

# Features



## 'There Are Angels': Young Man Fights Rare Condition

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*By Annabeth Miller, SMT Editor*

Kyle Smith is like most any teenager in Dexter. He hangs out with his friends, played the drums in the high school band, got dressed up and went to prom, acted goofy with his friends on an adventure, and has been an important part of his youth group at church.

But Kyle would sometimes have sinus troubles – and the doctors would just say it was a pretty common malady in this region. He would have severe headaches, something you might not expect with a healthy young teenage guy.

During a visit to his sister in Memphis, though, something happened. After his shower one morning Kyle was unable to raise his arms over his head.

Kyle's sister – who is an R.N. in Memphis – called their mother, Debbie; she knew something wasn't right. After an MRI, the doctors concluded Kyle had Chiari Malformation, a serious neurological disorder.

“The condition is not generally caught until someone is a young adult,” Debbie said. Chiari malformations (CMs) are structural defects in the cerebellum, the part of the brain that controls balance. When the indented bony space at the lower rear of the skull is smaller than normal, the cerebellum and brainstem can be pushed downward.

“The doctors found that his skull did not completely grow around his cerebellum,” she said. “When that happens it starts pulling on the spinal cord. If it gets worse they can be paralyzed.”

The next step was specialists at Barnes-Jewish Hospital in St. Louis and a risky surgery right after the new year. It was not an simple procedure; no, the surgery was complicated, it was it great risks for Kyle, including paralysis or blindness. Kyle also having pneumonia made the surgery even more risky.

### **Strength From Prayer**

Prayers were offered - for Kyle, the family, for the medical staff. The faith community at the First Methodist Church paused for prayer for Kyle prior to services the day before surgery. The prayer ministry lifted Kyle in prayer. His friends in youth group gathered together to join hands and pray for their friend. Friends, family, community - all prayed.

“We know there are angels; we know,” Debbie said. They family all felt the strength from the prayers. And the nurses and medical staff were remarkable – even fellow patients and their families were pulling for Kyle.

“The man next to Kyle was from Nigeria. He and his wife were amazing,” Debbie said. The gentleman’s wife was an international flight attendant, and prior to Kyle’s surgery she asked for a moment of prayer.

“She prayed the most beautiful prayer. She said over and over, ‘I lift him up, I lift him up’,” Debbie said. Their new Nigerian friend’s prayer was eloquent and spoke to the heart. “She must have said ‘lift him up’ at least 15 times.” The woman later told Debbie that she “began to feel an outpouring” of God’s spirit for Kyle. “God’s peace was on us.”

The surgery was a success, but the young Dexter man still had obstacles to overcome. Kyle still had to battle the pneumonia and following the surgery he was in extreme pain. Debbie said doctors explained that his pain was similar to the pain when a rubber band is tightly on a finger: after the band is gone, the pain rushes in.

“He has been such a pro,” Debbie said, the pride and hope in her voice. “He’s done very well.”

Kyle came home to Dexter on Wednesday. Daily antibiotics are fed through a PICC line administered by Debbie. He has a rash from the high doses of antibiotics, which is treated by antihistamine, which of course makes Kyle sleepy. But he has visited with friends, and worked with therapists. Debbie says the therapists are pleased with Kyle’s progress.

Debbie says God’s angels had a hand on Kyle – and on his family circling around him. And she can’t say enough about the family, friends, folks from the First United Methodist Church where they attend, and people in the community.

“I hope people never doubt that there are angels. We have met them.”

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