

Granting A Wish — A Tribute To Dale Butterfield

by Annette Fisher

A call came in around the first week of May from a humane officer who I work with, saying that he was asked if he knew anyone with a pig who could do a home visit for a man who was terminal with cancer. My very own house pig, Truffles, seemed like a good candidate, though she had never traveled to anyone else's home. She is friendly and social and potties outside. I immediately offered to make the visit, and asked to get some details of where and when. I used to belong to the Delta Society way back when, and would take my giant Alaskan Malamute to the Acute Care Units of various hospitals in the program and visit with cancer patients. I knew just how important animals are to people. Before the humane officer could get back to me, I also received an email from Holly Butterfield with the same request. It was her dad, Dale Butterfield, who was asking to see a pig, and Holly wanted to grant him this very special wish.

"I sponsored a calf and a farm pig for my parents as Christmas gifts. My dad is terminally ill with lung cancer and was never well enough to make it to a visitor day. I'm now trying to find someone with a pig who could do a home therapy visit to lift his spirits," said Holly. At the time of our conversation, Dale was given from 4 to 12 weeks to live. "I can't even tell you how excited we all are about the prospect of meeting you guys!" Holly wrote. "We can shoot for any day next week except Monday, because his hospice

nurse will be visiting that day...He's been so down about his situation, and we'll go to the ends of the earth to find any little thing to make him feel a little better." We made arrangements to visit him on Wednesday, May 23, at the family's home in Fairport Harbor.

I asked Holly if it would be OK to bring the other visiting animals as well. Happy Trails Farm Animal Visitation Program takes several rescued farm animals into nursing homes and handicapped facilities for special visits, and the animals include two goats, a mini horse, and ex-cockfighting roosters who now love to be petted and held. We agreed on one goat, the mini horse and one rooster, in addition to Truff.

But we weren't quite ready for the big welcome we received when we arrived at the Butterfield home. A very large family group of sons and daughters and aunts and uncles and cousins and brothers and sisters were waiting for us on the lawn, and we waved as we passed by the house and had to park a little ways down the street. As we unloaded our precious cargo from the back of the trailer, the family was filming the entire event. Happy Trails volunteers helped out with the menagerie of animals — Lori Luisi was escorted with her favorite mini horse,

Kachina, by her side, and Lissy Kuhn had Natasha the goat, an old hat at going to community events, as her date for the big day. We made quite a spectacle in the otherwise quiet neighborhood as we walked noisy Natasha and the cute-as-a-button Kachina, down the sidewalk. Gershwin the rooster joined in with joyous crowing as we set his wire cage on the lawn, and little Miss Truffles



Dale got to feel the soft fur of a pig right in his very own living room! Truffles the pig was happy to oblige as I helped the wiggly little pig hold still.

was carried like royalty in her pet porter. And we soon discovered there were as many people inside the house as there were outside - it was truly an incredible gathering for the entire family to celebrate the visit of the humble pig.

It was an honor to meet Dale and the rest of the Butterfield family. I went in first to make absolutely certain that everyone was OK with us bringing in some grunting, squealing, oinking, baa-ing, cockadoodledoing and neighing happiness and joy into the house. Dale sat in a big brown recliner, and we talked about bringing "his" pig in first! Truff cautiously backed out of her pet porter, not sure what was expected of her during the visit. She stayed close to Dale's chair, making it easier for him to reach out and pet her soft hair. She was bribed with apples and carrots to wander into the center of the living room. I kept thinking, "Thank God they have hard wood floors!" But like the clean and polite house pig that she is, Truffles did not even consider going potty indoors, no matter how self-conscious she was with all the attention. We agreed that Truff would stay in the house during the entire visit, and that the other animals would be brought in one at a time.

Next came Kachina. She actually clumped up the steep front porch steps in her custom made hooves from OSU in Columbus and walked confidently into the living room. She stood near Dale and he was



Happy Trails volunteer, Lissy Kuhn, held Natasha the goat while she visited with Dale. Natasha was thrilled to receive bits of apple that Holly, Dale's daughter, cut up for her.

able to pet her fuzzy little head and mane. Then being the diva that she is, she made her rounds visiting the folks sitting in the living room. After a bit, she wandered back down the porch steps (with a little assistance) and in came Natasha.

The goat, very used to crowds, made herself quite at home by deciding to chew on Dale's blanket. He was able to feel her horns and her curious, wet little nose. When she exited the living room I breathed a sight of relief — no accidents so far!



Kachina the mini horse stood politely while Dale petted her on her little head! Volunteer Lori Luisi (back right) had helped Kachina up the front porch steps and into the living room.

Next came Gershwin the rooster, who I balanced on the edge of Dale's recliner. Gershwin sat there very politely for quite a while, and Dale had the chance to pet Gershwin's soft feathers and to feel his feet. I am willing to bet that Dale never thought he'd have a rooster balanced on the edge of his chair inside his house in his wildest dreams! When it was time for the rooster to go back into his cage, Truff became the center of attention once more. She spent the entire visit either standing next to Dale's chair or right in front of his chair. She was a little concerned, this being her first big adventure away from home.

It was heartwarming to see the smiles that the animals brought to so many faces that day, and to see Dale smile at finally getting to see a pig in his house. Good byes were said and I offered to bring back Truffles as many times as he would like over the next so-many weeks. I gently shook Dale's frail hand and held it for a minute and thanked him for the visit.

I was hoping to bring the now famous Truffles the pig back for yet another visit. But only five days after our visit, we got the news from Holly. "I wanted to let you know that my father passed away on the 28th at Hospice House in Cleveland. The one thing I keep hearing is that people are so glad he had the day with the farm animals to relax and feel good with his friends and family. You guys came right in the nick of time and it's a wonderful memory we all will cherish. Thank you again, so much, for reaching out in our time of need."

I asked Holly if I could write a tribute to Dale, and she agreed. "He was such a great guy, so compassionate, and loved animals, especially pigs! He was really pleased and honored that you guys were willing to come so far and visit so long. It really brought a smile to his face, which we hadn't seen too often anymore. You guys gave us a great memory, which is a gift we'll treasure always."

Actually this worked both ways, Holly! Lissy, Lori and I received a great memory as well, of being welcomed by a family during a very challenging and private time in their lives. We are truly the ones who are honored to have been a small part of this time and to have had the opportunity to meet Dale and the entire Butterfield family. Truffles may never fully understand what an important pig she was on that day!

Gershwin, an ex-cockfighting rooster, was happy to let Dale pet him. Gershwin ended up sitting comfortably on the edge of Dale's recliner for quite a while!



Dale K. Butterfield, age 61, passed away May 28, 2012, at Hospice House of Hospice of the Western Reserve in Cleveland.

Dale was born Jan. 1, 1951, in Painesville to the late Joseph and Jane (Cramer) Butterfield. Dale grew up in Fairport Harbor and moved to Texas in 1971, where he met and married his beloved wife, Gwendolyn Butterfield, Aug. 29, 1975. Dale enlisted in the United States Air Force Reserves in 1982, and proudly served his country for eight years. He was an avid Cleveland Browns fan and enjoyed playing pool and guitar. Dale was a skilled electronics technician and was employed by defense contractor Raytheon (E-Systems) for several years in Dallas, Texas. He returned to northeast Ohio in 1993, and last worked for Rockwell Automation in Twinsburg.

His insight, intellect, and wit touched so many and he will be dearly missed.