

Stout-hearted Teen Rodeo Queen

**Northwest youth
with cystic fibrosis
lives her dream**

by *Nicole Lanphear*

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For many young girls, the sight of a smiling, curly-haired rodeo queen atop her prancing steed sparks the dream of one day becoming that queen. For Jennifer Stout, her first view of Kari Kondro, Miss Thunder Mountain Pro Rodeo, set her on the path to that dream.

“Her first impression was that Kari was so outgoing,” says Stout’s mother, Dolores. “She was a very genuine person, and had not changed once she became a rodeo queen. Her genuine love for people touched and inspired Jenny.”

On the path to reaching that goal, Stout had more hurdles than most girls her age. Now 16, Jenny Stout is one of 30,000 children and adults in the United States with cystic fibrosis,¹ a genetic disease that affects the respiratory and digestive tracts and growth rate.



Dreaming of Dash

Horse crazy from day one, Jenny and her mother were playing with searches on Dreamhorse.com one evening after a “girls night in” movie. They tried typing “wish” into the name search criteria and spent some time looking through horses with “wish” in their names. Afterward, a pop-up appeared on the screen for the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

Exploring the foundation’s website, they noticed it was not just for children who were going to die, but also for anyone with life-threatening illnesses. After some hesitation, Jenny and Dolores entered their story.

The next morning, Dolores was awakened by a phone call from the Make-A-Wish Foundation. The woman on the other end of the line said Jenny sounded eligible for a wish and asked Dolores what Jenny would ask for. Dolores knew that Jenny, who was quickly outgrowing her 12 hand high pony, wanted a horse.

The woman from Make-A-Wish explained that horse wishes were not taken lightly because of the vast amount of responsibility involved. But two weeks later, volunteers came out to visit with Jenny and find out what she would want.

“Oh, I’d really like a horse,” Jenny told them.

They explained about the difficulties of getting a horse, and Jenny said, “That’s okay.”

“What about a trip to Disneyland?” they asked.

“Oh, you don’t have to give me anything—those rides make me sick—give it to someone who likes rides,” Jenny said.

“Would you like to meet someone?” they asked.

“Not really—I have lots of friends.”

The volunteers agreed—this girl really wanted her horse!

¹ According to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation

Convinced of Jenny's true wish, the foundation's volunteers and Jenny's family searched for the ideal horse.

Upon hearing Jenny's story, a woman contacted the family and told them she knew of just the horse, but he was not for sale. She approached the horse's owners, Tom and Marg, who invited Jenny and Dolores out to Idaho to look at a paint gelding named Dash.

A crowd welcomed the mother and daughter, watching as the horse—who was not exactly warm and fuzzy—approached Jenny. With friends, vets, and stable hands looking on, Jenny rode Dash for five and a half hours, bareback, over trail obstacles, until Dolores told her to give the poor horse a rest.

As Jenny and Dolores left, Dash whinnied.

"Are these people for real?" Dolores says, remembering the moment with tears in her eyes. "It was a fairy tale experience. It really was a Make-a-Wish experience."

Make-a-Wish told the Stouts that they would not be able to arrange transportation until the December weather cleared up, but Tom wanted Jenny to have her horse for Christmas. He drove from Idaho to Longview, Washington to deliver Dash and surprise Jenny on Christmas day.

But the surprise had begun long before. After the first visit from the Make-A-Wish volunteers, the eleven-year-old Jenny had drawn a picture of what she wanted her horse to be. It was almost identical to Dash.

"She dreamed it up," Dolores says. "He was her dream horse."

A Parade of Pageants

Her health improved so much after getting Dash that Jenny's doctors said if every kid with cystic fibrosis would improve the way she did, they should all get horses.

In the following years, she pursued her dream of becoming a rodeo queen, fighting constant health issues, learning disabilities, and attention deficit disorder as she tried out for titles, beginning with Miss Junior Rodeo Washington. Out of about six contestants, Jenny won the photogenic and sales awards, but not the title. This only drove her to practice more and study harder.

In 2006, Jenny tried out at a week-long pageant for the title of Miss Teen Rodeo Washington. At 15 years old, she was the youngest contestant. With her dyslexia and learning challenges, Jenny had studied all year for the competition with assistance from many of her friends. As a result of her dedication, she won first runner up.

The next year, Jenny dedicated herself to practicing, training long and hard for the riding part of the pageant.

At the 7:00 showing of the 2007 Vancouver Rodeo, seven contestants stood in the middle of the arena in front of hundreds of spectators. The blonde girl wearing the number seven, yet again the youngest of the contestants, was announced the winner of Miss Congeniality. For horsemanship, too, Stout was the winner.

"Winning horsemanship was most important because she had worked so hard," Dolores said.

This only drove her to practice more and study harder.



L to R: Elizabeth Salvig, Jenny Stout, Erin Overbay, Courtney Kailin and Kayla Fleck

When the announcement of the 2008 Miss Vancouver Rodeo came out over the loudspeakers, Jenny Stout put her hands over her face and cried in joy. She was the next Miss Vancouver Rodeo.

Her Reign

As the 2008 Miss Vancouver Rodeo, Jenny raised close to \$5,000 at her coronation in January for travel and clothing expenses. More than 300 people attended to support the Stouts, including Jenny's doctors.

Stout has taken her job as a representative of the rodeo very seriously. She approached the Vancouver Rodeo board, proposing that, like the Professional Rodeo Cowboy's Association, they choose an organization to sponsor.

"For those of you who don't know," Jenny told them, "I have cystic fibrosis and I would not be offended if you picked another organization."

But the board decided: on July 4, 2008, the biggest day for rodeo attendance, a portion of the ticket sales will go to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation.

On top of her responsibilities for Vancouver, Jenny is preparing for the 2009 Miss Teen Rodeo Washington pageant in August 2008. Miss Teen is still Jenny's dream title, and she will study and practice until then.

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Statistics from the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation

- 1000 new cases are diagnosed each year
- Most cases are diagnosed by age 2
- As of 2006, the average age of survival was 37 years