Twentysome years ago, Liz Butcher was living in Provo with her two young children and husband, Corey, a student at Brigham Young University. She had been diagnosed with epilepsy and was having 7–9 seizures a day, despite heavy doses of anti-seizure medications. Doctors told the Butchers that they shouldn’t have any more children, so she was also on two forms of birth control.

Three years later, Liz took the required pregnancy test before getting her next birth control shot. The test came back positive. She was five months pregnant.

All medications were stopped. She was admitted to the hospital and immediately went into withdrawal from the anti-seizure meds.

“All the docs came in and said ‘this pregnancy is not viable.’ I said ‘you can’t tell me I can’t have this baby.’ At five months it’s a baby and not something I can abort,” she said. “He was meant to be.”

The rest of the pregnancy was not easy. Liz went back on high doses of two of the anti-seizure meds. At that point, she and Corey knew there would be problems with the baby, but nobody could tell them what form those problems might take.

Kenneth arrived six weeks early, after only a 30-minute labor, Liz said, and was immediately taken to the NICU.

“He was blue. We didn’t know what would happen,” she said. But Kenneth hung on, and soon they took him home.

For the baby’s two-week check-up, Liz and Corey took him to a pediatric neurologist who shared an office with Liz’s neurologist.

“Her first words were, ‘this little boy—by the time he’s 2, you should put him in a home. He’s never going to walk or talk or feed himself,’” Liz said.

Kenneth, now 20, enters the room in a whirlwind, hugging his mom, picking up the cat, extending a hand to a visitor with the greeting, “I’m Kenneth. Who are you?”

Kenneth attended the Provo Early Education Program until the family moved to Logan when he was 3.

He has received every service imaginable from Logan School District, the Division of Services for People with Disabilities, and the Center for Persons with Disabilities at Utah State University, Liz said. He was a client of Dr. Dennis Odell at the CPD until he turned 18, and continues to see nurse practitioner George Wootton.

“Kenneth has none of the syndromes they thought he might have,” Liz said. “There were 100 labels they could have put on him. He has developmental delays with ‘tendencies,’ and he shows every one of those tendencies every day.”

When Kenneth was 11 or 12, Liz said, they made the decision to place him in a group home. Now, he spends half the week at the group home and half the week at home with his mom and dad. He earned a certificate of completion from Logan High School and is now attending a post-high program.

“Kenneth has come thousands of miles,” Liz said. “He’s doing great. He’s awesome, but it’s always an experience.”

Looking toward the future

In 2010, Liz was selling produce from her garden at the Cache Valley Gardener’s Market, when she decided to create an all-natural jam, without added sugar or artificial...
Butchers Bunches | Its All For Kenneth

ingredients. She saw it as a way to support other local growers, and as a way to provide for Kenneth’s future needs.

“What’s going to happen to Kenneth when there’s no Social Security, or we’re not around?” she said. “Initially this was supposed to be something for him when we’re gone. If something happens to us, it’s all for Kenneth.”

Liz started making jam, and people loved it, she said, because it tasted like fruit, not sugar.

A few weeks later, she was lamenting on social media about how she couldn’t find a good, high-quality chocolate in Utah. She quickly received an e-mail from Matt Caputo of Caputo’s Specialty Market in Salt Lake City.

“He personally invited me to his store, and said if your jam is that good and other people say it’s that good, bring some along and I’ll buy it,” she said. “He bought 40 cases, and we only made six cases at a time then!”

Eight weeks later, a representative from the Sundance Film Festival contacted Liz to buy 300 jars of jam for the swag bags that are given to celebrities. She borrowed $200 from her dad to buy jars.

Kenneth is involved in the business as much as possible, Liz said, and he names most of the jams. Because he loves music, most of them have a musical reference. The Sundance people wanted the jam’s name to reflect the idea that the stars come dressed in black. The ingredients for that first year’s jam included red and black raspberries and blueberries, soaked in amaretto and with a touch of Amano chocolate from Orem, Utah.

Liz told Kenneth about the requirements for the name and he said, “Mom, duh, Back in Black.”

Within two months, Liz said, Butcher’s Bunches was in all the Harmon’s stores and all the ski resorts in Utah, starting with Deer Valley. Now, the jam can be found in Cache Valley at places like Lee’s, the Island Market, the Spirit Goat and Cox’s Honeyland, as well as national chains like Kroger and Associated Stores. (For a complete list, visit the Butcher’s Bunches web site).

“It’s been fun,” Liz said. “The best thing is that the jams are just what they were when we started. We start with a set amount of fruit, and know which spices to use. There are no recipes; we go by smell and by taste.”

Each batch will yield eight to 10 cases of jam. There are 12 jars in a case.

Except for the loan from her dad to buy jars for that first batch of jam for Sundance, Butcher’s Bunches has operated without outside loans or financing. Liz and “co-jammer” Alicia Ferguson make the jam, and Corey does everything else, said Liz.

While the jam is made in a commercial kitchen at Bridgerland Applied Technology College, the business is still based in the Butchers’ home in Logan. A spare bedroom serves as office and storeroom. Orders are packaged and shipped from the living room.

Seated on the couch between his mom and his personal care attendant, Kenneth answers questions with mostly ‘yeah’ or ‘no’ while stroking Sniffers, the cat. He loves to swim (“he’s an insanely good swimmer,” Liz said) and fish (“this kid can catch anything on a stick and a string,” she said) and create new varieties of chili in a slow cooker.

He likes to go to the jam kitchen with Liz and bake oatmeal cookies to sell at the market. In fact, Liz said, sales of jam go up considerably when Kenneth has cookies to sell.

When Liz started selling veggies, Kenneth would sit next to the onions and talk to people as they went by. Now, he visits all the booths, Liz said, and comes back with a big smile and armfuls of free stuff.

“He loves everybody on the planet,” Liz said. “He knows more people than I do. He’s incredible. He has no fear, just an incredible amount of love for people. I wish everybody had that.”

Their presence at Sundance has grown from simply including jars of jam in the swag bags to catering the snacks in the press room, where celebrities meet with media representatives.