

Kids Korner



Ben pauses a moment in zipping around on the Gator to pose with his family — his mom and dad, David and Kelly, sister Megan, and Bailey.

Despite Leg Loss, Ben Keeps Farming

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HAVRE DE GRACE, Md. — From the farm where 11-year-old Ben Keyes lives, you can see the waters where the Susquehanna River meets the Chesapeake Bay.

Ben's family operates Mt. Felix Dairy Farm, on the edge of the town of Havre de Grace. The Keyes family includes his parents, David and Kelly, and his nine-year-old sister, Megan.

Like most farm kids, Ben enjoys helping to milk and care for their 90 Holstein dairy cows and their calves and working with his dad at farm chores, including his very favorite, driving a tractor. He also enjoys sports, especially soccer.

One thing Ben does do differently than most farm kids is to take crutches along when he goes to the barn. That's because a few months ago, part of Ben's left leg was amputated, or removed by

surgery, after he got bone cancer.

While playing soccer at school early last September, Ben fell and hit his knee against the wall of the Meadowvale Elementary School gym, where he was in fifth grade. His knee became very sore and after several weeks, developed a large growth, or tumor.

On December 1, Ben's doctor took X-rays of his knee and told his family that Ben had cancer. Three days later, on his dad's birthday, Ben went to Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore for more tests.

"The doctor said I had to use a cane to walk because he didn't want me to fall and break a bone, which might make my cancer spread," Ben says. Ben used the cane a little bit but decided that crutches were more "cool."

Because of the danger of injury in school activities, Ben stopped attending school and is doing all

his classwork at home. His mother is his teacher and she does make him do homework.

Before they knew about his cancer, Ben's parents had ordered a John Deere Gator, a 6-wheeled vehicle, that was to be a surprise for Christmas. The Gator was delivered one day while Ben was at the barn with his dad, after his cancer had been found. It turned out to be the perfect "farm truck" for Ben, who was no longer allowed to ride his bike around the farm.

The day after Christmas, Ben began chemotherapy, or chemical treatment to destroy the cancer cells. A reaction to Ben's treatments caused him to develop a fever and his parents had to rush him to the hospital in the middle of last January's heavy blizzard.

After a series of treatments, Ben had surgery on his knee. His doctors replaced his knee and part of his leg bone with artificial replacements. But his cancer spread; and in June, Ben's doctors told him they would have to remove his leg above the knee. "It was scary," he said.

After his leg surgery, Ben's doctors fitted him with an artificial leg. He returns to Hopkins every few days for blood testing and physical therapy.

After he has his schoolwork finished, Ben spends some of his time helping his dad and likes to ride with him to go for equipment parts. He also enjoys having friends visit and spend time playing around the farm with him. Ben has figured out how to play soccer on his crutches and usually beats the rest of his family when they go to play miniature golf. Wherever Ben goes, "Bailey," his chocolate Labrador Retriever, will be right beside him. Bailey especially likes to ride with Ben on the Gator.

Ben is a Baltimore Orioles baseball fan. In May, the Grant-A-Wish organization arranged for his whole family to be special



Ben's constant companion around the Keyes farm is Bailey, the family's chocolate Labrador Retriever.

guests at an Orioles game at Camden Yards Stadium. During their visit, they were taken onto the field and also spent time with Orioles player Cal Ripken, Jr.

"He was nice," Ben says of the well-known ball player. And just recently, Ben received from Cal Ripken an autographed Louisville-Slugger baseball bat. It came in the protective covering of a long, white tube sock, which Ben jokes might have been one of Ripken's.

Ben and Megan are both in 4-H and show their dairy heifers at the Harford County Fair. Last year, he was the junior champion winner in fitting and showmanship classes. He owns several cows and calves in the Mt. Felix herd.

Two years ago, Ben also began showing pigs in 4-H. He named his two Hampshire pigs for this year's project Tom and Nancy, after two of his doctors at Hopkins. Doctors Tom and Nancy

thought it was neat to have 4-H pigs named for them. A friend showed Ben's pigs for him at the fair this year and Tom (the pig) won a giant trophy for having the best daily weight gain. Nancy also did well in her showing class.

At the livestock auction held at the Harford Fair, so many people bid on Tom that he finally brought \$26 per pound, or nearly \$6,000. And then the construction company owner who bought Tom gave him back. Many of the other 4-H members also donated part of the sale of their animals toward the very expensive cost of Ben's cancer treatments and the nine surgeries he has had in the last year.

Ben very much enjoys receiving cards and hearing from other kids (and adults, too). If you would like to send Ben a card, mail to Ben Keyes, 2028 Level Road, Havre De Grace, MD 21078.



Ben and Megan like to play with the Holstein calves. Both own several of their own animals for 4-H projects.



Once in a while, Ben can persuade his dad to let him drive the John Deere 520 very carefully around the circle driveway. Driving a tractor is his favorite thing to do at the farm.