

# Joel's Wish

By Dee Ann Campbell  
The Choctaw Sun

SANDY, Utah – “He thought he was king,” says Chan Coody. “I know he’ll never forget it.”

It was his day – a day when, just for a moment, he could see his dreams come true.

When 6-year-old Joel Coody shared his dreams with the Make-a-Wish Foundation, he didn’t wish for a trip to Disney World. That was something he knew he just could not have.

Instead, he wished for those things that could make his isolated life a little easier, a little more exciting, a little more fun.

At the age of 3, Joel was diagnosed with a rare genetic condition, an immune deficiency disease known as Hyperimmunoglobulinemia E (HyperIgE) or Job’s Syndrome. For most of his life, he has suffered with recurrent infections, from skin infections to respiratory infections to chronic ear infections, all due to a suppressed immune system that renders him unable to fight off typical childhood infections. Instead, those infections become life-threatening.

Although there are treatment options for HyperIgE patients, by the time of his diagnosis Joel’s condition was too advanced for the usual course of treatment of gamma globulin injections. His illness is typically treated with near-constant antibiotic therapy.

For Joel, his illness means that he is forced to remain isolated much of the time, with little chance to play outside or go to school or to have a normal childhood.

When a volunteer from Chatom turned his name in to the Make-A-Wish



Submitted photo  
Joel Coody and his mother Chan pose in front of the Make-A-Wish Foundation center in Utah. Joel was granted a wish in December.



Joel was given a special treat -- a visit from the local fire department as part of his wish.

Foundation, his mother Chan jumped at the opportunity to give her son something special.

“We’ve been working on this for about a year,” she says. “I got the appli-

cation and sent it in. It took a few months for them to call me back.”

In addition to information from Joel’s family, the organization required statements from his pedia-

trician and immunologist verifying that he was medically qualified for the program.

Since 1980, the Make-A-Wish Foundation® has granted wishes to children

with life-threatening medical conditions like Joel’s. Since then, the organization has reached more than 144,000 children around the world, granting wishes that range from trips to amusement parks to visits with celebrities. A network of more than 25,000 volunteers works through the foundation to serve as wish granters, fundraisers, special events assistants, and in numerous other capacities within the organization.

In order to be eligible for a wish, children must be between the age of 2 1/2 and 18 and not have received a wish from another wish-granting organization. To receive a wish, the child must be diagnosed with a life-threatening medical condition, such as a degenerative or malignant condition that has placed the child’s life in jeopardy.

A few months into Joel’s Make-A-Wish application process, Joel’s family decided to make a move that they hoped would help his condition. Because of his health problems, the family moved from their home in Gilbertown to Sandy, Utah, just outside of Salt Lake City. The area gave Joel the chance to live in a climate that was much less humid than in Choctaw County.

“We were going through the Georgia Make-a-Wish chapter, which takes care of Alabama,” she explains. “But then we moved to Utah, and they transferred him to the Utah office.”

“They have a wishing place – a special room they go in,” she adds. “He made his wish on November 1.”

Because of Joel’s immune problems, Chan knew that he would be unable to wish for many of the things that other children might choose. Instead, she would have to steer him toward those wishes that could be possible within the confines of his illness.

“We knew he couldn’t go to Disney World – that was obvious,” she says. “But when we sat down and thought of a few

things, we knew what he wanted.”

Joel chose to wish for a computer – a laptop to take with him during his many trips to the hospital. Along with his computer, he wished for video games and movies to entertain himself since he is unable to spend time outdoors.

On the Monday before Christmas, Joel was treated to a wish party where his wishes were granted.

“He got a 17-inch laptop, 12 video games, and computer software,” his mother says. “The laptop is the most amazing computer I’ve ever seen. It has everything – even a scanner and printer. It will really help with his school work since we have to homeschool him.”

But Joel’s wish party did not stop there. The volunteers at the Make-A-Wish office had arranged for a treat that neither he nor his family expected.

“They had asked him if he could be anybody he wanted to be what would he be,” Chan recalls. “He told them he wanted to be a firefighter when he grew up.”

While Joel enjoyed his party, he began to hear the sound of sirens. Moments later, members of the local fire department were on the scene.

“They stayed for his whole party,” Chan remembers. “He got to ride in the fire truck, and they took us to the fire station. Joel was so excited. They let him sit in the drivers’ seat. He even got to spray water with the fire hose. You should have seen his face.”

At the conclusion of Joel’s party, he was given the opportunity to participate in a moving ceremony that is part of every child’s wish who comes through the organization. It was an emotional time for Chan as she watched him take part in the event.

“Every kid who gets a wish get to raise a star onto the ceiling of the place,” she says with obvious emotion. “Joel has a star there now. It will be there forever.”

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