

Flutist

From Page 1

Swan, 37, lives in California but has stayed with her parents, Mike and Helen Miller of Yankton, for much of the year during her cancer recovery. Swan plays prelude music and special pieces at Trinity Lutheran about once a month.

She is also producing a compact disc of her music, entitled "My Gift," that she is giving away free. Yankton High School music teacher Todd Carr is editing the CD.

"It's my gift, in every sense of the word. I have been involved with music all of my life," she said. "The ability to play at all, it's an amazing gift to have. It's the only gift I have to give."

Swan attended the University of Minnesota-Duluth and North Dakota State University for her degrees in music and business. While at UMD, she took voice lessons, sang at Carnegie Hall and toured Europe for six weeks. She also played in the symphony orchestra, and she played piccolo with jazz bands in clubs.

"I picked up dancing as a fluke. I took lessons, and I was a natural teacher," she said. "I attended an Arthur Murray Dance Academy, and I was certified as a first level, or bronze, instructor."

She found a particular passion for the Argentine tango, even attending tango events in Buenos Aires.

Not surprisingly, she entitled her first book, "My Tango With Cancer: A Dancer's Journey of Breast Cancer Survival and Growth."

Besides her work as an author, Swan has founded the business Cieleme! — Latin for "Sky's The Limit" — and website www.cielemel.com.

"I travel throughout North America, speaking with a wide variety of groups about survival through inspiration, rather than desperation, when facing severe adversity, challenges and life trials," she said.

She speaks primarily before cancer support groups. The work has proved mutually beneficial, providing her a major boost in her own life journey since her breast cancer diagnosis in 2009.

"I was 32 years old at the time, which was really young for breast cancer, or for any kind of cancer," she said. "I had two tumors, one was Stage 2 and the other was Stage 3. We went for the lumpectomy rather than the mastectomy."

In 2009, she underwent seven surgeries, including six biopsies, to remove the tumor. She underwent chemotherapy treatments from July through October 2009, followed by daily radiation completed just before Christmas of that year.

Swan decided to remain in California for her treatments, near her Sacramento doctor while staying with a friend who became a caregiver.

The chemo treatments left Swan extremely ill. She maintained a medication calendar listing the foods she ate and the side effects.

"I had every side effect known to chemo," she said. "I lost my vision for a while. I couldn't read a computer screen even if I bumped it up to 150 percent, and I loved to read books and CDs."

"My esophagus burned, and I didn't want to eat. It was like a submarine was dropping bombs down my throat. The chemo was destroying my body in the process of killing (the cancer) cells."

Swan and her doctor dis-

cussed whether the severe side effects outweighed any benefits from continuing the chemo.

"But if I didn't finish the treatments, I faced the possibility of a (cancer) recurrence," she said. "I decided to finish the chemo and deal with the ongoing pain."

Swan adopted the motto, "It is what it is," as the new starting point in her life. But she greatly misses her dancing because of the pain.

"The very thing that I love the most is also the thing that causes me the most pain," she said. "The thing I love, I can't love it anymore."

During her treatment in California, Swan attended "milonga" dance parties. She socialized and remained in contact with others sharing her passion for the tango.

"I didn't know how much longer I could continue attending (the milonga), as the pain got worse and worse," she said. "But it let me stay closer to my people who loved to dance and talk. These people were as close as family. I couldn't see, read or touch, but I was so damn determined not to give it up."

The cancer treatment wasn't the only major pain in Swan's life, as her boyfriend was killed in a motorcycle accident. She includes him in her book's dedication.

The stress of both major life events complicated her health is-

sues, but she moved forward. She is completing the third of her five-year regimen on the drug Tamoxifen.

"They talked about me undergoing spinal surgery (to relieve my pain), but there is only a 50 percent chance of success," she said. "It's just not worth the risk."

Swan has focused on her business interests, including her public speaking.

"I like the smaller, intimate groups because I can have eye contact and interaction with them," she said. "If someone nods at something, I ask if they share

the same experience. We go (with the conversation) where it needs to go. People are scared and confused. We are there to support each other."

Swan also writes a blog, which she keeps upbeat for others to read, and a private journal only for herself that reveals her inner struggles.

"I don't put (my pain) out there for others to read because it's too negative and I don't want to bring people down," she said.

She is also working on her second book, "Wiggling Out," which plays off the 13 different wigs she

wore during chemo. She takes a lighter approach with the book.

"A year ago, I was having a bad day. I would wake up every two hours because of my pain medication," she said. "I decided it was going to be a light day, and I wore a neon pink wig. People looked me in the eye and smiled."

Thursday's "Bach's Lunch" concert will mark one of Swan's last activities in Yankton.

"As soon as Christmas is over, I am returning to California," she said. "I have to leave (South Dakota) from January through March because this cold weather

is too much for me to handle (with my physical condition).

However, she first wants to provide a special Christmas gift with her upcoming concert.

"My music isn't my vocation, it's my avocation," she said. "The flute is my gift, and I put my music out there to other persons. The only thing I have to give is myself."

You can follow Randy Dockendorf on Twitter at twitter.com/RDockendorf

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Snow

From Page 1

see up to six inches of snow, he said.

"Unfortunately, this isn't one of those pretty snowfalls where it just floats down," DeWald said. "It's going to be a pretty messy day."

The snow should taper off by Thursday morning.

National Weather Service spokesman Rod Donavon, in Johnston, Iowa, also said about 6 inches of snow could fall in central and southeast Iowa. Parts of the southwest to the northeast also could be affected, he said.

"It's certainly going to impact most of Iowa," Donavon said.

Heavy rain is expected to affect the southeast part of the state Wednesday afternoon, and that will begin accumulating as snow, he said.

For some parts of Nebraska, Wednesday will bring the first measurable snowfall of the season. Scant snowfall of less than an inch on Sunday ended Omaha's record streak of no snow at 295 days. But Lincoln has gone more than 300 days without measurable snow.

"Even with the wind, some people are going to be excited," DeWald said. "It might give us a white Christmas."

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