

“DANIEL
CAME BACK
BUZZING WITH
CONFIDENCE”

Catherine Pretty,
45, from Surrey, tells
us about her son
Daniel's holiday of
a lifetime to Orlando

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One of the highlights of Daniel's holiday in Orlando was meeting R2-D2 from the *Star Wars* films!



remember thinking to myself, 'I hope I have a child who knows who I am.' That was my biggest worry."

Fortunately Daniel, now 12, exceeded all expectations.

Catherine Pretty was enjoying a holiday in Canada in 2007 when her waters broke prematurely. "I was only 19 weeks pregnant and went into a panic," she says. Catherine and her husband, Simon, rushed to hospital, where they were told one of their twin babies had tragically died. "We were heartbroken and also anxious about our other son, who we weren't sure would survive."

Catherine stayed in hospital for the next four weeks, before being allowed to fly home for complete bed rest. "It's incredibly rare to keep one twin when the other gets delivered, but fortunately Daniel held on

until 30 weeks. As he was still so premature we knew there might be complications, but we just felt lucky to have him."

Daniel was taken for a brain scan, which revealed that he had cerebral palsy, a lifelong condition affecting movement and coordination. "We had no idea what it meant or how it might affect him, as the condition has such a huge spectrum of outcomes. I just

“CEREBRAL PALSY AFFECTS EVERY MUSCLE IN DANIEL'S BODY, SO HE CAN'T STAND OR WALK WITHOUT EQUIPMENT, HE USES A WHEELCHAIR TO GET AROUND AND HIS HAND AND ARM MOVEMENTS ARE AFFECTED”

"Physically it affects every muscle in his body, so he can't stand or walk without any equipment. He uses a wheelchair to get around and his hand and arm movements are affected. However, it hasn't affected him cognitively. He is very bright and chatty, has an amazing memory and vocabulary and is doing really well at school. He is also medically very healthy."

"Four years ago, Daniel had an operation called selective dorsal rhizotomy (SDR), where the nerves are cut in the spine to try

to interrupt the communication problems that cause the condition. Cerebral palsy can get more challenging with age, as the body gets stiffer and heavier and more difficult to move around as a result, so we're hoping this will help to keep him mobile as he gets older. He also has physiotherapy every week to help with his movement."

For Daniel, one of the main challenges has been gaining independence. "Unfortunately, he always has to have an adult with him, which he finds difficult and makes it harder for him to make friends. It can also be difficult for him to access all the activities and places his friends can, so he has been unable to attend things

such as birthday parties in the past. We don't want to put limits on what he can do, but sometimes he just can't take part in things, which can be quite frustrating for him."

In 2018, Daniel's paediatrician mentioned to Catherine that she had put him forward for a holiday of a lifetime in Orlando in Florida, hosted by the charity Dreamflight. "We couldn't believe it when we found out he'd been accepted for a trip the next October, and Daniel was completely over the moon. Apart from a short trip for school he had never been away without us, so was really nervous but also incredibly excited – and it definitely lived up to all his hopes."

"They packed in so much, visiting a different theme park every day, going swimming with dolphins and having parties every night. Daniel loves music, so enjoyed being on the dance floor every evening, and he had an amazing time riding the roller coasters. With having cerebral palsy, Daniel can't really physically ➤

Dreamflight has taken
more than 6,200
deserving children on
holiday to Florida.

The charity has to raise
approximately £1 million
per year from donors and
supporters to do this.

The trip builds confidence
and independence for
children who have never
been away from their
parents before.

“IT GIVES THEM A PROPER CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE WHERE THEY CAN JUST RELAX AND HAVE FUN WITH NEW FRIENDS”

challenge himself or get that sense of a thrill other children can from mountain biking or jumping off a diving board, for example, so he loved the adrenalin rush of going on the biggest rides.”

The trip also provided Catherine and Simon with a valuable opportunity to spend time with their younger son, Dexter, now nine. “To be able to make a fuss of Dexter was great, as siblings do struggle when one child gets so much attention. We love being outdoors and going hill walking but it’s not something we can normally do as a family, so we took Dexter to Wales and went up Snowdon, which was great.”

Since Daniel’s trip away, Catherine has continued to notice a positive change in him. “He came back buzzing and full of confidence gained from being away from us for so long and getting to meet a bunch of new kids.

“Children with serious health conditions can feel like they always stand out and are viewed as the poor kid in the wheelchair, or the person who

can’t join in with this or that. To be around other children who have also had challenges in life and met them head-on, and to be able to feel like just one of the crowd, was absolutely amazing for Daniel. He has made some really good friends he is still in touch with, and plans to meet up with them again soon.”

It was a holiday Catherine knows Daniel will never forget. “It was an opportunity we could never give him, and we just can’t put a price on the benefits he has gained from his time away. We’re so grateful to the charity and all the volunteers – especially Daniel’s leader, Rhys – who gave up their time



Daniel and his new friends packed so much into their Florida trip, including a visit to Disney World

to help the children make the most of everything and come home with such big smiles on their faces.

“Every single day can be a battle for some children facing health problems, and this is just an amazing, fun, positive way to give them a break from the realities of their life. It gives them a proper childhood experience where they can just relax and have fun with new friends, which means so much to them.” ✨

Dreamflight: Changing children's lives

TOTAL RAISED: £75,089

➡➡ Dreamflight will use the money raised in The Candis Big Give to help to send 20 children with a serious illness or disability on a ten-day trip to Orlando in Florida.

➡➡ The money will cover all costs for the trip, including travel, food, accommodation, medical expenses, entry to theme parks, a dolphin swim and reunion parties, giving them a much-needed opportunity to have fun, build their confidence and develop lifelong friendships.

➡➡ Visit dreamflight.org to find out more.