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Faith, hope, survival

Rincon resident DeeDee Miller fights breast cancer with strength and courage

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RINCON — There are three words a person is never prepared to hear: "You have cancer."

Deryl Davidson Miller, better known as DeeDee, is a young wife and mother of two children, Mackenzie, almost 7, and Sean, 5. In July 2009, she found a lump in her left breast.

Figuring it was a cyst that would clear up on its own, Miller decided to wait a few weeks to see if it cleared up. "On Aug. 6, that lump was still there and somewhat larger," she said.

Miller went to her doctor, who sent her next door for a diagnostic mammogram and



Miller after undergoing chemotherapy.

sonogram. "When the radiologist walked in, I knew it wasn't good news," she said. "His face told the story."

"Mrs. Miller," the doctor said, "I don't like the look of this, so I'm referring you to the Center for Breast Care at Memorial."

"On Aug. 12, I was in Dr. Ray Rudolph's office getting a needle core biopsy done," Miller said. "On Aug. 17, I



Photos special to Effingham Now

Rincon resident Deryl Davidson Miller, center, known as DeeDee to her friends and family, stands with some of her most loyal supporters at a recent fundraiser in Pooler. Miller was diagnosed with breast cancer in August 2009.

heard those three words, 'You have cancer,' and my life from that point on has never been the same."

Diagnosed

Miller was diagnosed with

stage two invasive ductile carcinoma, the most common form of breast cancer. In IDC, the cells have already left the duct and spread into surrounding tissue.

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PINK OUT!

Today's edition of Effingham Now commemorates Breast Cancer Awareness Month during the month of October. For more information about the Savannah Morning News Paint the Town Pink! campaign, visit savannahnow.com/pink.

4-H WEEK

This week is Georgia 4-H Week across the state of Georgia. Effingham County 4-H'ers have been busy all summer with activities.

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ATHLETE OF THE WEEK

Lady Rebel runner Riley Morrison's third straight first-place finish earns her Athlete of the Week honors.

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Accused bank robbers charged in more heists

SAVANNAH MORNING NEWS

SAVANNAH — Four men allegedly connected to a bank robbery in Rincon have been connected to five other robberies in Savannah, Savannah-Chatham metro police announced Tuesday.

Metro detectives have secured warrants against 26-year-old Luciano Ramone Moore, 19-year-old Rashamal Bradford, 18-year-old Stafon Jamar Davis and 17-year-old Jamal Chris Mitchell, all of Savannah, metro police spokesman Julian Miller said Tuesday.

Davis, Bradford and Moore already were in custody as suspects in a Sept. 21 robbery of a GeoVista Credit Union in Rincon.

Antwon Johnall Proctor, 30, also was charged as a suspect in the

SEE HEISTS, PAGE 6

Survival

FROM PAGE 1

"Not even the strongest faith can pick you up when those three worlds have knocked you down," Miller said. "The minute it hits you — BAM! — life as you know it has irrevocably changed."

But DeeDee didn't spend much time stewing. "I was blessed that day," she said. "God picked me out, brushed me off and sent me on my journey."

Next came the hardest part of treatment — deciding what to do.

Miller chose to have a bilateral — or double — mastectomy, followed by the most brutal of reconstruction surgeries.

"I was cut hip to hip, and then two flaps of my belly fat were dragged up through my abdomen to the empty spots that now occupied my body," Miller said. "I was able to have both the mastectomy and reconstruction all at once."

On Aug. 24, 2009, DeeDee underwent a nuclear bone scan, MRI and sentinel lymph node procedure, which requires the doctor to inject radioactive solution in the breast to locate the sentinel lymph node. If breast cancer has spread, it usually goes to the sentinel node first.

"This has to be done the day before surgery because the surgeons go in and remove several lymph nodes, which includes this sentinel lymph node," Miller said. "The radioactive solution 'lights up' the lymph nodes."

