

# Hallers feel the love, support



HERALD PHOTO BY CAROL MOORMAN  
Don and Georgianna "Georgie" Haller hold a prayer shawl received from a friend following Don's brain tumor diagnosis. Three other prayer shawls lay on the couch behind them in their home near Little Birch Lake.

## Man who enjoys life, (and fishing) now in the fight of his life

by Carol Moorman  
carol@saukherald.com

**Rural Little Birch Lake**—In every area of Don and Georgianna "Georgie" Haller's home near Little Birch Lake they can feel the love and support.

Four prayer blankets of different colors are scattered around. A dinosaur their granddaughter made out of clay sits on an end table near a basket, with a stuffed animal made by a grandson, all for their grandpa.

Greeting cards, some homemade, are stacked up.

One year ago Don was diagnosed with stage 4 glioblastoma multiforme or astrocytoma. Three tumors were discovered on the left side of his brain.

Since then the support has been a godsend. So have the prayers for this man who loves to fish, winter, spring, summer and fall, and is now in the fight of his life.

In fact, early last Tuesday morning Don and Georgie attended Mass at St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Grey Eagle. Georgie talked about how people visited with Don following Mass. Most were wishing him well.

You see, later that day they were traveling to Rochester where the following day Don was having another MRI.

### The diagnosis

The Hallers retired to their home near Little Birch Lake from Columbia Heights in 1997, although they had a cabin nearby since 1975. They have five children: Michael of Coon Rapids, Mark of Rice, Matthew of Eau Claire, Donald Jr. "Doj" of Andover and Dean of Belle Plaine; and nine grandchildren, seven girls and two boys.

Healthy before this, Georgie started noticing Don was having problems with his speech just after his April 22, 2007, birthday. Frequent headaches also increased.

Then one day Don went fishing and when he came in to clean the fish, he told Georgie that he couldn't talk very well. Not much keeping him from fishing, the next day he went to Starbuck fishing with friends. Again, he told Georgie he had trouble talking.

That weekend they attended their granddaughter's First Communion, Don driving there and home. His speech problems continued.

The following morning while Don went to the nearby cabin with their children and grandchildren, Georgie sat down and cried, knowing something was terribly wrong. She called a nurse friend, pouring out her heart and finally called the hospital.

"They told me to bring him in as soon as possible," said Georgie.

For about a week he was in the St. Cloud Hospital undergoing tests.

"They called him the mystery man," said Georgie.

He was sent home that Saturday with orders to start speech and occupational therapy. But even with the therapy his speech worsened.

That Monday morning before his occupational therapy, he had an MRI at 8 a.m. That's when tumors were detected and by 10 a.m. he was headed to the St. Cloud Hospital again. A biopsy confirmed the cancerous tumors, the larger one the size of a Greek olive. The scoop-sized portion of the tumor that was removed also reduced pressure in his brain.

His brain was the primary location of the tumors, meaning they didn't spread there from elsewhere in his body and would be contained to the brain area.

Apprehensively, doctors gave him three to four months.

He also went to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester for a second opinion of this rare and aggressive cancer.

An emotional Don agreed telling their five boys and their families was the hardest thing he had to do.

### The treatment

Because of the sensitive location in the brain, removal of the tumor wasn't a viable option. Radiation and chemotherapy were.

To top it off he suffered chest pain from a blood clot in his lung. He was placed on a blood thinner, which prevents blood clots and causes him to bruise easily.

According to a journal Georgie kept, that June 5 he started both chemotherapy and radiation, receiving 26 rounds of radiation Mondays through Fridays through that July at the Coborn's Cancer Center. A photograph taken back then of his head indicates exact areas where the radiation targeted the cancer.

"The last five treatments zeroed in on the larger tumor," said Don.

During this time he also received chemo, taking four Temodor pills (400 mg.) at night five days a week at home.

When he felt good enough, he and Georgie went fishing or friends picked him up. Last winter he was even able to go darkhouse spearing a few times, thanks to his friend, Dale Lyon.

"I got six, but I missed the first four," said Don, knowing his strength and aim weren't what they used to be.

Georgie said another friend, Eddie Middendorf, popped his head in the door one day and said, "Whenever you want to go fishing let me know."

Three MRIs have shown the two tumors in the back of the brain have shrunk, while the larger one remains that same. To them, that is good news.

### Family, friends, prayers

Family, friends and prayers mean the world to them.

"We've got people praying for him all over the world," said Georgie.

Cards of support continue arriving in the mail. So do words of support, including those from a spiritual counselor who visited their home last Tuesday morning after Mass.

Friends pop in on a regular basis, as do family. They also enjoy traveling, like recently when they visited with their hockey families in the Twin Cities.

He continues taking medication, some which make his face and stomach swell. "I was down to 220 and now I'm up to 276," said Don, optimistic that his weight will decrease once more.

Of course, the medication makes him hungry all the time.

He and Georgie have a membership at Snap Fitness in Sauk Centre and try to go at least three times a week. Georgie drives because driving is not recommended yet for Don.

Married for 47 1/2 years, Georgie usually knows what Don, now 68 years old, is trying to say if words fail him or if he gets words mixed up, a side affect of the tumors.

"I try to fill in the words for him," she said glancing across the table at her husband.

When he is tired, his words fail him more.

"But he still works like a horse," said Georgie, smiling.

And if he does sit down to nap, it usually ends up being for just a few minutes. Georgie should know, she's around him pretty much 24 hours a day.

"He used to go his way and I'd go mine," she said. "Now we're together all the time."

But that's just fine with them. That way, together, they can feel the love and support of family and friends.

And all those prayers don't hurt either.

Reprinted from a May 2008 *Sauk Centre Herald*.