

A Pretty Good Track Record Miller Family Perseveres Through Challenges



Troy (Berry) Miller clears the bar at the District Track & Field Meet at Shippensburg in May. Jumping has been just one of the high points for Troy and his family this spring. Photo by Jeff Ruppenthal, courtesy of LancasterOnline. Lancaster, PA.

Solanco High School sophomore Troy (Berry) Miller jumped a personal record 6' 7" at the PIAA State Track & Field Meet on Saturday, May 24, good for third place in the state high jump. A week earlier he placed second in District 3. His jump at states was the best jump this year in the Lancaster-Lebanon League, which was stacked with strong jumpers.

He didn't reach those heights without a good bit of practice and perseverance.

Troy, 16, along with his sisters Troyana, 13, and Heaven, 7, were adopted by Lloyd & Cathy Miller on April 3. Getting to adoption day required more than a little perseverance for Lloyd & Cathy and the family, and the COBYS Family Services staff

who accompanied them on their four-and-a-half-year journey.

Things were chaotic at the Miller home in southern Lancaster County the Tuesday evening in May that I stopped in to chat. The family beagle and yellow lab were on lock down and occasionally registered an objection. The makings of supper were scattered on the table, on hold until my departure. Cayla, the Miller's 18-year-old biological daughter, who is studying cosmetology at the Career and Technology Center, was giving Troy a haircut. Her prom dress hung nearby. The State Meet and Solanco's prom both were coming up on Saturday.

Lloyd had arrived home from work a short time before my arrival—he's a carpenter with Warfel

Construction. Cathy had wrapped up her day at the Quarryville branch of Wells Fargo Bank, and Troyana and Heaven were watching TV after a day at school.

Troyana is in seventh grade at Smith Middle School, where she was accepted into the National Honor Society this spring with a 4.0 GPA. She explains matter-of-factly that she really doesn't care for school, but figures if you have to go anyway, you might as well get A's.

Heaven is in first grade at Bart Colerain Elementary. All three girls take dance lessons. Add in Troy's sports—he does football and basketball in addition to jumping—and church involvements at Middle Octorara Presbyterian, and you have a recipe for a very busy life. This wasn't exactly how Lloyd & Cathy had planned it.

Cathy has a history of foster care in her family. Her grandfather was a foster child for a time. Her parents cared for foster children before Cathy was born. In fact, she was named after a favorite foster daughter. So she and Lloyd agreed they would give it a try.

"We thought we would take one child," she recalls. When the phone rang in September 2009, it was COBYS asking the Millers to consider a sibling group of three. After talking it over, Lloyd & Cathy welcomed Troy, Troyana, and Heaven into their home.

The children were able to return to their birth parents the following

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Mission Statement

Motivated by Christian faith, COBYS Family Services educates, supports, and empowers children and adults to reach their full potential.

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Fostering Hope is the quarterly newsletter of COBYS Family Services, a Christian family service agency, affiliated with the Atlantic Northeast District of the Church of the Brethren.

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Stick-to-itiveness

Each Memorial Day weekend, my family and my sister's family spend the weekend together at a cabin in Huntingdon County. While time with my sister and brother-in-law is something I look forward to, what I enjoy most at this annual family gathering is seeing our kids (they have four, we have three, ages 14-20) interacting. Our kids so much look forward to and make the most of this long weekend with their cousins.

One of our favorite activities at the cabin is sitting around the campfire in the evening, talking. But without wood, there's no fire, so a few weeks ago my two daughters and I were cutting wood in preparation for our weekend at the mountains. One of the pieces I was splitting by hand (about 24" in diameter) had a large knot in it. Knots make splitting wood significantly more difficult (in case you did not know that).



I was working very hard, hitting the wood numerous times in my attempts to split it. One of my daughters suggested using the chain saw to "split" the piece in half. I told her that I needed to split the piece by hand. The wood wasn't going to get the best of me. It was just something I needed to do! So after some more swings and some more sweat, the piece finally split in two.

I am not sure if my daughters were inspired by my tenacity and impressed with my great strength or frustrated with my stubbornness and unwillingness to accomplish the goal in an easier way. I decided not to ask them what they thought,

but I choose to believe it was the former.

