



Volume 11

# MARLER

## Christmas Newsletter

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December 2001

As we bid farewell to 2001, and look forward to 2002, we pray for world peace! Our family has been through a year of greatly improved health, career changes and a few relocations. As always, we will start off this letter where we ended the previous year: December 2000. Keegan was still battling cancer and a miracle (of sorts) took place for her Grandparents in Maryland.

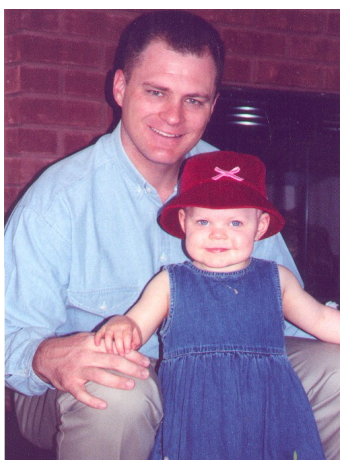
In December, Congresswoman Deborah Pryce dedicated a Christmas tree in Washington D.C. for children with cancer. Families sent in donations and in return a gold ribbon was placed on the tree with the child's name and age. Keegan had such a ribbon.

Kristy's parents were determined to visit the tree in Keegan's honor. The tree stood about 20 feet tall and was flanked by two stairwells draped with garland. All were covered with thousands of gold ribbons. Keegan's Grandparents hoped they would locate her ribbon. Keegan's angel guided Grandma to the bottom, left corner of the tree and her hand touched a ribbon that was bent in half and flipped upside down. She felt the need to straighten it out and who's ribbon do you think it belonged to? Yes, Keegan Shae Marler age 1. What a way to start the Christmas season!



Keegan returned to Birmingham for chemotherapy #13 and had stitches removed from her third craniotomy that took place in November. A week later she returned for a few blood transfusions. We returned home just in time for Santa's arrival. We had a great holiday season!

In early January, Grandma Lappin (Kristy's Mom) rejoined us. Jeff was fulfilling a life-long dream of becoming an Air Force Pilot. Jeff left the US Army on January 15<sup>th</sup> and entered the Air Force the next day. Right before he left, Keegan had chemotherapy #14. Jeff arrived for Officer Candidate



School at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama and began the transition. That same day Keegan returned to Birmingham. She was in drastic

need of several blood transfusions. This was her first hospitalization without Daddy.

Keegan's last chemotherapy (# 15) took

place in early February. We arrived a day early so that we could set up something special for our hospital family. The doctors and nurses had been with us since Keegan was 6 months old. She was soon to turn 2. We became very attached to them all and referred to them as Keegan's "angels". There were many tears shed with the "good-byes". We promised to keep in touch and send lots of photos of Keegan and her hair growth. A promise we have kept!

A week later we had to return to the hospital for more blood transfusions. Once again, Keegan's counts were extremely low. Kristy had to keep saying to herself "This is the last time we have to put Keegan through this!" Due to the low platelet count, Keegan was covered in bruises. A bruise above her right breast grew in size and became infected. Keegan was diagnosed with "cellulitis" and was treated with antibiotics.

As March arrived, so did a few other things. Keegan's rebound from her last chemo treatment (we were finally able to add the word "REMISSION" to our vocabulary), her first post-chemo MRI, her 2nd birthday, her Daddy on a 24-hour pass from OCS and her Grandpa Lappin. We were blessed with a clean MRI scan. No reoccurrence of the tumor! Keegan enjoyed her well-deserved "Tweedy Bird" birthday party. It was the first time our little princess looked like a big girl in her party dress, despite the lack of hair. We visited Jeff at Maxwell at the end of the month. Braden was so happy to spend time with his hero. It lifted all our spirits!



April was a busy month. Kristy, the kids and Grandparent's drove to Maxwell to attend Jeff's graduation week. Kristy and Jeff attended a formal Dining Out, two awards ceremonies and a "flight" dinner. The entire family attended the pinning ceremony and the "throwing of the hats" at the parade. Jeff won many awards and graduated with Distinguished Honors. We are so proud of him!



Kristy and her father pinned Jeff with his Second Lieutenant bars. Braden decided at the last minute that he wanted to be a part of

the special moment as well. Jeff made many great friends while at OCS. Grandpa left a few days later.

We celebrated Easter with Grandma and Jeff was off again. He flew to Washington State to attend a "dunker" school on Kristy's 35<sup>th</sup> birthday. He returned the next evening and the packers showed up the next morning. The packers took three days.

