

Let's do an Extreme Makeover – Maricopa style!

Tragedy strengthens family

By Vicki Pettes

Maricopa is home to some wonderful people. People that you see often at various functions and never realize that they've suffered thru personal tragedy. Dawn Cater, of MaricopaBiz.com, is one of those people.

I met Dawn a couple of years ago and immediately bonded with her. She's knowledgeable, ambitious, and a very caring person. Last summer I met her dad and knew then where many of her characteristics came from. When I met Rudy, it was like instant sunshine, I immediately fell in love. As Dawn and I drove away from him that day, I looked at Dawn knowing this must be hard for her, and told her I could feel the tug at my heart, as well, just leaving him. I'm not the only one; this man leaves a trail of admirers and friends in his wake.

Rudy Luz lives in Ahwatukee and is no stranger there, where many call him 'The Mayor'. They see him almost daily, visiting the shops in his motorized wheelchair.

Rudy, originally from Peabody, MA, started riding motorcycles at the age of 15 while at the same time becoming a carpenter. He married his childhood sweetheart, Dorothy, and they had six children – three boys and three girls, and 11 grand children.

Since they always enjoyed a houseful of children, they took in foster children until they could be placed in permanent foster care. Over the years they gave refuge to over 250 children.

Rudy also worked as a real estate agent for nineteen years. His favorite work though was doing building inspections. Rudy went to work for HUD in Peabody, and eventually in Boston, working for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts where he monitored the building of senior citizen centers, boys and girls clubs, and various communities. He even became a pilot in 1970 and flew his own Cessna 152.

In 1990, Rudy and his wife moved their family to Arizona where Rudy was hired by the State Department of Commerce, having beaten out hundreds of other applicants, and got to continue doing the same type of work he'd done in Massachusetts until he retired in 1997. Sadly, shortly before he



Rudy and Dorothy.

retired, his wife of 45 years passed away in 1996.

In 1997, Rudy became more involved in motorcycles and motorcycle organizations and soon was riding regularly with a group of eight people, calling themselves the 'Road Apples'. They started attending poker runs and benefits such as Toys for Tots and MS for Kids – made well known by Jay Leno and Peter Fonda's association with them. Any benefit run they could participate in, they did.

On November 22, 2000, the day before Thanksgiving, Rudy rode to the Eloy airport to make arrangements for him and a group of his friends to go skydiving. He never got to take that dive. Riding home on Hunt Highway, while making the turn at Ellsworth Road, Rudy ran across a soft patch of dirt that caused his bike to lay down. He was only going about 35 mph. At first glance, he didn't appear badly injured, a little road rash and a few scrapes below his eye. The last thing he remembered was an EMT asking him to squeeze his hand.

When he awoke on Thanksgiving Day in the hospital he was surrounded by his family and friends. It was then that Rudy was told he had bruised his C5-C6 vertebrae and was diagnosed as completely paralyzed. Always an optimist, Rudy hung in there and with constant occupational and physical therapy and perseverance he began to have slight feeling in his toes. At this time, the doctors upgraded his condition from complete paralysis to incomplete paralysis from his chest down.

Initially, Rudy spent several months in the hospital learning to deal with his paralysis. Because he was unable to call a nurse during the night, Dawn would sleep at the hospital each night, to make sure if he ever woke up, someone

familiar was there for him. "It was mostly for my piece of mind that I stayed with my father at night. I couldn't imagine what he was going through and how brave he was throughout it all. I didn't want him to wake up in a strange place, alone, paralyzed; I wanted him to know I was there for him, always," says Dawn.

Diane, her sister, also watched over him daily. She would arrive early in the morning and stay throughout the entire day. "I would make sure he was fed and that people understood that he was paralyzed and couldn't do anything on his own." "I was amazed at what we take for granted on a daily basis and how my father had to learn how to do things all over again without the use of his fingers. We've learned how to be very creative in doing simple tasks so that my father can be more independent," says Diane.

Shortly after Rudy was released from the hospital, he moved in with Dawn and her husband. He lived with them for little over a year in which during that time, Dawn and Charles took care of



Rudy and Dawn enjoy dancing together less than a month before Rudy's accident.

him. As time went by, Rudy dealt with his disability in a positive way; learning new ways to do normal things. Once Rudy knew what he was dealing with and how he would have to approach normal daily tasks, he got stronger, and his independent streak won out; he wanted to return to his home in Ahwatukee. He insisted he did not want his children taking care of him; he wanted them to continue on with their lives. Even today, he is so grateful to the occupational and physical therapists

that helped him at the beginning, and of course his family and friends for their unfailing support.

Today he has two caretakers, Erin Wright and Heli Gil who live in his home. They are there to get him up in the morning and to put him in bed at night. Heli used his skills to rig up a hoist, which they use to get him in and out of bed. But for the most part, during the day, Rudy is usually on his own.

Rudy's home has never been retrofitted to accommodate any handicap access. The carpet has been torn out so that his wheelchair can maneuver over the cement floors, and wood planks have been placed at the entrance of his home, as a ramp, to allow him to get in and out his front door.

During the day while he is fending for himself, he is able to get his lunch from a mini-refrigerator that sits on his kitchen table. His daughter, Diane, her husband, Greg and their children live a couple of blocks away. Diane dedicated a great deal of time researching nutrition and has helped Rudy tremendously by serving him nutritious meals every day.

Rudy has spent his life being there for others. Now he needs us. He needs equipment, physical and occupational therapy, and his house to be set up for handicap access.

On May 5th, Cinco de Mayo, there will be a poker run benefit for Rudy. Go to <http://www.maricopabiz.com/community/rudys-poker-run/> or www.copanews.com for further information on Rudy's Run. If you know of any – physical/occupational therapists, dentist, carpenters, plumbers, construction companies, builders – anyone you think might be able to help, please contact Dawn at 520-450-0072 or email her at Dawn@MaricopaBiz.com, or call Vicki Pettes at 520-568-3093.

"The one thing I miss terribly," states Rudy, "is being upright, being able to stand." With the proper equipment and therapy there is a possibility that he could regain some use of his body.

So how about it, readers? Let's see what we can do to make life better for this very deserving man.

Proceeds from Rudy's Run will also benefit children and adults with disabilities.



Rudy several months before the accident.



Rudy with daughter Diane.



Rudy with his grandson and namesake, Rudy.