

# Grad returns to St. Margaret to give thanks - and give back - to Casey Cares

BEL AIR - Bumps and bruises are a daily occurrence for parents with young children. With two of their own, Raymond and Kelly Link were no different.

Their son, Christopher, bumped his front left hip a decade ago, leaving him in tears in his kindergarten class at St. Margaret School in Bel Air, where his mother is a longtime staffer.

She said it was an unusual occurrence for the then-6-year-old. An emergency room visit and numerous medical appointments later, a lump Kelly Link had discovered on her son was diagnosed as a Wilms Tumor, a form of kidney cancer in children.

"It was my first year teaching here and I was gone - sometimes at the drop of a hat," said Kelly, a resource teacher, who recalls colleagues saying, "You take care of your family...we understand."

Ten years cancer free, Christopher, now a 16-year-old sophomore at Calvert Hall College High School in Towson, returned to St. Margaret School to share his story and give thanks to the Casey Cares Foundation, which helps ailing children, after a Jan. 29 Mass that opened Catholic Schools Week activities.

"We have a very special person who came to visit you today, to share a special story with you all," said Madeleine Hobik, principal of St. Margaret School, introducing Christopher.

The slender, 6-foot-tall young man, dressed in khaki pants, blue blazer and tie, approached the ambo.

"I used to sit right where you're sitting when I was a student here," said the 10<sup>th</sup>-grader. "I want to thank you and tell you that a long time ago, I was really sick. Because of the prayers and love of my classmates, my struggle was made easier."

Casey Cares also helped, sending him and his parents on a pirate ship cruise and to sporting events. Christopher told the Review about the new Star Wars pajamas he was given by Casey Cares during treatment many years ago.

“When you receive a little fuzzy thing like that, it makes you feel you’re back at home, normal, loved,” he said.

With that, he proceeded to add a new Star Wars robe to pajamas collected by St. Margaret School students for Casey Cares.

Christopher displayed a wide grin while recalling the SpongeBob get well poster his kindergarten teacher Margaret Kelly created for his classmates to sign, and the baseball hat he was given after he lost his hair from rigorous chemotherapy (he also underwent radiation therapy).

Those keepsakes are tucked away, reminders of the support he received during the most challenging time in his young life.

“You don’t give up on hope, you say your prayers, and God will be with you,” his father, Raymond said.

The visit to St. Margaret was also a homecoming for Casey Baynes, founder and executive director of the Casey Cares Foundation, who graduated from the parish school and then the John Carroll School in Bel Air. She was at St. Margaret to receive nearly 500 sets of new pajamas that the foundation will share.

“This is my childhood,” she said. “I went to elementary school here, and have so many memories, of being an altar server, amazing opportunities and lasting friendships. It was awesome to be back here.”

Her belief in Catholic education hasn’t wavered since her Bel Air days. Casey’s children attend Mount de Sales Academy in Catonsville, Our Lady of Good Counsel in Montgomery County and St. Louis School in Clarksville.

The Link’s oldest child, Delaney, is a graduate of St. Margaret School and the John Carroll School in Bel Air. She majors in biology at Salisbury University.

“Surviving cancer had an impact on my faith,” Christopher said during his St. Margaret visit. “God had plan for me, and he still does.”

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