Stick-to-itiveness. I am surrounded daily with examples of stick-to-itiveness. At home, my wife gets up each weekday at 5 a.m. to run three to five miles. (And I impress myself because I split a piece of wood with a knot in it.) My kids almost always are self-motivated in their studies and, as a result, are doing extremely well in school. They work on projects and homework at times when it would be much easier to do something else.

I also am surrounded by these persistent people at work. Our resource families invest countless hours and so much effort dealing with challenging issues so that children are given their best chance to succeed. Our staff devote significant energy to educating, supporting, and empowering children and adults to reach their full potential. The cover story in this issue is a good example.

I like the following quotes from Thomas Edison. After trying more than 10,000 times to make a light bulb without success, Edison said, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work." He also said, "Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time."

Someone else has observed that it isn't how many times you fall down that matters, but how many times you get back up.

Fight the good fight, finish the race, and keep the faith!

Mark Cunningham, Executive Director

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spring, but a few months later they were back in care, as their birth parents continued to struggle with drug addiction and related problems.

By then Lloyd & Cathy were caring for three other foster children and didn't feel able to add three more kids to the mix. By early 2011, two other foster care placements hadn't gone well for Troy, Troyana, and Heaven, and the Millers had said farewell to one foster child. So in February they welcomed Troy and Troyana back home; Heaven rejoined the family in April.

For a time, they had a full house, with five foster children and Cayla—a few more than the one foster child they initially thought they could handle. (The other two foster daughters eventually were adopted by another family.)

Though they initially had signed up just to do foster care, Lloyd & Cathy knew when the threesome returned to their home, it would be for good. But serious obstacles remained. The children's birth father appealed the termination of parental rights. And Lloyd & Cathy had some challenges of their own.

Things were going well with the kids, but financial issues stood in the way of adoption. Lloyd had been laid off for a time and, when he found work, he took a pay cut. Cathy had given up a well-paying but demanding job to be more available to the children, resulting in an additional reduction in income. They didn't adjust their spending accordingly and fell behind on home and vehicle payments.

COBYS Adoption Caseworker Matt Stoltzfus, who also assists families with their finances through COBYS' Community Connections program, began to delve into the situation. "This is a journey we were on for a very long time," says Matt. "It was like



The Miller family, flanked by COBYS staff Matt Stoltzfus and Sharon Kingsley (left) and Amanda Annis on their April 3 adoption day.

this onion. We peeled off one layer and then found another expense."

Matt referred the Millers to Tabor Community Services, who helped the family budget and consolidate debt. "At first," says Cathy, "you're angry because you think you should be able to do this yourself." But once finances were stabilized and the weight was lifted she was grateful that "they helped us get where we needed to go."

"When I think of the Millers," says Matt, "I think of commitment. They are committed to these kids and persevered through a lot. We want to empower families, and I think that's what we did. It was a team effort. We empowered them and they committed to the process and finished."

Cathy admits there were times when they felt like giving up, but then one of the children would greet her in the morning and she would know that today wasn't the day to quit.

One of those times was last fall, when bacteria in their well water required them to get a treatment system that they couldn't afford in order to continue to serve as foster

parents. But with the help of a donation from a church, a deal on an ultraviolet light facilitated by a friend from their own congregation (who also installed the system for free), they overcame this obstacle.

"The Millers, despite difficulties, hung in there because that's what the kids needed," says COBYS Foster Care Supervisor Sharon Kingsley. "For me, what's special about the Millers is that they came to COBYS just for the purpose of fostering and they followed God's leading to be the kind of family that the kids needed them to be—and that's a forever family."

The gallery in Courtroom 3 at Lancaster County Courthouse on April 3 was packed with family, friends, and many COBYS staff who have accompanied the Millers on their journey so far. Speaking from the stand, Matt addressed the children: "If you ever had any doubt that Lloyd & Cathy loved you, you can put that aside. They worked very hard to get here today."

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Sharing the Joy Wedding Guests Give Gifts to COBYS

Ron & Karen Peters waited a long time to get married, so when they did said “I do” on May 3, it was impossible to contain the joy.

“It was very neat to see their unbridled joy,” said COBYS Executive Director and wedding guest Mark Cunningham. “She was just so happy and he was just beaming. It was all very sweet. It really was.”

