

STUDENT'S WISH COMES TRUE IN WHITE HOUSE



EMILY SHANAHAN AND HER mother, Barb, of West Carrollton meet President Bush at the White House.

Thrill of lifetime: praying with president

Dale Huffman

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When Emily Shanahan of West Carrollton had a 15-minute meeting with President Bush in the White House last week, she

asked the president if he would pray with her.

He agreed, and as Emily and her family stood in a circle, holding hands with the president, she prayed and said that her words brought tears into Bush's eyes.

Emily, 15, a freshman at West Carrollton High School, has been dealing with the effects of cerebral palsy since birth. She has

had seven major surgeries in six years and is in a wheelchair, but she said she is doing fine. Her meeting with Bush was arranged by the group known as A Special Wish Foundation in Dayton.

"I will remember this the rest of my life," Emily said after returning home. "I was quite excited and a bit nervous as we waited for him. But I calmed down when he entered the room and we had a nice conversation, and a prayer."

Emily was accompanied to the White House by her parents, Barb and Tom Shanahan, and a friend, Shanna Banks, 20, who is a freshman at Cedarville University, where Emily hopes eventually to get a degree in social work.

"The White House was very accommodating," said Ilene Schnable, executive director of

the Special Wish organization. "Emily is an A student in school, has read the Bible in totality twice and is running for president of her high school class. Needless to say, the White House staff was impressed and selected Emily for one-on-one time with the president."

A Special Wish Foundation, 436 Valley St., just observed its 20th anniversary of making dreams come true for Miami Valley children fighting debilitating and sometimes terminal illnesses.

Emily's meeting with the president happened at 9:30 a.m. Friday and lasted 15 minutes. It took place in the Diplomatic Reception Room in the East Wing of the White House.

"My first question to the president was, 'Why did you choose me?'" Emily said. "He answered

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that he thought I was a special person, that I was courageous and that I never let obstacles stand in my way.

"I was really stunned by what he said, and I had a delayed reaction in thanking him — five seconds or so."

Barb Shanahan, who is manager of the Summit Cafe at Far Hills Community Church at 5800 Clio Road in Centerville,



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said that her daughter led the conversation.

"The president said he liked meeting her because he enjoyed being around inspirational people," Emily's mother said. "But it was the prayer that we will all remember as long as we live."

Emily said one of the reasons she had requested a meeting was to pray with Bush.

"After a little while, I just asked him if it was OK to pray," Emily said.

"He said that, sure, that would be fine. I held the president's hand on one side, and my dad was on the other side of the president, and my mom and my friend Shanna made up the circle."

As for what she prayed, "Basically I prayed that President Bush

would have guidance from God to be able to deal with the challenges he faces. I thanked God that the president was able to stand up for what is right for our country. My dad said that when I said those words, the president was squeezing his hand a little bit.

"What really shocked me, well, my head was down when I was praying. But after we said 'Amen,' and before I looked up, President Bush leaned over and he kissed me on my forehead, ever so lightly.

"When I saw his face, he was crying. There were tears in his eyes. Praying with our president was by far the most memorable thing that has ever happened in my life. I thank God for letting this happen. God was the one who let me meet the president. He is the one who leads my life every day and helps me with every challenge I face."

Dale Huffman wants your suggestions and story ideas. Send an e-mail to him at dhuffman@DaytonDailyNews.com or write to Dale at 45 S. Ludlow St., Dayton, OH 45402. Fax: 225-2489. Phone: 225-2272.