

FEATURE

Destiny Maker

By Katie Maupin



Picture by ShowChampions

Dalaney Vickrey, a 14-year-old NJSA member with Cystic Fibrosis, had one wish – to be an honorary judge at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo's Junior Market Barrow Show. Many volunteers from the stock show and Make-A-Wish® banded together to make Vickrey's dream come true, and she sorted barrows with judges Nick Mauck and Travis Platt.



A booming voice with a slight drawl echoed throughout Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo's NRG Center's East Arena as the Poland Market Barrows drove for champion honors.

"Please allow me to introduce again 14-year-old Dalaney Vickrey from Warren, Indiana," the announcer says. "Dalaney is battling Cystic Fibrosis. Her one wish was to serve as an honorary junior market barrow judge at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo.

So tonight, we're happy to make her one wish come true. She knows it takes dedication and hard work to show pigs, because she has shown pigs for many

years and been very successful. She is an incredibly gifted young lady who enjoys being outside, working with livestock, painting and versing herself or doing everything she can to raise awareness and funds for Cystic Fibrosis. Dalaney is joined tonight by her mother, her father and her 11-year-old brother. It is my honor to introduce Dalaney Vickrey as an honorary judge

specialists before they got their answer at 14 months – Cystic Fibrosis.

Cystic Fibrosis (CF) is a genetic disorder that wreaks havoc on the lungs and digestive system by altering the way the body produces mucus, sweat and digestive juices. Instead of these bodily secretions being thin and slippery, they are thick, causing what should be the body's lubricants to plug

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— Carin Vickrey

for the 2015 Junior Market Barrow Show. Now, put your hands together for an incredible young lady."

Thunderous applause erupted as spectators rose from their seats to pay homage to a 14-year-old girl battling Cystic Fibrosis who is brave enough to step foot onto the green shavings to evaluate her peers.

Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo President and CEO Joel Cowley remembers this moment as

one of the most moving he's witnessed during his decade with the stock show. But, this isn't the beginning of Dalaney's story, and as you will see shortly, it's far from the end. It's just a beautiful moment in the life of one hard-working teenage girl who has faced more challenges than most.

Dalaney is the first child of

Bret and Carin Vickrey. As new parents, Bret and Carin were perplexed by their daughter Dalaney's "failure to thrive,"

as the doctors called it. A sickly infant, Dalaney was hospitalized for pneumonia twice before her first birthday.

The family went to many doctors, allergists and even asthma

tubes and passageways in the organs. While there are treatments to manage the symptoms of CF, there is no cure, at this time, and often people with the disease only live into their 30s.

"We were just starting out as new parents," Bret says. "We had no idea what CF was, at the time. I didn't know anything about it, and I didn't even know it existed."

After Dalaney's diagnosis, the family learned everything they could about CF. One of the first things they learned was CF is considered an "orphan disease." An orphan disease hasn't been "adopted" by the pharmaceutical industry because it provides little financial incentive to prevent, treat or cure in the private sector. Since there is little research going on to find a cure for CF, groups such as the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation (CFF) work to raise funds to provide research for a cure.

Bret and Carin walked CFF's Great Strides Walk for a Cure just months after Dalaney's diagnosis, and the family continues to walk each year. Together, the Vickreys and their Great Strides team – Dalaney's Destiny Makers – have raised tens of thousands of dollars to be put toward research about the disease.

"We hope in the future that Dalaney will have the option to take some of these medicines found through research," Carin says.

But, she's quick to point out their family's work to raise awareness of the disease isn't just for Dalaney but



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every one of the 30,000 people in the U.S. who live with CF each day.

"We always hope to gain a little more awareness as well," Carin adds. "It's kind of an invisible disease. You look at someone, like Dalaney, and you may have no clue that something is going on."

Certainly, you wouldn't at first glance. Dalaney, like most kids her age, is incredibly involved. She runs track, plays basketball and is known for her ability to drive a show barrow, which is a family passion.

Back in Houston, after the applause subsided, judge Nick Mauck took the mic.

"For those of you that know this young lady and those that don't, from a national standpoint she's as good as it gets. She can drive one as good as anybody, she can work as hard, if not harder, than anybody, even with the challenges she deals with on a daily basis," he says.

Mauck is right. Dalaney's accolades in the show ring are impressive. She has driven her way to countless banners, showmanship plaques and sweepstakes buckles, since her first show when she was just 4-years-old. Her proudest moments came in the show ring, when she won the World Pork Expo Junior National showmanship class in 2009 and then went on to win Sweepstakes in Louisville.

Although Dalaney was born into a livestock family, don't think for one second her love for livestock is someone else's dreams. Since she could toddle, Dalaney wanted to be in the barn.

"When she was real little, probably two or three, she would be in the barn looking at pigs," Carin says. "She would carry a little ice cream bucket full of feed to help her dad feed."