Ron & Karen decided to share their joy with others. Since they were getting married later in life, Ron, who owns an excavating business, and Karen, who



teaches kindergarten at New Holland Elementary School, were pretty well set with toasters and towels. So they invited their guests to give wedding presents to support the ministries of COBYS instead. And give they did.

Some 400 guests at the Greg & Tammy Miller farmette near Strasburg, where the outdoor wedding was held, donated more than \$3,700 in cash. And Mrs. Peters’ students—about half of the 37 kids in her morning and afternoon classes attended the wedding with family members—collected a heap of toys, games, baby items, and craft supplies to benefit children that COBYS serves.

“We both had it on our hearts that we really wanted to give and not have us be the focus,” says Karen.



Guests at Ron & Karen Peters’ wedding, including some students from Mrs. Peters’ kindergarten classes (pictured with Ron & Karen), donated more than \$3,700 and a variety of children’s items to benefit COBYS.

“We’re older. We have two households we’re bringing together, so we didn’t really need anything. We wanted to point folks to the Lord, and we wanted to do that by encouraging them to bless someone else.”

“It’s safe to say that COBYS feels blessed,” says Director of Development Don Fitzkee. “And we’ll do what we

can to pass that blessing on to others.”

After a three-day get-away to New York as a down payment on a honeymoon, Ron’s back to digging and Karen is finishing out the school year. Occasionally a student slips up and calls Mrs. Peters “Miss Heisner,” but otherwise everybody seems to be adjusting just fine.

The Graduate: Luis Is One of 35 Kids to Complete Dina School This Spring

Eight-year-old Luis Cooper graduated on May 21. So did his dad, Matt, and he’s a teacher.

For 18 Wednesday evenings this winter and spring Luis and Matt (pictured at right with Luis holding his “diploma”) attended the Incredible Years Dina Dinosaur Child Training Program and accompanying class for parents at the COBYS Family Life Center in Lancaster.

While 18 weeks is a long time, Matt says it didn’t seem long. “We actually made it kind of fun,” he said, turning Wednesdays into a father/son night, with supper out before the class and other special activities built around it.

Dinosaur School serves children, ages 4-8, who are difficult to manage, aggressive, or may have disruptive

behaviors. Concurrent Incredible Years parenting classes cover some of the same topics that the children are addressing.

“It’s kind of neat,” says Matt, “because you’re all on the same sheet of music. We were both learning.”

Luis’s class was one of five offered this spring, with a total enrollment of 35 children. In addition to the one at the Family Life Center on King Street in Lancaster, four were held at Head Start Centers in Columbia and Lancaster. Two parent classes were offered, serving 22 adults.

“We’ve seen amazing progress regarding the changes occurring in these children,” says COBYS Family Life Education Supervisor Abby Keiser. “Anxiety has decreased. Social skills, friendship skills, problem-solving skills

Four Families Recognized at Annual Resource Parent Banquet

COBYS Family Services recognized four families at its annual Resource Parent Appreciation Banquet at Casa di Fiori, in Leola, on Monday, May 5. The annual dinner for COBYS resource families is held in conjunction with National Foster Care Month.

"We truly enjoy planning this event each year," says Resource Home Coordinator Emily Rice, "as a way to show our foster and adoptive parents how much we appreciate all of the hard work that they do to keep kids safe, healthy, happy, and loved."

Honored for 10 years of service were Kevin & Julia Martin, Lebanon. In their decade with COBYS Kevin and Julia have adopted four children and provided foster care for seven others.

Recognized for five years of service were: Gary & Dawn Dupler, Elizabethtown; Jeff & Tiffanie Monchik,



Four families were recognized for their years of service at the May 5 Resource Parent Appreciation Banquet. (From left) Joel & Jaclyn Umholtz, Gary & Dawn Dupler, Jeff & Tiffanie Monchik, and Kevin & Julia Martin.

Marietta; and Joel & Jaclyn Umholtz, Lancaster.

Collectively, all four families have

provided foster care for 19 children, adopted 10 children, and provided short-term respite care for 25 children.

Sixty resource parents, along with 20 staff and board members, attended the dinner. COBYS showed its appreciation by giving each family who attended an herb planter and a gift card to an area business. As an additional token, 16 area businesses provided door prizes.

Entertainment was provided by The King's Strings, a strings-playing adoptive family from the Mechanicsburg area (who also performed at the COBYS Nightly News Banquet in March).

