

Commentary...

Helping a little girl live out a wish

By **Cody Rhealt**
Correspondent

Meet Carmel, a three-foot-tall 4-year-old dread-locked little African girl with a magnetic attitude. When you first meet her you realize her personality outweighs her age. At 4 going on 10, Carmel displays a charisma that pulls you in and grabs your heart. Her white-rimmed glasses, drawn-back hair, and tight grin are her signature looks.

Her joy is contagious and allows you to forget the issues she lives with. When I first met her with my camera pointed at her, she casually asked who I was and what I was doing. It took a minute, but we bonded almost immediately. For a child struggling with such heavy conditions, her suffering doesn't reflect in her personality when she's happy.

For me and fellow *Nugget* photographer, Jerry Baldock, Make-A-Wish Foundation provided the opportunity to capture and experience her story. Over the Fourth of July week we had the opportunity to live a glimpse of a life affected by medical tragedy and had the privilege to photograph and film a wish come true as she lived out her dream in Central Oregon.

Underneath her charm and charisma, Carmel suffers from a number of conditions. After birth she suffered with the effects of her mother drinking and consuming drugs throughout her pregnancy. A brain MRI a few weeks after Carmel was born revealed a slew of conditions including epilepsy, cerebral palsy, and alternating hemiplegia of childhood (AHC). AHC is a life-threatening neurological condition that causes full or partial paralysis at unpredictable times. Episodes can range from minutes to days while she waits for her body to regain control. For Carmel and her

family, her state of health is unpredictable.

Carmel's mother, Sophie Hartman, is a single 29-year old mother of two, an author, and a resident of Seattle, Washington. At only three weeks old, Carmel came under her custody before her conditions were known, and Sophie admitted to us she had little idea she was adopting more than just a child.

After living in Zambia for five years, Sophie describes her experience as transformative in her own life — inspiring her to write her book "Crowns of Beauty" and to start adopting orphaned African children. Her first adopted daughter, Mia, is now 9 years old.

When Make-A-Wish approached Carmel about granting her a wish, only two words came out: mountains and horses. For the then-3-year-old, her happy place had always been on the back of a horse or brushing its coat. The Make-A-Wish Foundation of Alaska & Washington set to making her dreams come true — booking her a week filled with horses and mountains in Central Oregon.

As storytellers, Jerry and I had the opportunity to follow Carmel and her family as she lived out her dream. Every day was filled with joy as she rode horses and interacted with them. Capturing her joy and presence resonated with us, knowing that we were telling a fragile story.

As Sophie once told us, Carmel's days are numbered. Every moment counts. She explained to us that her conversations with doctors are not about treatment and cures — there are none — but what her quality of life looks like.

Watching Sophie care for Carmel brought a familiar tone to Jerry. A former Make-A-Wish father himself, Jerry was able to share his experiences as a father and Make-A-Wish grantee. This



Cody Rhealt and Jerry Baldock with Carmel, helping make a wish come true for a suffering child.

provided a unique perspective for Sophie. Jerry and his wife lived the life of the unknown with their son and his rare medical condition, much similar to Sophie and Carmel's story. For Sophie, that brought her relief and comfort and gratitude that Make-A-Wish would provide such a resource.

Carmel's last "wish" day

brought her to Sisters Country where she rode horses at Black Butte Ranch Stables and later visited a month-old fox trotter. Jerry and I worked together to make meaningful imagery of her time; the sight of Carmel riding in the pasture with Mt. Washington behind her was special. Her wish had come true and it was a joy to simply see her smile.

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RULLMAN: Columnist is a life-long reader and writer

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praise or calumny.

"I think it's more important to focus on the work and trying to improve as a writer and not get too lifted up or brought down, because there's a lot of writing to do," he said.

In addition to his *Nugget* and other freelance work, that writing includes a novel in progress, and the website www.RunningIronReport.com, which he contributes to along with Cornelius.

He describes it as "a website for people who are looking for a different tune than they've been hearing in the (national) media."

Running Iron Report has also begun a series of podcasts, some of them featuring remarkable Sisters citizens including mountaineer and cave explorer Brent McGregor and local volunteer Jack McGowan. The podcasts are available through iTunes and Podbean and can be accessed through RunningIronReport.com.

Centennial celebration...



PHOTO BY JERRY BALDOCK

Hundreds turned out to mark the 100th anniversary of the Camp Sherman Store last weekend.

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