While both Bret and Carin feel fortunate to raise their kids in the agriculture industry, they're more proud knowing these young people have found something

they're truly passionate about.

"I'm just proud of the fact that she has grabbed a hold of something, and it just happens to be raising and showing hogs," Bret says. "Anything that she decides to do, you want her to put everything she has got into it. And I know it will pay off for her in the future as she enters her career."



Putting everything Dalaney has into showing pigs is different than most kids. When she leaves early in the morning to head to a show, her day starts two hours earlier than most to accommodate all of her treatments. Each day, Dalaney has three different breathing treatments, seven oral medications and at least a half hour of vest physical therapy to help break up the mucus in her lungs. Recently, Dalaney was also diagnosed with diabetes, a side effect of the CF, so she's added checking and regulating her blood sugar to her morning routine.

After a long day at a show, Dalaney can't simply head to bed. She has another round of nighttime treatments including a supplemental feeding tube, which will run throughout the night.

"It takes a toll on her," Bret says. "Most of those nights, she won't get

done with her treatments for a couple of hours, but when we're going to a pig show, she is up and has it done before the rest of us are even in the truck."

Both Carin and Bret want everyone to understand people may have struggles no one knows about, yet acknowledge these people work through these each day to find a sense of normalcy. This perspective wasn't lost by judge Mauck, as he continued on the mic.

"But, when you can set yourself into perspective, and when you can put this into your palette and digest it, and chew it up and realize that most kids with this opportunity are probably going to pick to go meet – I don't know who they'd want to meet – but it certainly wouldn't be being an honorary livestock judge at the Houston Livestock Show, and for me and for Travis, that's absolutely unparalleled and amazing."

Dalaney did want to meet LeBron James, according to Cowley, but he was her third choice.

"Her first wish was to be an honorary judge, and her second wish was simply

to attend the Houston Barrow Show," he says. "It's pretty cool to be more popular than LeBron James."

When Cowley was contacted about Dalaney's wish, he was attending the North American International Livestock Exhibition, and he immediately called home to Houston to start making plans for Dalaney's trip. Their staff rounded up tickets to the rodeo, found ways Dalaney could participate in their junior livestock auction and even arranged for Dalaney to have a meet and greet with Dierks Bentley and Florida Georgia Line.

Amid all the plans, the Make-A-Wish® sponsors noted some kids only wish to meet Dierks Bentley or Florida Georgia Line, to which Cowley replied not to worry about their tickets because they were customary for all honor-

ary judges. When asked how many honorary judges they've had help sort classes in Houston, Cowley replied, "None," before he continued planning.

It wasn't just the Houston Stock Show and Rodeo staff that helped make Dalaney's wish come true. Several Make-A-Wish® volunteers around the country helped organize her trip to Texas. From the two local volunteers, which helped Dalaney and her family fill out the necessary paperwork to submit her wish, to the entire Make-A-Wish® of Texas Gulf Coast and Louisiana team, which finalized her wish in Houston, volunteers were imperative to the process.

According to Dalaney's Wish Program Manager Jennifer Ulsomer, each wish case needs at least two volunteers, and in Indiana alone there are more than 250 wishes which will be granted this year.

"When a wish is granted, we want to bring them strength, hope and joy, and create lifelong memories," she says.

Similarly to Make-A-Wish®, Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo is also operated by volunteers.

"It's no small commitment to come here and show," Cowley says, adding countless volunteers work with the Houston Stock Show staff to ensure every exhibitor and attendee has an excellent experience, from moving the barrows in to the livestock premium auction and beyond.

This was not lost on Dalaney. While she made this wish so she could grow her "livestock family," Dalaney says the volunteers at the Houston Stock Show made the biggest impact on her.

"Houston was a whole other world," Dalaney says. "They rely on people at the stock show and volunteers to help out for no money. They just do it for the kids. If they could do something like that in Indiana it would be amazing. It's just inspiring to see that many kids who wanted to show livestock."

Dalaney left Houston with a new sense of appreciation for her great industry, some new friends – including Briana Huseman who drove the Champion Poland Barrow – newfound confidence in the reasons room and a signed backdrop gifted to her from Cowley himself. But, she also left a piece of herself with the staff in Houston.

Cowley says everyone who met Dalaney was inspired by her story, and when they recapped her visit to their great event, there wasn't a dry eye in their staff meeting. When asked what he learned from her the most, Cowley simply replied – be brave.

"We go through life, and we have annoyances," Cowley explains. "Whether it is traffic or waiting in line, and she is battling something far more serious than most of us experience on a day-to-day basis. It just really puts things into perspective."

As for Dalaney, she is brave.

