

Catch-A-Dream: A program for youth with precious little time to lose!

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 3 and grandfather of 13, 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**, which provided Catch-A-Dream its initial 501(c)(3) fiscal home. In late 2003, the 4-H Foundation Board recommended that, due to phenomenal growth and national support and involvement, a separate foundation be created into which the program would move from its original incubator home in the 4-H Foundation. The **Foundation** was incorporated in December 2003 and granted 501(c)(3) status by the IRS. The *Catch-A-Dream Foundation*, whose mission is to provide resources and implementation of the Program, is hosted by Mississippi State University, and the program is supported and delivered as part of the MSU-Extension Service, operating as a functional unit within the MSU Extension Service.

***"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

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 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. or Canadian resident, age 18 or under, suffer from a physician-certified life-threatening illness, and must not have previously been granted a hunting or fishing trip by a non-profit organization or program.

As a non-profit, charitable Foundation, 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 served over 350 families to date. We have granted outdoor adventures for children from 43 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, sheep, bear, wolf, bison, alligator and turkey hunts as well as snapper, mackerel, shark, halibut, cod, marlin, wahoo, salmon, trout, bass, catfish and bluegill fishing.

For additional information, to make a donation, or to refer a child, contact Catch-A-Dream at 662-325-8149, PO Box 6280, Mississippi State, MS 39762, or visit our website at www.catchadream.org. ***Catch The Vision!***