

# Family's life was 'like a fairy tale'

'He had changed a lot. Dale was at the happiest point of his entire life.'

— Deric DeBenedetti,  
victim's brother

Life had been looking up for Dale DeBenedetti, ever since a chance encounter three years ago at Seventh Avenue and Brommer Street in Live Oak.

That's when he met his wife, Suzy, by good-naturedly "wooing" her from his pickup truck's window as she sat in her car at the intersection. Suzy "wooded" back, Dale followed her home and Suzy asked him to stay for dinner.

Married two years ago, Dale and Suzy settled in Aptos. They became parents 17 months ago when their daughter, Alyssa Maggie, was born.

If this were a fairy-tale, the DeBenedettis would have lived happily ever after. But it isn't.

DeBenedetti, 27, was killed about 6½ hours after the Oct. 17 earthquake in a bizarre accident when his pickup truck hit three spooked horses on Highway 1 in Capitola.

The earthquake put him in precisely the wrong place at the wrong time, said his father, Ronald DeBenedetti of Corralitos. Dale was returning home around 11:30 p.m., having gone to his work — Airtec Heating and Air Conditioning in Scotts Valley — to get his truck.

"He needed the tools inside his truck to fix a water heater at home, which was leaking as a result of the earthquake," Ronald said.

A friend of DeBenedetti's, Kurt Miedecke, had driven him to

Scotts Valley and was just "six car lengths behind in the other lane" when the horses darted onto the highway between Bay and 41st avenues. "It happened so fast, I went sailing past the accident before I could stop," Miedecke said. "I had to swerve to miss one of the horses myself."

It's all so unfair, said both of Dale's younger brothers, 25-year-old Duane and 18-year-old Deric DeBenedetti. "Dale used to be into drugs, but things had finally turned around," Duane said. Added Deric, "He had changed a lot. Dale was at the happiest point of his entire life."

Miedecke had known Dale for more than 10 years, since the two drove buses for the Pajaro Valley Unified School District. Their friendship was unusual, he said, in that it lasted through hardships.

"He and I both had problems in our youth; we were both screw-ups," Miedecke said. "He went into drug rehab and I went away, and we both changed on our own. It was

something to be able to remain friends after all of that."

His passion was the San Francisco Giants, Suzy said.

"He was a big Giants' fan," she said, laughing slightly, remembering. "He thought he was Will Clark. He even liked to play first base."

He loved sports, said his father, Ronald DeBenedetti. He golfed several times a week, loved fishing and had talked his father, brother Duane and a cousin into joining him in a local bowling league. His brother Deric added, "We would laugh more than we would golf. He was always cracking me up."

His father was overjoyed when his son joined him as a sheet-metal worker at Airtec two years ago. His wife said, "That was exactly what he was shooting for — to be just like his dad."

Said his father, "I was very proud he was following in my footsteps. We spent a lot of time together. We ate lunch with each

other every day."

His father said that they had talked about going into business together somewhere down the line. DeBenedetti had been going to school in San Jose two nights a week for additional training.

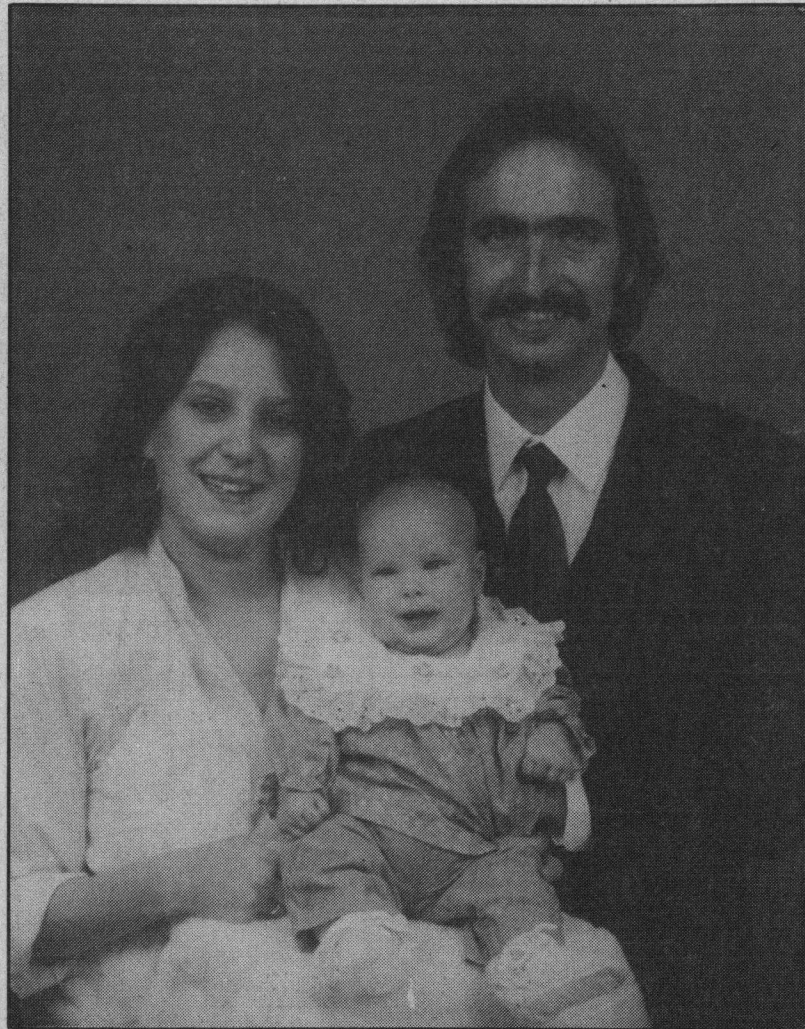
His mother, Lois, was too upset to talk about the loss. However, she had this to write about Dale: "Remember that all the material things can be replaced. Be sure to tell your loved ones you love them while you have them. Our son was taken and he can never be replaced. We'll miss him forever."

Added Suzy, "We had never experienced anything going wrong in the three years together. We lived like June and Ward Cleaver — Mom, Dad and the baby. My life had changed completely, and it was like a fairy-tale."

"I treasured Dale. I'll never forget him. He's in my heart and memory."

Two separate memorial funds have been established for 17-month-old Alyssa Maggie DeBenedetti. Contributions may be made at any Pacific Western Bank branch to the Dale DeBenedetti Memorial Fund, account No. 01-104-083-59; or to Household Bank, 1626 Freedom Blvd., Freedom, 95019, for Trust for Alyssa DeBenedetti, account No. 0513526620.

— Keith Muraoka



Dale DeBenedetti with wife, Suzy, and 17-month-old Alyssa Maggie.