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A Home For A Hero

JUNE 16TH 2012 BY UNKNOWN

A Home For A Hero

By Annabeth Miller

Today's story is about Elliott. To be a bit more specific, Elliott John Miller.

He grew up like most any other kid in this corner of the woods. He loved to hunt, he was a Boy Scout and earned his Eagle, enjoyed camping out, was respectful, loved his family. The night he graduated from high school in Cape Girardeau, his buddies shaved his head. Because, you see, Elliott was joining the Marine Corps.

He served his country, did his duty. He sailed the seas and saw the world as a Marine. After his tour was over, he returned home and was ready to make the transition from Marine to student.

Then two planes plowed into the World Trade Center. America was at war.

Elliott felt compelled to serve his country. He returned to that recruiter, only this time he was destined to an elite corps of America's heroes. He joined the Navy SEALs.

At his graduation in San Diego, I will admit to being in awe – and having a lump of pride in my throat and a tear in my eye. I thought of his Grandma and 'Pop' – and how proud they both would be.

So, this Navy SEAL fought America's new enemy. Then, during his fourth tour in Iraq, his dad called one morning. Elliott had been hit – not once but actually twice in one day. He was serving in the Al-Anbar province of Iraq and was fragged by a grenade. When his teammates evacuated him, an improvised explosive device (IED) exploded and compounded his injuries. It read almost like a litany – left leg had massive injuries, arm broken, lost most of his blood, traumatic brain injury, burned over 60 percent of his body from the phosphorus in the bomb.

He eventually lost part of that left leg, and brain injury claimed his ability to speak. Now he communicates by typing on an iPad, which then voices his words.

Now, all of this leads us to Thursday. Thursday was a big day. Not only was it Flag Day and his dad's birthday, it was the day that Elliott became a home owner. From his wheelchair, he raised the American flag on a flagpole in front of his new home in San Diego, thanks to the Wounded Warrior Support Foundation and Wells Fargo.

Elliott, his wife April and their 10-month old son Joseph Trevor saw their home for the first time Thursday. The 65-year home has been totally renovated to meet his needs – wheelchair ramp, refitted bathroom, doorways enlarged to fit a wheelchair, other touches in the home to accommodate a guy who is either in a wheelchair or walking with a prosthesis.

The Wounded Warrior Support Foundation is a group that was founded in 2007 by 3 star retired general, Leroy Sisco. They serve the heroes that have served us – with home programs that help vets like Elliott, and with programs that help them find jobs, learn skills, and go back to college. They do good work – important work – in helping our heroes after they return home.

More than 180 houses have been delivered to Iraq and Afghanistan veterans over the past two years, including 44 in California, foundation officials said. Banks transfer the deed to the charity, which holds it for three years. After demonstrating good stewardship, the veteran receives the property free and clear.

Wells Fargo has donated 10 houses for veterans since 2009. Wounded Warriors Support Foundation also works with Bank of America, Chase and GMAC.

On top of that, Wells Fargo covered the bill for the repairs and renovations in the house.

There's a garage where Elliott can work on projects, a yard where little J.T. can run and play, and April can plant a garden.

Elliott has a lot of grit and determination. He climbed all 110 stories of the Willis Tower (formerly known as the Sears Tower) in Chicago – basically to prove that a guy with a prosthetic leg could climb 110 stories!

You know those 110 stories on that building? Well, Elliott didn't climb them alone. There were his buddies from the SEALs, his younger brother Adam and sister Camille. But there was also a Sunday School class of ladies from the Dexter United Methodist Church, who prayed every step of the way!

I was talking the other evening to a gentleman in our church. He's a veteran of World War II – a member of "the Greatest Generation". Like so many in our church family, he has been concerned about and prayed for Elliott throughout his recovery. When I told this gentlemen about Wounded Warrior Support Foundation and about the house, he told me he had sent the group some money from time-to-time. "If anybody needs help, it's these guys. They've done so much," he said.

Gen. Sysco told Elliott that the new home is a good "foundation" for Elliott's future. I've got news for the good general – the house is just another layer in that good foundation Elliott has built throughout his life.

Congrats, Elliott. Pops and Grandma would be proud.