Currently COBYS Family Services has 64 approved resource families caring for 50 foster children from Lancaster and Berks Counties. COBYS holds free monthly informational meetings in Lancaster and Wyomissing for families wanting to explore foster care or adoption. Upcoming dates are July 1, Lancaster; and July 8, Wyomissing. The time at both locations is 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.



have increased. This is what I'm hearing."

"They did a different kind of rewards system," says Matt, who is a COBYS adoptive parent and a science teacher at Lampeter Strasburg High

School. "It made me cognizant of focusing on the good behavior. A lot of time as parents we don't look for the good behavior and we focus on the bad behavior."

One tangible result of the program that Matt has seen in Luis is a growing ability to think before acting. He also has enjoyed the child-directed play advocated in the program, where adults follow the lead of children as they play together.

The Incredible Years programs are a cooperative effort of the COBYS Family Life Education and Counseling programs and have been funded by a \$200,000 grant from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency.

While it was still indefinite, COBYS staff were expecting to receive confirmation in mid-June of a \$200,000 extension of the grant to partner with the School District of Lancaster to expand Incredible Years programming in 2014 to 2016.

'Nightly News Banquet' Sets Giving, Attendance Records



At least anchormen Mark Cunningham (left) and Don Fitzkee were amused at The Nightly News Banquet. The evening included a mix of food, fun, information, and inspiration that attracted a capacity crowd and brought in donations totaling more than \$50,000.

The COBYS Nightly News Banquet ended up being big news.

Held March 6 at the Middle Creek Church of the Brethren, the event established a new attendance record and shattered last year's giving record. Donations totaled \$51,583, up from \$44,100 in 2013. Attendance was 558,

up from 549.

Attendance would have been higher, but seating was limited, forcing planners to turn some people away. At one point, the 550 banquet slots were filled and 60 additional people were on a waiting list.

"We were thrilled with the strong

response to our banquet invitation," said Director of Development Don Fitzkee, "and we really hated to turn people away."

To accommodate people who wanted to see the program, arrangements were made to live stream it into the church sanctuary. People who came just for the program were offered a coupon for some ham loaf and gourmet potatoes at Gene Wenger's Meats & Fine Foods. While only 14 people came for the live stream, that was enough to establish the new attendance record.

The banquet program took the form of a nightly news broadcast, with a mixture of fun and serious features. The King's Strings, comprised of John & Cindy King and some of their eight children, provided lively gathering music and then wowed the crowd during the "Arts & Culture" segment of the "newscast."

Less serious items included Greater Brunnerville Area traffic updates from Nicole Lauzus; the therapeutic weather report from weather therapist Laura Miller; sports by Mark Cunningham; and two original commercials for Gene Wenger's ham loaf. Wenger's donated the ham loaf for the meal and the coupons for live stream attenders.

"People really seemed to enjoy the humor," said Don. "But we hope they were paying attention to the real news too!"

The serious news included a Work for the Well-Being of the City campaign update with a "live look in" at classes at the COBYS Family Life Center; a report on foster/adoptive resource parent training taking place the night of the banquet at Lancaster Church of the Brethren; and a feature on respite parents Dave & Marj Stoddard and the Dupler family.

Video of the entire banquet and individual segments is available at YouTube.com/COBYSFS.

Plans Underway for September 7 Bike & Hike

Plans are underway for the annual COBYS Bike & Hike, which will be held Sunday afternoon, September 7, at the Lititz Church of the Brethren. Brochures and information on our website will be available in July.

The event includes a three-mile walk, 10- and 25-mile bicycle rides, and a 65-mile motorcycle ride. This year's motorcycle ride is heading north into scenic areas of Berks County.

Last year, for the first time, Bike & Hike income exceeded \$100,000. Goals for this year are 600 participants and \$110,000.

Walkers and bicyclists donate a \$25 registration fee, obtain support

from sponsors, or both. Motorcycles are \$35 per cycle, plus \$25 for an additional passenger. Those who pre-register by August 29 receive a \$5 discount. Individuals who raise \$25 or more in pledges do not need to pay the registration fee.

Each participant receives a free t-shirt, ice cream and refreshments, and a chance to win a door prize. Those who raise certain levels of support earn additional prizes.

