

Pilots N Paws Nonprofit Grants Dying Man's Wish to Have His Dog by His Side

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Roger "Rod" and his 7-year-old yellow Labrador, Bailey

A cancer-stricken Florida man's dying wish to be reunited with his dog one last time was fulfilled by an animal rescue group last week.

Roger "Rod" Calvert, a 57-year-old former Marine, wanted a chance to say goodbye to his 7-year-old yellow Labrador, Bailey. There was just one problem -- about 1,100 miles between the two best friends.

Calvert and Bailey were separated earlier this month, when Calvert and his wife of 34 years, Debra Burke Calvert, traveled from their home in Vero Beach, Fla., to Pittsburgh for what they thought would be a routine health screening. Rod had been diagnosed with cancer about five years ago, but the disease had gone into remission.

Shortly after arriving in Pittsburgh, they were shocked to learn that the cancer had returned. Worse, Rod was given just

days to live. In an instant, the Calverts' lives were turned upside down. As quickly as the Calverts learned the devastating news, Rod Calvert's health took a dramatic turn for the worse. Unable to return home, he and his wife went to her brother's home in nearby Hopewell Township, where Rod received hospice care.

It was while helping to make arrangements for Rod's care that Nick Petti, of [Family Hospice and Palliative Care](#), heard about Calvert's desire to be with Bailey. Petti then reached out to [Pilots N Paws](#).

The non-profit group includes more than 2,500 pilots and nearly 12,000 animal rescuers throughout the U.S. Pilots N Paws unites organizations that rescue, shelter or foster animals with pilots and plane owners willing to assist with the transportation of animals. To date, thousands of animals have been saved and or relocated thanks to the group.

Bailey's case, while not the rescue or relocation requests that Pilots N Paws usually receives, was given immediate attention.

"Several of us had to work together to find the right connections," Debi Boies, co-founder of Pilots N Paws, told The Huffington Post. "Normally, a distance that far is just too long of a distance for general aviation pilots to cover. Most cover an area of about 250 nautical miles, so you can see from Florida to PA is far beyond that. But Bailey needed to get to Roger and Roger needed to have Bailey before he could let go, so we worked hard to make it happen."

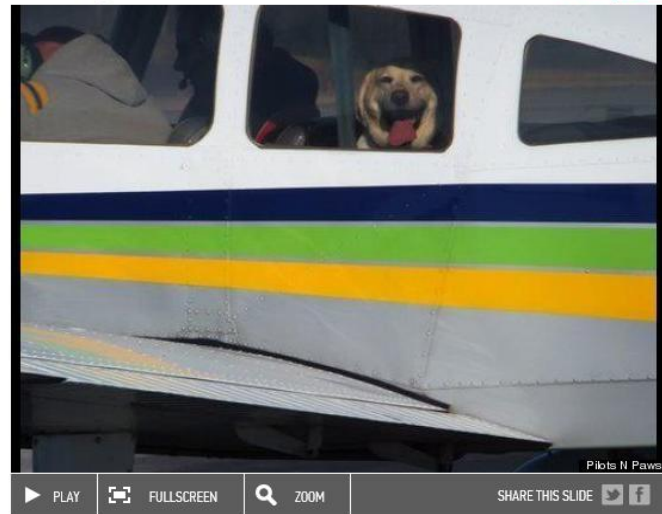
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Bailey: A Final Wish

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Pilots N Paws coordinator Liz Bondarek and dozens of other volunteers, including four pilots, worked to safely transport Baily on March 11. According to Boies, the dog enjoyed the flight and was excited to be reunited with Rod, who had no idea she would even be coming to see him.

Calvert "could not believe she was there," Boies said. "She's a big girl and she actually jumped up on his bed. She then kept watch over him and would put her paws on him and look at him. She watched him and helped him let go. I believe it brought him great comfort in those last hours."

Calvert was able to spend three days with Bailey. She never left his side and was there for him throughout the darkest time of his life. Then, on the evening of March 14, Rod lost his fight with the disease.

"It's so touching. We are not here forever and we all know how important our animals are to us. Bailey was obviously important to Roger," Boies said. "There was a part of him that needed to see her himself to let go. I think a part of him also wanted to know that Bailey was with his wife, who has multiple sclerosis. Bailey is her service dog, so I think it gave him a real sense of peace to know Bailey was there with his wife, Debbie." Boies added: "Roger and Bailey touched so many people in so many ways. I'm very honored we were able to get her there in time."

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