

Mary Miller's Story

by Amy Copeland

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“Ya gotta take care of yourself; you can't count on doctors to do it for you. Believing in my doctor and not taking the bull by the horns like you should, I didn't do anything about it. And it kept growing.”

For 63-year-old, Amelia Island resident and mortgage loan officer Mary Miller, beating two bouts of breast cancer was all about taking responsibility for her health, then taking care of business.

An active career woman and grandmother, she wears her short golden blonde hair in a sporty style that seems perfect for her busy life. Her clear green eyes project self-assurance.

She's always been more independent than most people are. After a divorce at age 33, she spent the next ten years in Jacksonville, raising her son alone. “My family lived in Pennsylvania. I grew accustomed to taking care of myself.”

Mary remarried in 1984. “I have a son, Jay, who's 36 years old and lives in Atlanta. Through my second marriage, Stan has three kids, Jeff, Clay, and Lori. Between the two of us, we've got eight grandchildren: Jordan, Jake, Ty, Kerry, Samantha, Ryan, Jacob, and Isaac.”

Mary was first diagnosed with breast cancer in 1998. “It was a rather bad experience because almost a year before that I found a tiny lump, like a BB, next to my nipple.”

She had told her family physician about the lump in January 1997. The doctor told her not to worry about it. By the time she went back in January of 1998 for her annual check-up the doctor suggested she have it looked at, but he never made an appointment for her at the hospital. “So I just finally called the hospital on my own and made the appointment to have the ultrasound.”

The tests revealed the lump was cancerous, and would require a complete mastectomy. “If I had gone when it was just a BB, and demanded that it be taken out and biopsied, I probably would not have lost a breast. I probably would have just had a lumpectomy.”

Her mastectomy was scheduled, and when she arrived at the hospital, a woman at the check in desk informed her, “You do know that Blue Cross Blue Shield considers this out-patient surgery?”

“Cut a boob off and throw 'em out! You are joking?”

The clerk told Mary that her physician, Dr. Robert Taylor, had already made the necessary phone calls to the insurance carrier and obtained approval for a two night stay.

The practice of limiting hospital stays for mastectomies is common. “There is legislation going on now to change that, but it’s true with all insurance companies; it’s not just Blue Cross Blue Shield,” Mary said.