We moved to Post lodging while we cleaned our house and put it on the market to be sold. All five of us and the 2 dogs jumped in the van, and with the U-haul dragging behind us, we headed to Birmingham for Keegan's last visit. Grandma flew out of Birmingham while Keegan saw her doctor. Kristy's mom has been such an important part of our family throughout Keegan's illness. It was hard saying "goodbye" and yet we were all looking forward to the next step in our journey. Keegan had her port flushed and a great check up.

We jumped back in the van and headed on our way to New Mexico. Keegan became ill, so we called it a day in West Memphis, Arkansas. We kept a close eye on Keegan and gave her Tylenol for her fever. The next day we arrived in Norman, Oklahoma (Home of the Sooners). We returned to our old stomping ground to visit Jeff's family and the newest Marler, Addison Dawn. The next morning we had a family breakfast and headed out.

We made it to Amarillo that night and to our final destination, Albuquerque, the next afternoon. We had a corporate apartment waiting on us so we unpacked the U-haul, set up house and had a great night's sleep. Keegan was back to her old self again. On April 30<sup>th</sup>, Jeff reported to his new duty station, Kirkland Air Force Base, to attend a 3 1/2-month "Pavehawk" flight school.

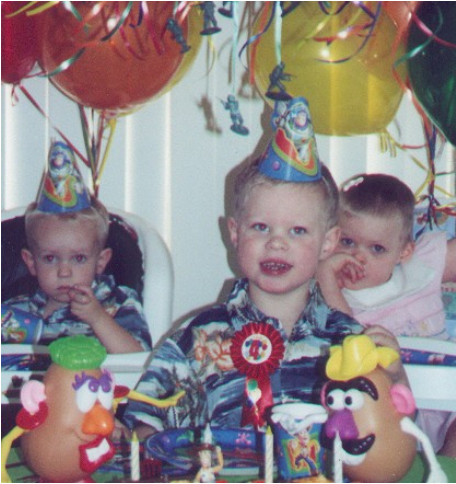
On May 1<sup>st</sup> Jeff showed up for the first day of the course and the civilian instructors went on strike. This delayed our stay in Albuquerque. May also brought severe allergies to Kristy and the kids. Must be the desert! Keegan met with her new pediatrician, Dr. Tapia, at the University of New Mexico's Children's Hospital. While Dr. Tapia made arrangement for Keegan to meet with the other specialty doctors on her team, we slowly started to venture out and seek adventures that Braden and Keegan had been denied for so long. We visited the Zoo, parks, swimming pools and went to a few public events. It was priceless seeing the pure joy on Braden's and Keegan's faces with their newfound freedom!

In June, Keegan had her monthly port flushing at Dr. Tapia's. She became very ill within hours. We remembered Keegan also became sick after her last flushing in Birmingham on our cross-country trip. We urged the doctor to check Keegan for a port infection. Her blood cultures proved there was an infection and she was hospitalized for IV antibiotics. Keegan was eventually released and a home care nurse came to the apartment to train us for her continued treatments. At the end of the 10-day course of antibiotics a decision was made to have her port surgically removed. The surgery went smoothly and the port appeared badly infected. We also accepted an offer on our home in Alabama. We were looking forward to saving the mortgage payment.

July brought celebration. We took in the Independence Day festivities at Kirkland Air Force Base decked out in Red, White &



Blue. In mid July, Kerri, Jonathan & Christian (Kristy's sister & family) came for a visit to celebrate Braden's 4th birthday. We had a "Toy Story" party. Braden was really excited with all the decorations and great gifts. Braden also en-



joyed having his cousin to play with. An instant pal! A few days later we closed on the sale of our Alabama home. We now could focus our attention on a new home at our next duty station, Nellis Air Force Base, Las Vegas, Nevada. Kristy and Jeff celebrated their 13<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. We left the kids with their Auntie & Uncle and went out on a date. We went to a Depeche Mode concert (we were feeling nostalgic) and dinner. Don't kid yourselves, we called home several times checking on the kids (ha ha). Keegan underwent her 2<sup>nd</sup> post- chemo MRI at the end of the month and the results were perfect. No reoccurrence!

In August we found ourselves still in New Mexico. Jeff's helicopter course was painfully dragging along. Keegan finished taking Bactrim (anti-pneumonia medicine), as she was chemo free for 6 months. She only takes Tegretol (anti-seizure drug) twice a day now. We drove to Las Vegas to house hunt. We stayed on the strip at Bally's and then at the Luxor. We spent the entire day house hunting so it left us with little energy to enjoy the strip. We did manage a nightly stroller walk so we could take in the bright lights, attractions and Nevada heat! We reserved a custom home lot in a lovely new community nestled near the mountains. All the fine details were made with a designer over the phone and computer. The 2284 sq. ft. two-story home should be completed by Christmas.