New this year is a Silent Auction. We currently are seeking business sponsors and donors of supplies, prizes, and auction items. Contact Don Fitzkee at 717-656-6580 or don@cobys.org for more information.

Fun Walk Marks 20th Anniversary

The crowd wasn't large, but the spirit was good and the giving generous at the 20th annual COBYS Family Fun Walk. Held May 4 at Peter Becker Community in Harleysville, the walk attracted 75 participants and resulted in pledges totaling more than \$9,400. With additional gifts coming in, the \$10,000 goal for the event still is within reach. In 2013, 86 participants raised \$9,113.

Among this year's participants were a few walkers who were at the first event two decades ago (and just about every one since), including John & Janet Hoover and Eugene



Wampler. Another longtime participant, Earl Rineer, made walking three miles look easy at age 91.

Top fundraisers were Joan

Top fundraiser Joan Kabakjian (right) and family members (from left) Daniel, Julianna, & Ken pose with Donna Parcell, sporting her one-of-a-kind hot pink COBYS shirt.

Kabakjian and family, of Harleysville, \$1,210; and Donna Parcell, Souderton, \$643. In honor of the 20th anniversary of the event and Donna's commitment to the walk, she received a one-of-a-kind bright pink COBYS t-shirt (since pink is pretty much the only color she wears). Youth groups from Indian Creek and Quakertown COBs earned a gym and pizza night by raising more than \$1,000.

The Fun Walk consists of a three-mile walk, followed by ice cream and prizes. The Bauman Family Fruit Butters & Cider, Sassamansville, sponsored the walk, and several other businesses and individuals contributed. Photos from the walk are available at [Facebook.com/COBYSFS](https://www.facebook.com/COBYSFS).

Praise Dinner Raises \$18,000+ for COBYS

The 19th annual Wenger Foundation Praise Dinner raised more than \$95,000 for four ministries, including \$18,652.50 for COBYS Family Services. Held April 16 at the Lebanon Expo Center, the event featured a buffet meal and inspirational music from the 50-member Penn View Bible Institute Choir and Instrumental

Ensemble. More than 800 people attended the \$100/plate dinner.

Numbers were down from the 2013 event, which attracted a record attendance of some 900 people, and raised more than \$100,000, including \$20,049 for COBYS.

This year's dinner fell on Holy Week and also was just five weeks after a record-setting COBYS banquet. "With the timing and the great response at our banquet, we were thrilled to have such a strong show of support at this year's Praise Dinner," said Director of Development Don Fitzkee.

Other ministries benefitting from the event were Evangelical Seminary, Friendship Community, and On Fire Youth Ministries.

Underwriting the event's expenses were: John Byler; Country Fare Restaurant; Roger & Marjorie Gerhart; Good's Disposal Services; Bud & Joyce Mitstifer; Tom B. Morrissey TV & Appliance; Roger & Carolyn North, North Group Consultants; Reedy Diesel Service; Bill & Nancy Smeltzer; Gene Wenger's Meats & Fine Foods; Sight & Sound Ministries, Inc.; and Wengers of Myerstown.



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Thanks!



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Judge Jay Hoberg echoed Matt's sentiments: "It has been a long, long journey with lots of uncertainty for these beautiful young people," he observed. "The Millers have a lot of stick-to-itiveness. You've been there for them. . . . So it's a great privilege for me to be able to finalize these adoptions and give them the permanency and stability they deserve."

Troy Miller has two more years at Solanco to pursue a state high jump championship. It won't happen without more hard work.

And certainly there will be additional challenges for the Miller family to overcome on their continuing

journey. The older children, especially, says Cathy, continue to grieve the separation from their birth parents even as they now view Lloyd & Cathy as mom and dad.

But the Millers have demonstrated a pretty good track record when it comes to persevering through challenges. Who knows how much higher they can go?

COBYS Welcomes Planned Gifts

Have you included COBYS in your will? Designated us as beneficiary of a life insurance policy? Set up a charitable gift annuity for our benefit? If you have, but haven't told us, please let us know so we can say thanks!

If you haven't, but would like to explore including COBYS ministries in your estate plans, we would be glad to talk with you about it. Planned giving allows you to make sure your own needs are cared for as long as you live, while also providing for the needs of others in the future.

To learn more, contact Director of Development Don Fitzkee at 717-656-6580 or don@cobys.org.