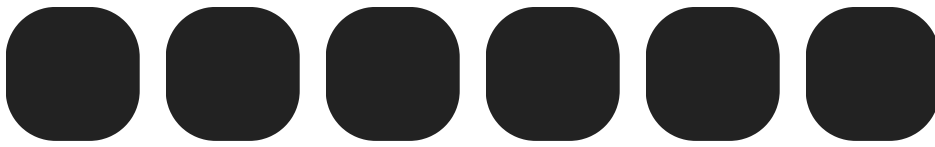
Photo Above: Elliott and Joe Miller, outside Elliott's new San Diego home. (BusinessWire photo)

Annabeth Miller is a Dexter native and editor of the ShowMe Times. Retired Navy SEAL Miller is her nephew.

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More Than A Golf Tournament

MAY 30TH 2012 BY UNKNOWN

More Than A Golf Tournament

By Annabeth Miller

In 1999 two young men walked into my office. I'd known them both for quite a while. The younger one even sat around a Sunday School table when I tried to lead the class. Good young men. Their dad was like another brother - he always seemed to be at our house with my oldest brothers as I was growing up and he was part of the of the crowd in the back of the old Methodist Church.

These young brothers had an idea. Let's play golf, have some fun together, and while we're at it raise money for a great cause and help folks genuinely in need. Not a half-bad idea.

Scott and Ben Kruse seemed to have it all planned out. The money raised would go to the V-Foundation, named for legendary Coach Jim Valvano.

The local charity would help fight an insidious disease – cancer. Thus, 18 Fore Life was born, and in those years since much has happened, the event has grown, and has become a small-town miracle.

The organization the Kruse Brothers created and have inspired is so much, much more than just another golf tournament. It is more than a banquet, more than another silent auction. There is heart, soul, and joy in this weekend; it is one of the special parts of this community that makes Dexter a unique place. The work of this weekend lives 365 days a year through the everyday love and kindness and spirit of the 18 Fore Life Foundation.

Think about it: Because of the work of 18 Fore Life, more than half a million dollars has gone to families right here in the Bootheel. No administrative costs, nothing taken out for staff, or “overhead”. More than \$600,000 to families right here at home – families who are battling the enemy called “cancer”. Love gifts – real gifts of love from the heart and the joy of a community banding together.

And there is another aspect. Because of the work started through 18 Fore Life, there are so many more people involved in the fight against cancer. The middle school volleyball squad started a “pink” game tradition that last fall moved to DHS. And the

DHS game saw macho high school guys donning pink, a Poplar Bluff squad wearing their pink jerseys along with Dexter, and a Poplar Bluff coach and former Dexter resident talking about her own fight against breast cancer.

And the “pink” revolution is now in other county schools, all raising awareness about the disease and funds to help those fighting breast cancer in the county –all through 18 Fore Life.

And let’s not forget the 10 Pins For Ben, when kids and grownups have fun bowling to raise funds for cancer – this time for kids fighting cancer at St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital in Memphis. Then there are the church groups, community organizations, fishing tournament, Claus of for a Cause, and families who raise funds throughout the year for 18 Fore Life – all to help families facing the battle against the “Big C”.

This weekend is more than a golf tournament, more than a banquet. It’s more than a duo of inspirational speakers, a silent auction, more than the traditional toast to Ben.

This weekend is, in many ways, a testament of all that is right, and good, and decent about small communities like Dexter. It is about a community banding together for a common cause, it is working with joy and spirit together to help another.

So, thank you to the Kruse Brothers and their family and friends for wanting to do something good and simple – something that is fun and valuable and that has become a real part of the heart of this community. It has lived through the years.

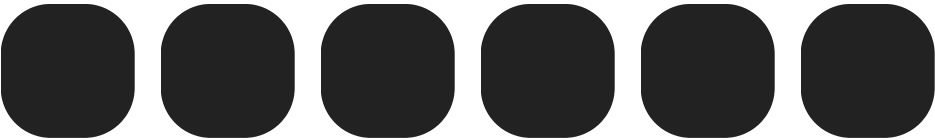
What an incredible legacy to Ben, and to those who have fought the fight against cancer.

Annabeth Miller is a Dexter native and editor of the ShowMe Times.