"The following day, I was admitted close to midnight the day before my surgery in order to go into a 'hot room,'" she said.

"My doctor requires his patients to go into an 89-degree hospital room in order to heat up the skin and bring blood to the surface. I was miserable — it was like a sauna."

"The next morning was D-day," DeeDee said. "I went

PAINT THE TOWN PINK!

For more breast cancer survivor stories and other October events related to Breast Cancer Awareness Month, visit savannahnow.com/pink.



into surgery early that morning, and the next thing I remember was waking up in post-op, crying for my mom and my sister."

Miller's sister Lane is a 10-year survivor of breast cancer. In families where either the BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene is present, breast cancer can be hereditary, but that wasn't the case with Miller's family.

"They did a complete genetic background," she said. "What they traced it to was that it was more than likely related to mutated genes from my dad's prostate cancer."

Miller underwent hours of surgery.

"They finally brought me up to my room, which was still very hot, and I was able to see my mom, husband and sister," she said.

"When Dr. Rudolph came in and told me they found cancer in one of my lymph nodes — devastation all over again," she said. "Again, God was right there to pick me up."

The next morning, Miller was doing so well her plastic surgeon, Dr. Richard J. Greco, sent her home.

Because the margins around the tumor were clear, Miller didn't have to undergo radiation. However, because cancer was found in a lymph node, she had to undergo six months of chemotherapy.

Hope for recovery

"I got through it, with God right by my side, and have been in remission since May of this year," she said. "I feel great. Dr. Greco is an artist. He gave me back my femininity, and I will be forever grateful to him."

Miller's strength amazed those around her.

She was hired to work at the Lowe's in Rincon in October 2007 and was at work

when she was told about the diagnosis.

"I was sitting in the parking lot on break when I said, 'It's been four days, I'm going to call,'" Miller said. "They connected me to the nurse. She said 'Are you at home, or are you at work? You have breast cancer.'"

"I said, 'I guess I need to come see you. I went back in and finished my shift. When I told people, they said, 'You need to go home.'"

But Miller chose to stay at work.

"I'm a very spiritual person," she said. "God removed that burden. I've had not one day of worry or fear. Now it's all good."

Helping hands

Betty Baker, chairwoman of the West Chatham YMCA board, Frankie Fort, the former chairwoman, and Ike Laroche, a board member who has done other Boston butt fundraisers for people with medical needs, knew about Miller's situation and wanted to help.

"She went through all this surgery, and not too long after, her husband was laid off from his job," Baker said. "He got another job, but they've been struggling."

Baker praised Miller's strength and faith.

"She's got an attitude like I wish I had," she said. "I saw her the day she was told she had cancer. She kept saying, 'If anyone can beat this, I'm going to beat this.'"

Miller is a thankful person, too.

"Life is precious," she said. "Every day I'm here is a blessing, and I consider my life as a gift. I intend to enjoy every minute of it and spread the news of God's grace and love."



SUPPORT GROUPS

Bereavement counseling

Hospice Savannah's Full Circle has opened an office in the United Way Effingham Service Center, 711 Zitterer Drive, Rincon. Bereavement counselor Barbara Moss holds office hours 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Tuesdays to counsel children or adults, individually or in group sessions, and plans to offer workshops and presentations on coping with grief during the holidays. The counseling is offered free of charge as a community service. To schedule an appointment, call 629-1089.

Diabetes

The Effingham County diabetic support group meets 11 a.m. on the second Tuesday of each month at the United Way building, 711 Zitterer Drive, Rincon. Call Janice Winemiller at 728-8945 or Mary Paul at 754-3154 for information. If you need accommodations such as an interpreter, call 826-5300 ext. 26.

NA of Effingham

Narcotics Anonymous groups meet at 7:30 p.m. Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays at the Beulah House, 407 Church St., Guyton. Meetings are also at 7:30 p.m. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at Freedom Christian Center, 409 S. Laurel St.,

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