

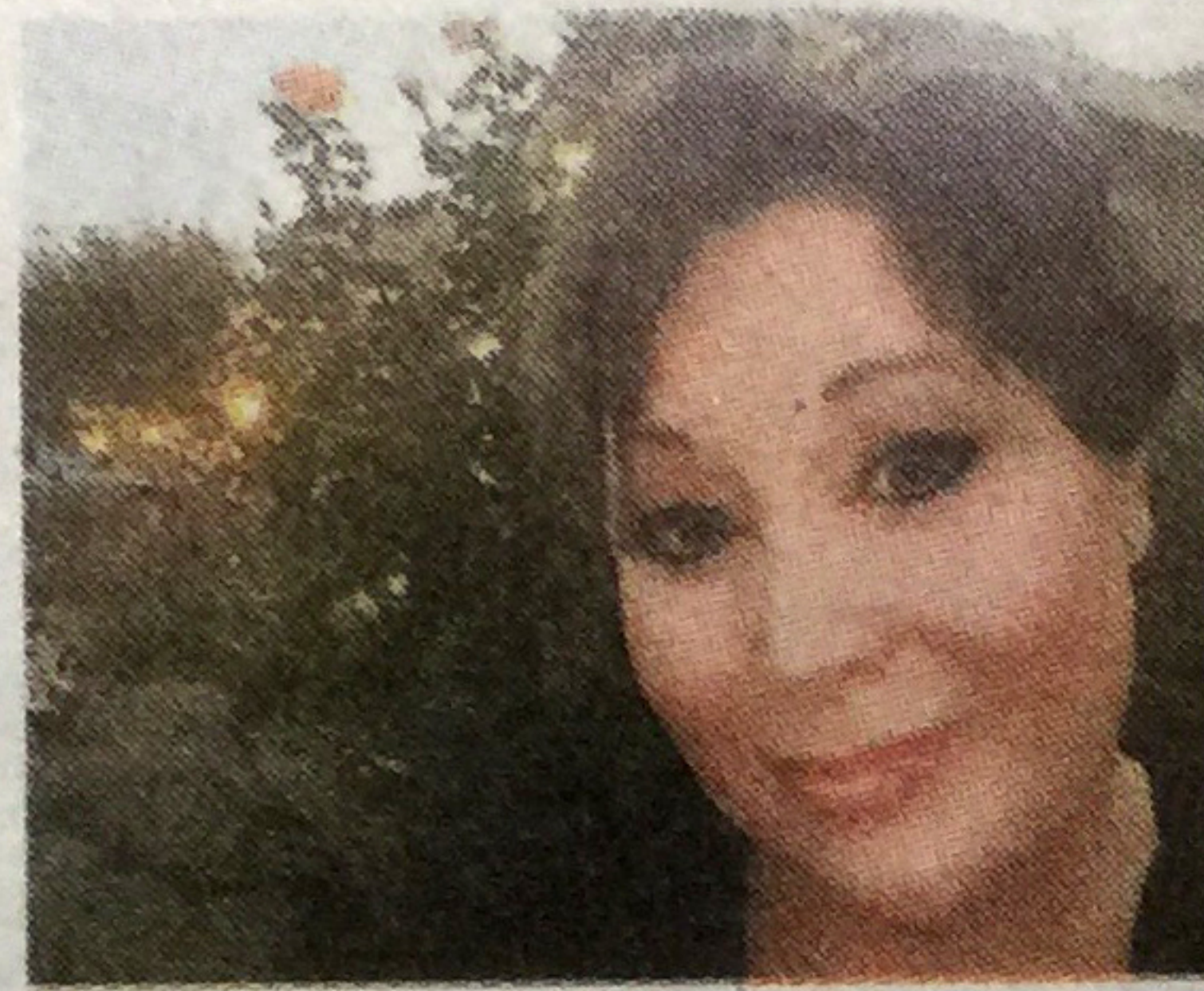
# My breast cancer journey

BY STEPHANIE JACKSON

**M**y cancer journey began in July 2014 when I was diagnosed with triple negative breast cancer.

TNBC is a rare type of breast cancer that, if not caught in the early stages, the survivor success rate decreases dramatically because it is a fast-spreading type of cancer. I was blessed to find my lump with a self-exam in July, so I acted quickly and got right in to my doctor. If I had not found it myself I am afraid I may not be here to tell my story because I didn't have a mammogram scheduled until October.

Once I found it, they did 12 core biopsies making sure it wasn't in my lymph nodes already because it is such an aggressive cancer. Fortunately, my nodes were clear. However, my stage 1 breast cancer grew to stage



Stephanie Jackson

2 in less than three weeks. My oncologist canceled my bilateral (double) mastectomy surgery and started me with aggressive chemo within days. He asked if he could treat me more often and stronger than he normally would because this was such an aggressive cancer. That's what we did for the next six months.

After my last chemo treatment, the bilateral mastectomy surgery and the start of my reconstruction was scheduled. I had a total of six surgeries within 15 months. I have one more to

go for the reconstruction portion and I was just told we are going to proceed with a complete hysterectomy, which will be next.

The reason I am sharing my story is because I want to do anything I can to educate women to not only get their mammograms on a regular basis but also do a self-check. It literally saved my life.

I tell people that God blessed me to be able to find my lump at stage 1 and my amazing oncologist, Dr. Robert Lemon, I believe saved my life by postponing my surgery and going straight to chemo. God continued to bless me with such wonderful surgeons as Dr. Margaret Hadcock for my mastectomies and Dr. Carl Askren, my amazing plastic surgeon who is giving me my life back and helping me get back to some sort of normal.

My family, friends and co-workers rallied around me and got me through the difficult journey. As bad as chemo, surgeries and all the complications and side effects were and still are, I don't think I would change anything. I have learned so much and met so many wonderful people on this journey and it has made me a better person for it.

I thank God every day he helped me through it. In turn, I want to help others with their cancer journey.

For now, I am back to work and have been for a while and it feels great! For those of you out there going through this, please remember to stay positive. You are allowed to have bad days but don't stay there in that dark place. You can and will come through on the other side and look back, and you will be amazed at how strong you were.