A short 12 minutes later Andy's 7-point Alabama buck lay next to Andy's wheelchair as he and Papa posed for a photo. Jason quickly dubbed his young California buddy "QuickDraw" then made a cell phone call to Chris, and the celebration was on!

The ensuing three days were filled with more time in the stand, more BBQ from Little Porky's, a trip to the Saturday night dirt track races to watch Jason run his custom Hollis Racing car, a steak cook where Mrs. Peggy Brady presented some very special mementos of the trip, and a lot of hugs and relationship building. Andy and Papa had a close encounter with a trophy buck after a seven hour vigil in a heated stand on the second day of the hunt, but the challenge of turning 180 degrees in a box stand and then getting proper sight alignment proved more than Papa and Andy could handle before the



big buck slipped back into a thicket unscathed. By Sunday morning when goodbye time came, it was clear that much more had taken place than a simple deer hunt. Lifelong friendships had been forged, and three Mississippi tough guys (Jason, Chris and I) had been touched forever by a brave little boy from California who had captured our hearts. At times like these, tears of joy and sadness tend to freely mix, and the big cabin at Lake Lowndes served as an appropriate setting for these tears to unite a bunch of hearts forever!

Perhaps Andy's step-mom and grandmother summed it up best as we sat in a van late on Friday waiting to pick up Andy and Papa from the deer stand. As we overlooked a bluff far above the field where the hunters posted vigil, they shared "Andy had a Disneyland grant from Make-A-Wish. But Catch-A-Dream is different, and not just because this is hunting and fishing. At Disneyland we had a good time, then went home; over and done. No one met us at the airport; no one hugged Andy and the rest of us and told Andy that they loved him. No one went out of their way like you folks in Catch-A-Dream have done. You have treated us like family, and that is exactly what you have now become to our little boy... and to us. True family." DW