



Ben Sauer was the focus of Blue4Ben.

Community mourns Ben Sauer, 5-year-old from Clarence who inspired outpouring of support

By Melinda Miller | Published May 14, 2014

The news in the short, sad message rippled across the Internet like a small explosion:

"Ben is with Jesus now. He took his first breath in heaven peacefully at 8:05 p.m. last night. Thank you so much for praying. Our baby is at peace now."

Benjamin Sauer, 5, the bright-eyed boy who inspired the #Blue4Ben movement, lost his fight with cancer Tuesday night.

Wednesday afternoon, after the Sauer family of Clarence Center posted the information on Facebook, thousands of people who had been following the little boy's struggles through his mother's blog responded with condolences and prayers.

They also responded with deep personal sadness over the loss of a child most of them had never met.

"As the news was passed through our office, there was not a dry eye in the place. (H)e was loved and prayed for by all," Marjorie Jasinski wrote.

From Barbara Schilling: "You have united an entire community with your son's struggle. Now the entire community cries for your loss. He is now an angel looking over his family as much as his family watched over him. God bless you."

The sentiments flowed in faster than anyone could read them, all from people who have been touched by the story of the little boy whose happy life took a terrible turn earlier this year. In February, Ben was diagnosed with Stage 4 glioblastoma, a kind of brain tumor rarely found in children. Surgery and other treatments could not stop the fast-moving cancer, and his family turned to their community and their faith for help.

Western New York churches, schools and businesses rallied behind the cause of "Blue 4 Ben" – so named because Ben always wore blue to help people tell him from his twin brother, Jack. Buildings and bridges were illuminated in blue lights, and groups wore blue to raise money for Ben and for cancer research.

Meanwhile, Andy and Mindy Sauer prayed for a miracle.

With three children at home and expecting a fourth, Mindy still found time to share their experiences – medical, personal and spiritual – online at www.blue4ben.com/blog.html, a "friends and family" blog that captured the attention of thousands who have used it to offer their prayers and share their own stories.

Most of those who responded to Mindy Sauer's posts were women, but many men were also touched by Ben's story. Buffalo Bills Hall of Fame quarterback Jim Kelly, who is in his own fight with cancer, was among those sending condolences Wednesday, along with many other fathers who wrote about their own sons and daughters.

The family's strong belief in a loving God through their darkest times also continues to inspire Ben's supporters.

"Your unwavering faith, candor and love have touched me more than I can tell you," wrote Mary Brenneisen Hoover. "I have been checking often for updates and sit here now in shock. My prayers for Ben and your family will continue. You have done an amazing job of glorifying God through this whole ordeal. Your baby will never be forgotten."

Wednesday's news stunned many people, although on Monday, a week after Ben and Jack celebrated their fifth birthdays, a heartbroken Mindy Sauer had warned on her blog that Ben's condition was deteriorating:

"None of us are promised tomorrow. But from the look of things, I'm not sure how many more tomorrows God has in store for Ben," she wrote. "From what we can tell, this is Ben's eleventh hour."

In eloquent prose, she told how the illness and sadness were taking over their lives, and how their tears were turning into sobs of grief. Still, she summoned the strength to end her message in prayer, asking that Ben receive comfort, peace and freedom from his pain.

And then she added, "Show him the way into heaven and promise me, You'll be the first to greet him. Wipe away his tears and let him know we won't be that far behind him."

While messages continue to come from many states and from Kenya, Germany, Australia and other countries, it is clear that Ben's biggest impact was at home. As Tiffany Smallwood noted in one of the hundreds of Twitter messages mourning the boy,

"Buffalo will always be #Blue4Ben."

There will be a service for Ben at 11 a.m. Saturday in The Chapel at Crosspoint in Getzville. All other arrangements will be private.

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