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A Day That Triggers Memories

NOVEMBER 22ND 2011 BY UNKNOWN

A Day That Triggers Memories

By Annabeth Miller

It's one of the dates that are a trigger for memories. You remember how old you were, what you were doing on anniversaries for the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the night man first walked on the moon, the attacks on America on 9-11, and the day President Kennedy was killed

On this date in 1963, President John F. Kennedy was fatally shot while riding in an open-top car through Dallas. The world as we knew it changed forever.

Some of us were too young to actually be told at school – there were still some things that schools let families handle. So on that rainy Friday afternoon a group of mothers were on hand outside first grade classrooms – ready for kids who normally walked to school. Adults talked in hushed tones; sadness and shock was everywhere.

Older students were told of the momentous event by their teachers. Teachers cried. Heads bowed. At Dexter High School a hastily created mimeographed slip of paper was passed out for students to take home – not everyone had television to learn the news of the assassination of the President.

Brother Joe was just a freshman at DHS, but after school he headed to the Post Office to snap a photo of the American Flag flying at half-mast. There was a prayer service that evening in town, for the community to gather together, and grown-ups gathered to pray, to talk and ponder the state of the nation.

And thanks to the advent of television, America stayed glued to the news coverage all weekend. We watched as the young president's body boarded Air Force One for the last time, saw his widow keeping her hand on the casket as it arrived in Washington, saw the lines and lines of people to see their last respects. I specifically recall young Caroline and her mother kneeling by the casket in the Capitol Rotunda. And, yes, that day of the funeral we watched that iconic moment, when young John Kennedy Jr. saluted his father's coffin leaving the cathedral.

On Monday, a television set was brought to first grade at Southwest, and all the students watched the pomp and somber funeral procession and service. We watched the Blackjack – the riderless horse who symbolized a fallen leader - with black boots backwards in stirrups and anxious among the proceedings.

The assassination of President Kennedy stunned and horrified the nation. Journalist James Reston wrote 48 years ago, “America wept tonight, not alone for its dead young president, but for itself. The grief was general, for somehow the worst in the nation had prevailed over the best. The indictment extended beyond the assassin, for something in the nation itself, some strain of madness and violence, had destroyed the highest symbol of law and order.”

Today’s world is different. As a nation we have gone through so much since that day 48 years ago. But in 1963 there was a respect – for the office of President, for the man, for the country. The moment has worked itself deep into the American psyche.

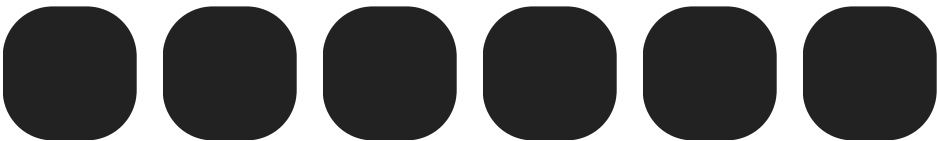
But now, all these years later, the late President’s daughter, Caroline Kennedy, will use the occasion of this anniversary to present the John F. Kennedy New Frontier awards honor Americans under the age of 40 who are changing their communities and the country with their commitment to public service. A good way to mark a momentous day.

Annabeth Miller is a Dexter native and editor of the ShowMe Times.

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Meet You At The Fair!!

SEPTEMBER 23RD 2011 BY NEWS

Meet You At The Fair!!

By Annabeth Miller

Just as sure as the sun sets in the west, the seasons change and the long, hot summer gives way to crisp autumn days.

Part of the fun of autumn are the traditions that abound in a small town. Traditions like football games, marching bands, and the annual county fair.

The Stoddard County Fair has always been a fun time. Now in its 85th year, the Fair is all about traditions and fun and small town values - all rolled into one!

I can remember working with my mom in the kitchen many years ago, making sugar cookies to take to the fair. They had just a touch of a "secret" ingredient that made them extra special - a little bit of orange rind. I'm sure other cooks put orange rind in their sugar cookies, but I thought my mom was a genius when she suggested it, and was positive that my special sugar cookies would win a prize. They did - a blue ribbon that is still tucked away some place in a shoe box. And I got some prize money, too, that was promptly spent on the midway (probably on a caramel apple).

It was fun this week to see that same sense of excitement from a Dexter FFA member, who was thrilled to see he had won a blue ribbon for the soybeans he had entered at the fair!