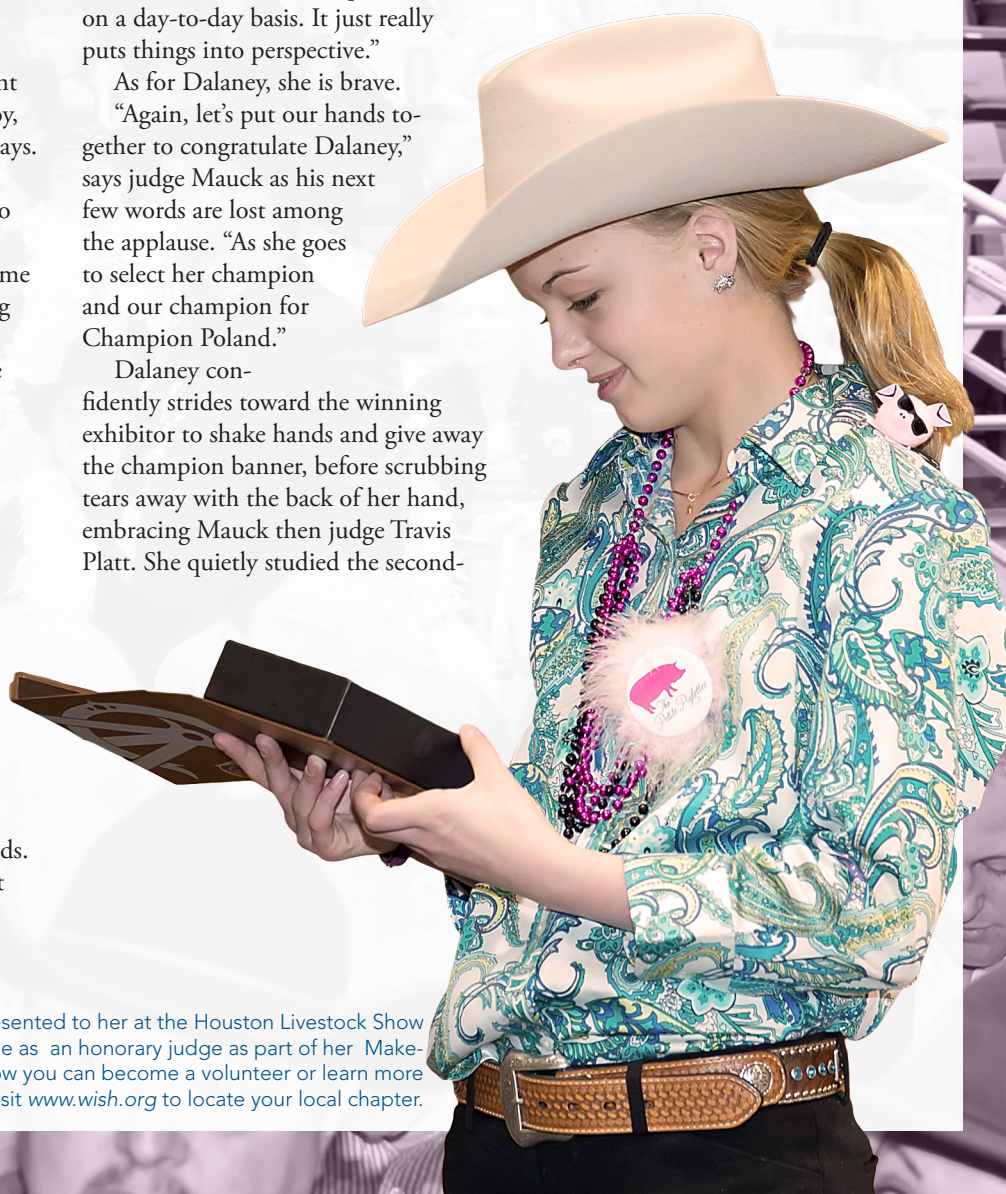
"Again, let's put our hands together to congratulate Dalaney," says judge Mauck as his next few words are lost among the applause. "As she goes to select her champion and our champion for Champion Poland."

Dalaney confidently strides toward the winning exhibitor to shake hands and give away the champion banner, before scrubbing tears away with the back of her hand, embracing Mauck then judge Travis Platt. She quietly studied the second-

place barrow as they dropped him in the ring before picking up the mic.

"It's been a pleasure out here judging," Dalaney began as her voice cracked. For a brief moment she faltered as her shoulders hunched and a couple tears fell away. Then, as she has every obstacle, she bravely straightened her shoulders, took a breath and dove into her reasons.

"The second place barrow, as he comes out here, looks very nice. He just wants to get a little tighter in his flank, but he's still very good. Now, looking at our heavyweight barrow, he's a little bit stouter, a little bit more powerful, and that's the one we will use for reserve," she concludes as she passes the banner.



Dalaney Vickrey studies a buckle presented to her at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo to commemorate her time as an honorary judge as part of her Make-A-Wish® wish. To learn more about how you can become a volunteer or learn more about helping Make-A-Wish®, visit www.wish.org to locate your local chapter.