

# Tommy's Story

*Coincidence or Something Bigger at Work?*



In 1994, DCMF granted its first wish in Riverside County to a special little girl named Jessica Rea. Jessica suffered from a very rare disease known as Hallervorden Spatz - so rare, there is about 200 cases that have been diagnosed in this country. Research is minimal at best, and a cure appears to be a long way off.

In 1997, DCMF expanded its wish-giving to children who reside in San Bernardino County. In January 1998 DCMF brought us

our first San Bernardino County wish child.

Two weeks prior to Super bowl 98, I received a phone call from Dave Williams, a close friend who experienced the devastation of childhood cancer when his younger sister succumbed to the disease years earlier. Dave explained that a co-worker of his, named Ron Wittwer was very good friends with a family in Pioneer town who has a son who is afflicted with a rare muscular disease.

I contacted Ron, and he told me all about Tommy Erkhe, the wish child, his dad, Tom Sr., and mom, Jo Anne. I called Jo Anne, and we talked about Tommy and his disease. . It was then I learned that Tommy suffered from Hallervorden Spatz . . . the same, very rare disease that Jessica Rea suffered with. It occurred to me then how odd it was that the first wish performed in two separate counties should be such a very rare disease, suffered by two children who live no more than 50 miles apart. Phenomenal to say the least!

Jo Anne informed me that Tommy is a Green Bay Packer fanatic and said that going to Super bowl 98 would definitely be a wish come true for him. Considering the Super bowl was only 2 weeks away, I made no promises, but bowed to do what I could.

Getting this 17-year-old young man to the Super bowl become a mission shared by many. Ron Whittwer went right to work and raised enough money to provide Tommy and his family with a limousine for the day. As challenging as it was for Ron and me, the Erhke's faced a greater one. Since Tommy's diagnosis, the family had not been on a real outing, except to the hospital, in two years. However, they committed themselves to seeing this wish through, and it turned out to be a grand day for everyone.

Escorted by San Bernardino Deputy Sheriff Dave Henley, Royal Limousine and myself all headed out Super bowl morning to pick up the Ehrke Family. Deputy Sheriff Henley announced our arrival with flashing lights and sirens blaring. Paul McCarthy, from Dream Maker Video, taped the wish from the beginning to end . . . a most treasured memoir. Royal Limousine had shined up the long bed limo, and Yucca Valley Florist filled it with green and white balloons. We arrived to an ear-to-ear smiling Tommy, along with his entourage who were there to share in his special day.

Tommy was donned in all his Green Bay Packer gear and gave us the thumb-up, indicating he was ready to go. Although the Packers lost the game, the family had a wonderful day that they will always remember.

Many thanks to Tommy, Tom and JoAnne . . . you are the true MVP's of this Superbowl.

Tommy passed away in July, 1998, at Loma Linda University Children's Hospital.