

MARLER Christmas Newsletter



Volume 10

email: jkmarler@msn.com

December 2000

As the year 2000 ends and 2001 approaches, we give thanks for our family's survival and pray that complete health lay ahead for us all! As always, we will pick up where we left off last year. Keegan was facing life-altering surgery and a blessing took place for our family.

In early December 1999, Keegan was hospitalized for increased intercranial pressure. We were devastated when a MRI showed that the three rounds of chemotherapy Keegan had undergone had not shrunk the brain tumor. However, it did stop the tumor from getting any bigger. It was still the size of a man's fist. Doctor Grabb (Keegan's neurosurgeon) decided to move on to a more aggressive procedure to save her life. On Dec. 6th, Keegan underwent an angiogram to embolize (reduce the blood supply) to the tumor. The tumor was emobilized in hopes that there would be less bleeding during Keegan's second craniotomy scheduled the next day.

On December 7th, during her sixhour surgery, we almost lost Keegan. Because of the vascularity (many blood vessels) of the tumor, Keegan bled a lot. Halfway through the surgery she had a cardiac arrest, caused by the massive loss of blood. While performing CPR more blood was Several minutes later she was infused. brought back to life and the surgery continued, even though it was "touch and go" for some time. Doctor Grabb diligently removed the entire tumor and gave Keegan a second chance at life! We had witnessed a miracle! She had an extremely tough recovery but amazingly showed no signs of paralysis or other deficiencies.

A week later Keegan underwent a shunt revision, her 11th surgical procedure in three months. A shunt revision is when the surgeon replaces all or part of a malfunctioning shunt. Keegan's shunt helps drain spinal fluid from her brain down into the lining of her stomach. She will have a shunt for life. Keegan was released from the hospital days before her first Christmas.

The tumor was sent to the pathologist for study. After seeing the tumor again Doctor Grabb was sure Keegan's tumor was malignant. The medical term for the tumor was: *Choroid Plexus Carcinoma*. Doctor Reddy, Keegan's Neuro-oncologist, explained we would need to continue the chemotherapy for another twelve treatments to prevent possible regrowth of the tumor.

We were temporarily living in an apartment in Birmingham to be close to the hospital. We decorated the apartment with a little tree, went to the mall to visit Santa and



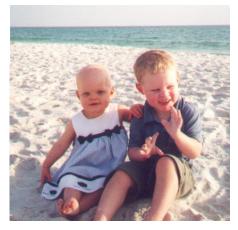
attended a Christmas Eve service. We had a wonderful Christmas together away from the hospital.

As the new millennium arrived, we all were sick with the flu. Luckily, Keegan managed to stay well while we were at our worst. It took about two weeks before we all had a clean bill of health. Keegan started back with chemotherapy #4 on January 18th. She also had 100+ stitches removed from her recent surgeries. Keegan spent the rest of the month in the hospital on IV antibiotics with a blood infection and had to get a few blood transfusions. Braden was enjoying spending quality time with Grandma Lappin (Kristy's Mom) at the apartment.

February found Keegan not well enough for chemotherapy. Her counts were not rebounding . She was neutrapenic with a fever and we had to drive her to the ER in the middle of the night during Birmingham's first snow storm in several years. On Valentine's day, Keegan's fever jumped to 103 degrees. While we were waiting to start treatment, Keegan had seizure lasting over 20 minutes. She had a team of doctors & nurses working on her. Keegan received the maximum amount of phenobarbital allowed in order stop the seizure. Jeff sang to her while the team worked quickly to help Keegan. It was frightening and an experience we hope to never go through again. At the end of month Kristy's sister's family (Kerri, Jonathan & their son Christian) and Grandpa Lappin (Kristy's Dad) came to celebrate Keegan's first birthday. We celebrated a few days early on the 29th, because Keegan was to be hospitalized for chemotherapy on her real birthday. We marked the occasion by having our first extended family portrait taken. This also was the first time Kristy & Kerri met each others babies. Christian was a joy and Keegan & Braden really enjoyed his com-



Keegan was hospitalized for chemo treatment #5 on her birthday, March 3rd. We had another party with our hospital family. Keegan surprised us by learning to sit on her own. Braden and Kristy's family enjoyed a few outings while Mommy & Daddy stayed in the hospital with Keegan. Braden especially enjoyed the train ride at the Zoo with his Grandpa Lappin. By mid month we packed and moved back home to Enterprise. We relished the additional square footage & enjoyed sleeping in our own beds again. We noticed a shift in attitude as well. We were focused on the family as a whole, instead of solely concentrating on Keegan's illness. We started to see a very tight bond between Keegan & Braden emerge. They had been separated so often. Braden is a very loving and protective big brother. A week later we returned to Birmingham for chemotherapy round #6. Braden & Grandma stayed at home so that Braden could have more stability and enjoy



a regular life for a change. On the 31st, Braden pulled the prize winning ticket out of the jar for a VFW raffle. The proceeds from the raffle were donated to Keegan's cancer fund. He made front page in the local paper and a local television showed him on the evening broadcast.

In April, Kristy & her mother celebrated their birthdays with a picnic at a local park. We all enjoyed the fresh air, sunshine, and cake. The Easter bunny brought both the kids a basket full of goodies. It was Keegan's turn to wear the bunny ears this year. Keegan had chemotherapy #7 the following week. A few days later we were back at the hospital with extremely low counts and Keegan received three blood transfusions. She was also being treated with IV antibiotics for a blood infection.

