

Company coming. Bills to pay. Kids home from school ... bored already. Need to clean. Need to cook. Need to shop. Need to drop? Need a nap!

Hectic holidays got you overwrought? Trying to pack a year's worth of catching up, visiting, celebrating into this brief, busiest-of-celebrations week in the year? And meanwhile, all the usual stuff needs done as well.

Whoa. Hold it. Slow down. Today is the first day of the rest of your life. Yeah, I know we've heard that phrase so much we're sick of it. But ... think about it.

Two chain-jerker incidents have happened in my life recently. You know, those things that come along, yank us from the daily routines and remind us to take each day for granted.

Barely two months ago, my only sister, in apparent excellent health, underwent a routine health physical for her job. A routine blood test stirred questions; a second brought her family the devastating news that she had a nearly-always-fatal form of leukemia.

Just a few weeks later, she died. It was the second cancer death in my immediate family in 13 months; we lost my dad to another form of disease last fall.

About the same time, I traveled to the upper edge of the Chesapeake Bay to do a newspaper story on 11-year-old Ben Keyes. He and his family are dairy farmers on a historic farm just a stone's throw from the town of Havre de Grace.

Ben is one cool kid. He loves the farm, especially tractors. He's a 4-H member and owns a couple

of his own heifers which he has shown at local fairs. He used to spend a lot of time playing sports and riding his bike around the farm.

Now Ben rides a "Gator" around the Keyes' farm, a small John Deere, six-wheeled cross between a golf-cart and a mini pickup truck. The day I visited, Ben toured me around the farm on the Gator, along with his constant buddy, Bailey, the chocolate lab with the ever-wagging tail.

See, Ben has cancer. He found out about a year ago, after he fell in the school gym playing soccer and banged his knee. The knee swelled up over a period of several weeks and, just before Christmas last year, was found to be cancerous. Since then, Ben has had nearly a dozen surgeries at Johns Hopkins. During one of the, last June, his doctors amputated his left leg above the knee.

It's slowed Ben down a bit — but hasn't stopped him. He's figured out how to play a little bit of soccer. With an artificial leg and on crutches.

Just before Christmas — this year — Ben had yet another round of cancer surgery. This time, the doctors operated on his lungs. Knowing Ben, he's probably back out on that Gator — or at least hounding his parents to let him be.

Ben has become my inspiration.

His picture hangs above my computer. On those days when the bills roll in, the cows break out, milk price drops, and the mud in the pastures swell 'til we wonder if we should be building an Ark, I look up there, above the monitor, and sure enough, there's Ben ... grinning at me from a newspaper clipping.

Stressed? Yeah, we all surely are stressed in these days of too much to do in too little time.

But, stressed spelled backwards is "desserts." That's to be my mot-

to for 1997. For, when a young man like Ben Keyes can take all the stresses he's dealt with and still find some desserts in life, it becomes an inspiration to those of us who get all steamed over much less critical problems.

So, chill out. And Happy New Year, y'all.

And especially, Happy New Year, Ben!

Note: Ben loves to get mail. You can drop him a card at 2028 Level Road, Havre de Grace, MD 21078.

## Ephrata Cloister Offers History Classes

EPHRATA (Lancaster Co.) — Explore the clues left by previous generations as the Ephrata Cloister goes on a search to solve some of history's mysteries in the annual History Class, starting January 9. The informal sessions are held each Thursday morning in January, February, and March, starting at 8:45 a.m. and continuing until noon. Topics such as the clothing, food, and architecture of early

area residents will be discussed.

No previous background is required to join the class. The class sessions will have a clear emphasis on the Ephrata Cloister in their content, but not the exclusion of other bits of regional history. All reading materials will be provided. Tuition fee is \$10 for the 12-session class. To register, call the Ephrata Cloister at (717) 733-6600.

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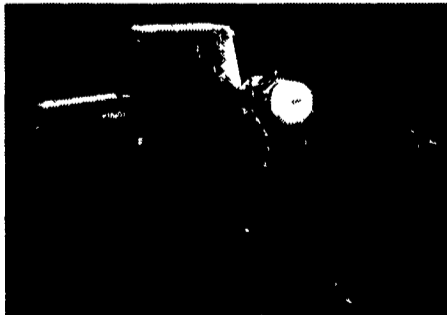
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