

# FIND THE BLESSINGS

Breast cancer found a formidable foe in Mountain Home, Ark. resident Rosalyn Coggins.



By Angela E. Thomas / photograph  
courtesy of Newman MD Plastic Surgery

It was another sultry summer day in July 2011, and Rosalyn Coggins, 46, was hard at work as a cosmetologist at her salon and day spa Beauti Central in Mountain Home, Arkansas. A normal day, by all accounts, but for Coggins it was anything but — she noticed two knots in her left breast.

“It was definitely suspect. I’d never felt anything like it before. I’ve always done breast self exams in the shower, and usually kept up-to-date with my mammograms, though, it’d been two years since my last one,” the business owner said. She later found out it’d been three years. She immediately scheduled a mammogram; however, her breast tissue was so dense the test showed nothing out of the ordinary. Her physician, in turn, scheduled her for an ultrasound. “Everyone could feel the knots, but they couldn’t see them,” she said. “I knew, in my heart, it was cancer. I just knew it.”

Coggins was referred to another doctor for biopsy as she had saline breast implants. However, Coggins said, doctors at a nearby center “weren’t too concerned or worried as the tumors were less than 1 centimeter in size. I was concerned! I had these two [tumors], and I wanted them out!” she said.

So she soon returned to her local hospital and asked for a surgeon for the biopsy; an oncologist; and a reconstructive surgeon. She worked with Drs. Jacob Dickinson, general surgeon; Brooke Brandner, oncologist; and Adam Newman, plastic surgeon.

“I met these doctors within four days. I was so impressed with them individually, but even more so that they worked as a team, each making sure the other was in the right place and the right time, and making sure I received the best possible care,” Coggins said.

Upon exam — just five weeks after the first exams and the ultrasound — the tumors had increased in size, from .7 centimeters to 3.8 centimeters.

“If I’d waited, I’d be dead now. Not only did I have triple negative breast cancer, the worst kind, it’d gotten into two of my lymph nodes and was Stage III,” Coggins said.

Further, within days of her breast surgery — Coggins elected to undergo a bilateral mastectomy — it was discovered that she had ovarian cancer as well. The ovarian cancer was found through genetic testing and just two weeks after the mastectomy, she underwent a total hysterectomy. “I didn’t really have time to absorb everything. It happened so quickly,” Coggins said.

Neither did her husband Billy. “He was in shock as well. We were just kind of numb, but I don’t know what I would have done without my husband. He was amazing; he never missed an appointment and



Rosalyn Coggins

after the surgeries, he was my caregiver. He is the sexiest caregiver ever.”

Coggins was, of course, also concerned about how her three adult sons would handle her diagnosis and treatment. “I wanted them to understand that breast cancer is not a death sentence. We caught it in time, and we were going to get rid of it.”

Ironically, as a stylist, Coggins had customers who experienced hair loss as a result of chemotherapy. “I had just fixed my hair and taken pictures — I knew the hair loss was coming — just before it happened. Billy said, ‘You’re going to be one of the most beautiful bald women I’ve ever seen.’ We try to find the blessing in everything,” Coggins said; she could now truly identify with her customers experiencing this loss. “I tried to wear a wig, but it wasn’t me. Friends often refer women losing their hair to me. I reassure them. It’s OK that you’re bald. Bald is beautiful.”

Coggins chose to have her “breasts revised,” and her hair has grown back “thick, curly and a different color,” now that she’s finished nine months of chemotherapy. She advises women to stand up for their rights, especially when it’s concerning their health. “If you feel something is wrong and the first doctor won’t listen, find another. You may not have time to lose.” And if you receive a cancer diagnosis? “Keep it real, but don’t dwell on the negative. Focus on the positive in your life ... you gotta find the blessings.” 