Braden started special preschool in September. He was thrilled the moment he picked out his backpack! He was finally going to socialize with peers and soak in all the experiences school provides. Braden has a speech delay, so this program is designed to work on that. He has 10 other classmates with delays such as speech, occupational (fine motor) and physical (large motor). The class has a Head Teacher, 2 Assistant Teachers, a Speech Therapist, an Occupational



Therapist and a Physical Therapist. We love when he shares stories, games and songs with us that he learned at school. He is very social and is learning that not all kids loved to be hugged. He has made progress in school and this program seems to be tailor-made for him.

We drove to Colorado for the weekend to spend time with Kerri and her family. Our kids love the playtime and Kristy and Kerri got in hours of laughs. Keegan received her first round of dead virus shots. She is on her way to perfect health. Our family reached a goal this month as well. We attended our first cancer related event at the Zoo to celebrate Keegan's battle with cancer. Braden & Keegan had a great time feeding the animals and we felt like a normal family for a change!

Of course the horrific events on Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> has left a lasting impression on all of us. We reached out to all our military friends around the world to check on their status. Our prayers are with them and their families as they fight for our freedom.

Jeff's Mom, and her husband Doug, arrived for a short visit. We went to the state fair and watched Braden and Keegan enjoy the rides. A few days after their departure, we awoke to Keegan vomiting and crying in her crib. We put her in bed with us and noticed her surgery bone flap was pushed out. This a sign of a shunt malfunction and increased cranial pressure. We quickly got on the phone and told the hospital Keegan needed a CAT scan to check for a shunt malfunction. The films convinced the Neurosurgeon there wasn't a shunt malfunction. We were told to come back if Keegan started vomiting, became increasingly tired or appeared dizzy. She did not, but her bone flap is still out in the front by her left temple/ear area. It is resting on top of the other part of her skull. We think the pressure from throwing up made it possible for the bone to get pushed out. It is causing her no discomfort.

In early October we attended the famous Albuquerque Balloon fiesta. We attended the evening "Balloon glow". It was breathtaking! Keegan underwent her 3<sup>rd</sup> post-chemo MRI. It was "virtually identical to the previous MRI". No reoccurrence of tumor! Jeff celebrated his 35<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 21<sup>st</sup>. Keegan also had her 2<sup>nd</sup> round of dead virus shots with no complications.

The kids took part in Halloween this year. Braden was "Woody" and Keegan "Jessie" from the movie "Toy Story 2". They looked adorable. We trick or treated at a couple of



houses on base and then headed to the mall. Braden and Keegan were not that thrilled about getting the candy, but loved all the costumes and attention. This was an experience that really made us reflect on how far we've come.

We headed back to Las Vegas in November

to do a walk through of our home. The house was coming along nicely. We took the rest of the visit to become familiar with the area. We found Braden's school, Keegan's hospital, the base, furniture stores and the apartment we will be living in until our home is finished. It was a short but very productive trip. We celebrated Thanksgiving at the Officer's club on Kirkland (our family tradition). Lots of choices with no cooking or mess to deal with. Keegan had her 3<sup>rd</sup> round of dead virus immunizations at the end of the month. She is done with dead virus shots until August 2002. She will start her live virus shots in March.

In December Jeff should finish his school.



Braden will say goodbye to his friends before we pack up and move to Nevada. We hope to move into our new home by Christmas. In the meantime, we will get all of Keegan's Doctors set up and prepare Braden for his new school. Jeff will sign in to the 66<sup>th</sup> Rescue Squadron (the Jolly Greens) as a Combat Search and Rescue Pilot and we will move into our new home. We have plans to celebrate Christmas at a hotel on the strip and attend church. It should be a busy month!

After the New Year, Jeff will have to leave for "Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape" school in the dead of winter in Washington State. Keegan will have an EEG to check for seizure activity. If the test comes back clean, Keegan will slowly taper off Tegretol. She will then be medication free. She has her next MRI in February. They will then be scheduled bi-annually for the



next two years. The following two years the MRI will be done once a year. If she remains tumor free by 2006 she will be "**CURED**". We will meet that goal!!!!

Remember, when you are in Vegas, be sure to look us up! We'd love to visit.

Our new address is:

**MARLER's**  
**5134 Pearl Creek Court**  
**Las Vegas, Nevada**  
**89131**

As always, we want to thank you for the continued prayers, love and interest in our angels fight with cancer. You have given us the calm and strength needed to make it this far. We cherish you all!

Have a Merry Christmas and a Healthy & Blessed New Year!