



Benjamin "Ben" Nikowa Keel

September 16, 1978 - June 4, 2023

It is with sorrow unimaginable that we announce the passing of Benjamin "Ben" Nikowa Keel, on June 4, 2023, after a long, hard-fought battle with Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE). In his passing, Ben was surrounded by his beloved wife, children, and family. Ben was born September 16, 1978 to Mary Kay Scaggs and Franklin Donald Keel in Shawnee, Oklahoma.

Ben came into this world a gentle but fierce soul who fully embraced life and everyone in it. Ben spent his childhood amongst sisters and cousins, tubing at Blue River, riding bikes on red dirt roads, reading mysteries, sharing ghost stories, singing, and watching 70s and 80s television. From kindergarten through graduation, Ben attended Tecumseh Public Schools in Tecumseh, Oklahoma, Class of 1997. His endearing nature made an everlasting impact on all who knew him— teachers, coaches, teammates, and friends alike. Ben treasured his time as a state champion on the academic team, playing guard and defensive tackle for Tecumseh football, wrestling heavyweight, track & field shot put, and as a LifeGuides peer mentor.

After graduation, Ben served a mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Quezon City, Philippines where he devoted himself to our Savior, Father in Heaven, and the Filipino people. After his missionary service, Ben returned home to Oklahoma, where through the friendship of others, Ben was led to a chance phone call with the woman who became the love of his

life, April Dawn Parkinson. Trusting in the Lord and one another, Ben and April made eternal promises and were married and sealed in the Bountiful LDS temple January 20, 2001. Ben spent his life in full devotion to the beautiful and eternal family Ben and April created and are the beloved parents of, Silas Holden Keel, Zachary Nikowa Keel, Lydia Marie Keel, and Micah Benjamin Keel. Over the years, Ben and his family made their homes in Norman, Oklahoma, Falls Church, Virginia, and Spanish Fork, Utah where they made countless, treasured friends along the way.

Ben attended the University of Oklahoma and East Central University and double-majored in Native American Studies and Political Science. He spent his professional career hoping to make our world a better and more just place. Ben was a proud member of the Chickasaw Nation and inspired to work for Indian Country, spending many years dedicated to Native affairs. Ben worked as the Executive Director for the White House Council for Native American Affairs where he worked closely with the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, tribal leaders, Administration, and the President in coordinating outreach and policy to Native American tribes and communities. Ben also served in a consultant role at the National Congress of American Indians, and worked as a political advisor on the 2016 presidential election, as well as other national, state, and local campaigns. Ben most recently served as a board member with the Native American Working Group for the Atlanta Braves and was honored with a World Series Championship ring. Ben was our jester, our co-conspirator, our practical joker, our go-to historian/walking encyclopedia, sports and political analyst, our defender, confidante, and friend. An athlete and avid sports and Oklahoma Sooners fan, participating and watching sports of every kind was a favorite pastime of Ben's. Ben was one who would carry the shot put and discus for track friends, don an Elvis wig and sing karaoke, join any lively debate, protect and defend on the field and in the governmental hallways, floors, and offices, impersonate SNL sketches, share his last and best slice of smoked brisket, and he was

always one to pick up his phone to call a friend or family, just because. Ben's love for sports, comedy, politics, history, tribal preservation, justice, and BBQ was only surpassed by his abiding faith and his deep love for his family. Ben celebrated his children, siblings, nephews, nieces, cousins, and other family and friends in all of their work, school, church, and athletic accomplishments. He was adored and beloved by everyone.

“Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light” —Dylan Thomas

Ben did not go gently. He raged and he fought for years, so that his life would be full of light, meaning, and joy for countless people, but most importantly, for his children and his wife. Every breath and every ounce of determination and hard work was done for them.

Ben was diagnosed with SLE in his 20s. It attacked multiple organ systems and led to dialysis, multiple broken bones, heart problems, and other illnesses that were either direct results of SLE or complications from it, and that ultimately took his life.

In honor of the life Ben lived, go love your family. Love your friends. Never pass up the opportunity to answer a message or call from a loved one. Send them that silly meme that only they will understand. Watch the doppler radar for them. Pick up the phone and tell them about the tornado, thunderstorm, or police chase coverage you just saw. Share the last slice of smoked brisket and all pickle-flavored things. Give them half of your fry-bread and cook them that okra. Go get one last half-banana & half-coconut sno-cone. Listen and share ghost stories with them. Teach them how to roller-skate. Call them just to hear them say hello. Play phone tag. Tell them lame jokes. Fight like cats and dogs. But make up later. Find middle ground. Stand up for them. Listen to their stories. See them. Love them. Love them hard.

“Moreover, we can’t fully appreciate joyful reunions later without tearful separations now. The only way to take sorrow out of death is to take love out of life” (Russell M. Nelson).

Ben was preceded in death by beloved grandparents, Mary Virginia Ruth, Delby Ray Scaggs, Wayne Lee Brown, Hilda Bessie Murphy, and Freeman Edmond Keel; his dear cousins Scott Alexander, Zachary Austin Keel, Tracey Taliaferro, and many other precious great grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and loved ones.

Ben is survived by his wife, April Dawn Parkinson, his children, Silas Holden Keel, Zachary Nikowa Keel, Lydia Marie Keel, and Micah Benjamin Keel, all of the home; his parents Mary Kay Scaggs, Franklin Donald Keel, and Keith Russell Brown; his sisters, Edie Robins, Amy Brown (Andrew), Julie Keel, Kelly Cabrerros (Ellison), and Laura Brown; his grandmother, Clarice Estelle Oplinger Brown; his parents-in-law Lana and Tom Parkinson; his brothers-in-law, David Parkinson (Chanelle) and Jason Smith (Stacy); his sisters-in-law, Stacy Hanson (Dirk), Kama Woods (Phillip), and countless cherished aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews, family, and friends.

The family wishes to extend gratitude to the first responders, physicians, nurses, and other healthcare workers who cared for Ben over the last few years. Additionally, they wish to express their gratitude to Alen Howard who generously offered to donate a kidney to Ben.

The family requests that condolences be sent to 1176 South 1920 East, Spanish Fork, Utah, 84660. In lieu of flowers, monetary donations may be made to Ben’s GoFundMe (<https://gofund.me/325c3fec>) or to April’s Venmo, found under the username @April-Keel-1.

A viewing for Ben will be held Saturday, June 10, 2023 at 9:30am, followed by

a funeral service at 11am, at 2162 East Canyon Road, Spanish Fork, Utah. Ben will be laid to rest beside his beloved Granny Virginia and his partner in mischief-making cousin Scott in Milburn, Oklahoma. Graveside services will be held 1:00pm on Friday, June 16 at Condon Grove Cemetery, Milburn, Oklahoma. A memorial service will be held 10:00am, Saturday, June 17, at 1506 West Imhoff Road, Norman, Oklahoma.

Previous Events

Graveside Service

JUN 16. 1:00 PM (CT)

Condon Grove Cemetery
Milburn, OK 73450

Tribute Wall



“ Benjamin "Ben" Nikowa Keel

October 05, 2023 at 07:47 PM