In May, Kristy & her Mom cele-



brated Mother's Day with a big, home-cooked meal. Next year they want to eat out. Keegan returned for chemotherapy #8 at the end of the month. Grandma & Braden joined us on this trip.

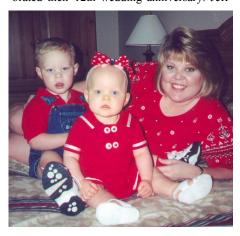
Kristy's Mom left for Colorado to celebrate Christian's first birthday on June 1st. Saying "Good Bye" was difficult on us all. She was an integral part of our family's struggle. We couldn't have done it without

her. She will return from Maryland in January 2001. Keegan had a MRI which showed her brain was expanding into the space that use to be occupied by the tumor and more importantly no tumor regrowth. Due to low counts Keegan could not have chemotherapy in June. Jeff celebrated Father's Day with a cake, gifts and his favorite people: US!

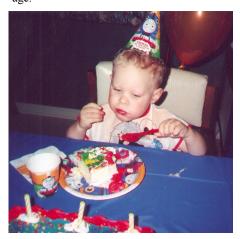
We spent the 4th of July at Fort Rucker's Independence Day celebration. It was so hot that we sat in the air-conditioned van and watched the fireworks. Keegan had chemotherapy #9 the next week. On the 14th, Braden celebrated his third birthday with a Thomas the Tank Engine party. He



really enjoyed all the Thomas decorations and gifts. Keegan learned to crawl in late July around the time Kristy & Jeff celebrated their 12th wedding anniversary. Jeff



also received word that the Army was extending him on active duty until January 15th so he could join the Air Force on January 16th, without a break in medical coverage.



By August Keegan was learning to walk. She underwent chemotherapy #10 and a week later was neutrapenic with a high fever. We rushed her to the local ER for some IV antibiotics and then drove her to Birmingham. Keegan was admitted for more antibiotics to treat the blood infection and was released 2 days later. She received more blood tests at home which showed the infection was still present.

So in early September Keegan started IV antibiotic treatment in our home which lasted for seven days. The day after Keegan finished the home antibiotics, we were back in the hospital so she could start chemotherapy #11. Braden and Keegan had



portraits taken during the middle of the month.

October was a very, emotionally draining month for us. Keegan had chemotherapy #12 in early October. A week later, Keegan became violently ill and we drove her back to Birmingham. Keegan



was having a shunt malfunction and was in danger of slipping into a coma. She was rushed to the operating room for an emergency surgery to replace her shunt. She recovered and we returned home for Jeff's farewell from the Army on his birthday. The farewell was very emotional for us both. We've made wonderful friends in the Army and will miss them.

We returned to Birmingham on Halloween for a MRI. The kids did not get to Trick-or-Treat. Braden did dress up as Thomas the Tank Engine long enough for a few pictures while at the Hope Lodge (a place for families with cancer). We spent most of Halloween night at the hospital.

On November 1st we thought



we were getting admitted for chemotherapy #13. Instead, we were facing another tragedy. The findings of the MRI were devastating. There was regrowth! Keegan was admitted and was put on a ten-day, IV antibiotic treatment for another blood infection. Keegan had spinal fluid taken from her shunt to check for floating cancer cells and a spinal MRI to check that her cancer had not spread. Luckily, both proved no additional cancer was found. The decision was made to have Keegan undergo a third craniotomy to remove the regrowth. Doctor Grabb felt it was necessary, due to her tumor type and history. We were frustrated that the chemotherapy this past year may have failed Keegan again. The surgery was short and the growth was removed. While recovering, the pathology report was finalized; "NO CAN-



CER". It was scar tissue. We were relieved that the chemotherapy was working, Keegan didn't have to have radiation and she seemed to still be cancer-free. We honestly feel the prayers by family, friends & strangers all around the world and by the grace of God made this possible. Keegan recovered quickly and we made it home for Thanksgiving. Jeff's co-workers donated a wonderful Thanksgiving meal to our home. We had so much to be thankful this year! Keegan started growing hair during her recovery and long break from chemotherapy. She continued to gain balance for walking independently and remains cheerful and energetic.

Now that it is December, we have to return to Birmingham for chemotherapy treatment #13 and to have stitches removed. The house is all decked out this year with Christmas cheer. We deserve it! We plan to visit Santa and attend Christmas Eve service if Keegan has rebounded and feeling well. On December 15th, a Christmas tree will be dedicated in Washington, D.C. for children Congresswoman Deborah with cancer. Pryce will be submitting a list of names of children with cancer to Congress. Keegan's name will be on that list and a gold ribbon will be on the tree dedicated on Capitol Hill. Kristy's parents will attend the ceremony in Keegan's honor.

Come January, Keegan is scheduled for her last two chemotherapy treatments, Jeff will leave the Army and enter the Air Force and Grandma Lappin will return. We are praying for Keegan's health and the moment we can say "REMISSION", Jeff's transition will be smooth and quick and that we are all together as soon as possible. Most of 2001, Jeff will be in Air Force training schools. When completed, we will relocate to Las Vegas, Nevada. There is a hospital close by to handle Keegan's long term care.

As always, we want to thank you for the continued prayers, love, and interest in our angels fight with cancer. We truly would not be as strong as we have to be if it weren't for your constant support. We treasure you all. Have a Merry Christmas and a healthy & blessed New Year!

GOD BLESS YOU & YOUR FAMILIES! Love, Jeff, Kristy, Braden & Keegan Marler