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Third-grader basks in foundation honor at Reno Rodeo

Siobhan McAndrew
RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL
6/25/2003 02:23 pm

Connor Allbee can describe what the rope felt like. He can talk about how the crowd was cheering. He can describe what it felt like to rope his very first sister. Yes. His sister. Not a steer.

Allbee, 8, was this year's Reno Rodeo Wish, a program started last year, that grants a wish to one person each year.

"It was funny," said Allbee, a third-grader at Marvin Picollo School in Reno. "I threw the rope and got it around her."

Allbee roped his sister, Kelsey, on his first try, as he stood center stage at the Reno Livestock Event's Center Sunday night. For Allbee, who has been blind for three years, it's quite an accomplishment

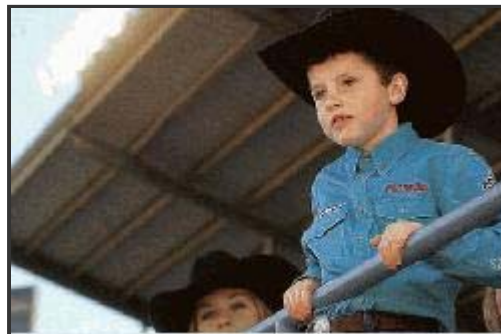
Allbee was diagnosed with juvenile Batten disease, a disorder of the nervous system. Allbee takes medications to prevent seizures, but eventually the disorder will cripple and kill the energetic boy.

"He is always full of energy," said his sister, Kelsey Allbee, 15. "He won't watch movies or sit. Today we played dress up and did a play," said his sister, who often baby-sits for her younger brother. "He dressed up as a girl and sang 'Yankee Doodle' and 'God Bless America.'"

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Ryan Balbuena/RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL
WATCHING: Connor Allbee attended Sunday night's rodeo with his family. Sister Kelsey is at left.

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The Reno Rodeo Foundation is the charitable arm of the Reno Rodeo Association.

Last year, the first recipient of the Reno Wish was Don Balliette, a Reno man who is a quadriplegic. The Reno Rodeo built a special saddle for Balliette, who has been confined to a wheelchair for the last 12 years.

"It was just the best experience ever," Balliette said.

And for Allbee, who has spent time with some of the world's greatest professional ropers this week, learning to rope is better when it's from the best in the business, even if it was his sister he was practicing on.

"I was pretty good at it," Allbee said.



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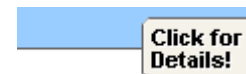
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