The county fair is one of those annual events that bring our entire community - the entire county - together. You see old friends at the parade, and promise to meet down at the fair. Folks enjoy the crisp, cool evenings and swap stories and trade local gossip. You catch up on what's been happening, and make plans to get together again.

I always look forward to Fair week, even though it is very busy time. But it is usually a fun kind of busy. There's the parade on Tuesday and this year there's local musical talent on the Midway Stage. I'm looking forward to hearing Maggi Thorn on Saturday evening.

Part of the fun of the fair is watching the kids. Youngsters who have taken the time to learn from their parents about the care needed to raise sheep, hogs, cattle. And then are proud to bring them to the county fair. The lessons the youngsters learn from the judge are important, too. He has taken a lot of time and care into his instructions to the kids - and took that extra bit of time to teach the finer points of showmanship.

When you stand back and look at it, the fair really is representative of what makes life in small, rural Missouri special. There's the families from the farms, with their animals and crops, and the civic organizations all working together serving hamburgers, hot dogs, and the famous funnel cakes and fired Oreos. There are the groups with booths, and volunteers who make the whole thing work – the fun and camaraderie that puts an extra touch on the entire scene.

Fall is here, and with it are some great traditions. See you at the fair!

Annabeth Miller is the editor of the ShowMe Times and a lifelong resident of Dexter.

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Champion Tree Guards Heritage

AUGUST 15TH 2011 BY UNKNOWN

Champion Tree Guards Heritage

By Annabeth Miller

It has been a sort of “keeper” of one of the most unique tracks of land in Southeast Missouri. It’s a sentinel guarding the bluff above the river.

The champion American beech tree has watched Indians paddle canoes down the river and the march of Europeans into the western half of the nation. Steamboats, paddlewheels, barges and more have floated by spot at the top of the hill – situated at a precious point looking out over the Mississippi and protecting the old St. Vincent’s Seminary in Cape Girardeau.

Now this champion beech tree guards the eastern ground of the River Campus of Southeast Missouri State University. But its roots are deep in the heritage of the region.

] Back when its was a seminary, it was a part of the young student’s tradition. The beech tree was the “Initial Tree” and young seminarians would climb the thick branches and carve their initials into the tree for posterity. Still today, you crane your neck up to the sky, and you can see their initials carved for decades in the limbs of this giant tree.

Mark Twain wrote about the Seminary in his 1883 book, *Life on the Mississippi*. He writes, “There is a great Jesuit school for boys at the foot of town by the river. Uncle Mumford said it has as high a reputation for thoroughness as any similar institution in Missouri.”

<images/Blog Images/NewsAugust2011/8.15.2011 boughs.jpg>

When SEMO developed the spot for the River Campus, they were wise to keep such treasures as the enormous beech. They even put wonderful benches at points near the tree, so visitors can pause, and look up at the magnificent span of branches.

I sat there the other day during a quick visit to campus and wondered –what prayers were offered by the seminarians under the shade of that beech? What devotionals were written? What scripture was studied?

And now, as the center for arts education, what music is studied under the boughs of that

tree? What lines are rehearsed for a theatrical performance? A friend has told me that she is actually a little glad they didn't have the River Campus when she was a student – she would have wanted to sit and watch the Mississippi instead of being inside practicing music!

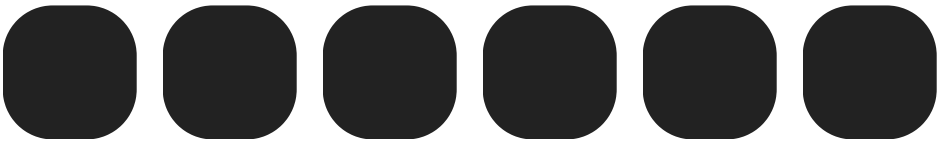
Next to the beech tree is the Old Mississippi River Bridge Scenic Outlook, A small, restored portal of the old river bridge is all that remains today. At the overlook there is a viewing scope that provides a commanding view of the Mississippi River. You can stand at the outlook, and watch the river make its way to New Orleans and view the impressive Bill Emerson Memorial Bridge. It's a great way to use the portal to the old bridge – keeping a bit of the old to view and appreciate the new!

Annabeth Miller is the editor of the ShowMe Times and a lifelong resident of Dexter.

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