

## Connections of the Heart

Tony grew up in Lancaster, South Carolina. His childhood was filled with outdoor play, football and horseback riding. Tony always looked forward to his time with his Uncle Richard who often took him on horse back rides through the Lancaster country side. Like many South Carolina boys, Tony was born a Gamecock fan and upon graduation from high school, he enrolled in the University of South Carolina-Lancaster.

During Tony's freshman year in college, he was diagnosed with Juvenile Parkinson Disease. Over the past 17 years, Tony's health has declined slowly. We recently met him as a 36 year old adult when we were given the honor of caring for Tony and his family. The disease has progressed and Tony is now wheelchair-bound, non-verbal, and tube fed but his mind is as sharp as ever. It didn't take long for us to learn about Tony's love for the Carolina Gamecocks and the outdoors.

When our social worker, Joan Long, visited with his family, she quickly discovered that Tony liked horses, fishing, and the USC Gamecocks. It is always interesting to find people who are connected for a clear purpose. In addition to Joan's hospice career, her spare time is devoted to pet therapy and pet rescue. Joan and Tony were a perfect match!

Joan arranged for Amelia, her gentle horse, to visit with Tony. Tony was so excited for the big day. He even chose to wear his Gamecock best for the special visit. Amelia patiently awaited Tony's arrival. Her beautiful chestnut coat glistened in the sun. Tony radiated joy as he was wheeled into the yard to meet Amelia. Joan tenderly showed Tony how he could stroke Amelia with his contractured hands and then encouraged him to feed Amelia several carrots. Tony beamed with excitement. Amelia enjoyed the carrots and even shared them with Tony, dropping pieces into his lap as she chewed!! Tony's mother joyfully smiled throughout the visit, sometimes through tears, and told us over and over again how much this visit meant to Tony and to her as a mother. The visit ended with Joan giving Amelia her favorite treat...peppermint candy!

It is truly a blessing when we are able to share with others the joy that Amelia and Joan were able to share with Tony and his family. All creatures, great and small, we are all connected in a very special way.

*Joan Long Lives in Lancaster with her husband and many rescue animals including Amelia. She has been with Hospice Care of South Carolina for 2 years.*



Submitted by:  
Janice Broach, Lancaster County



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