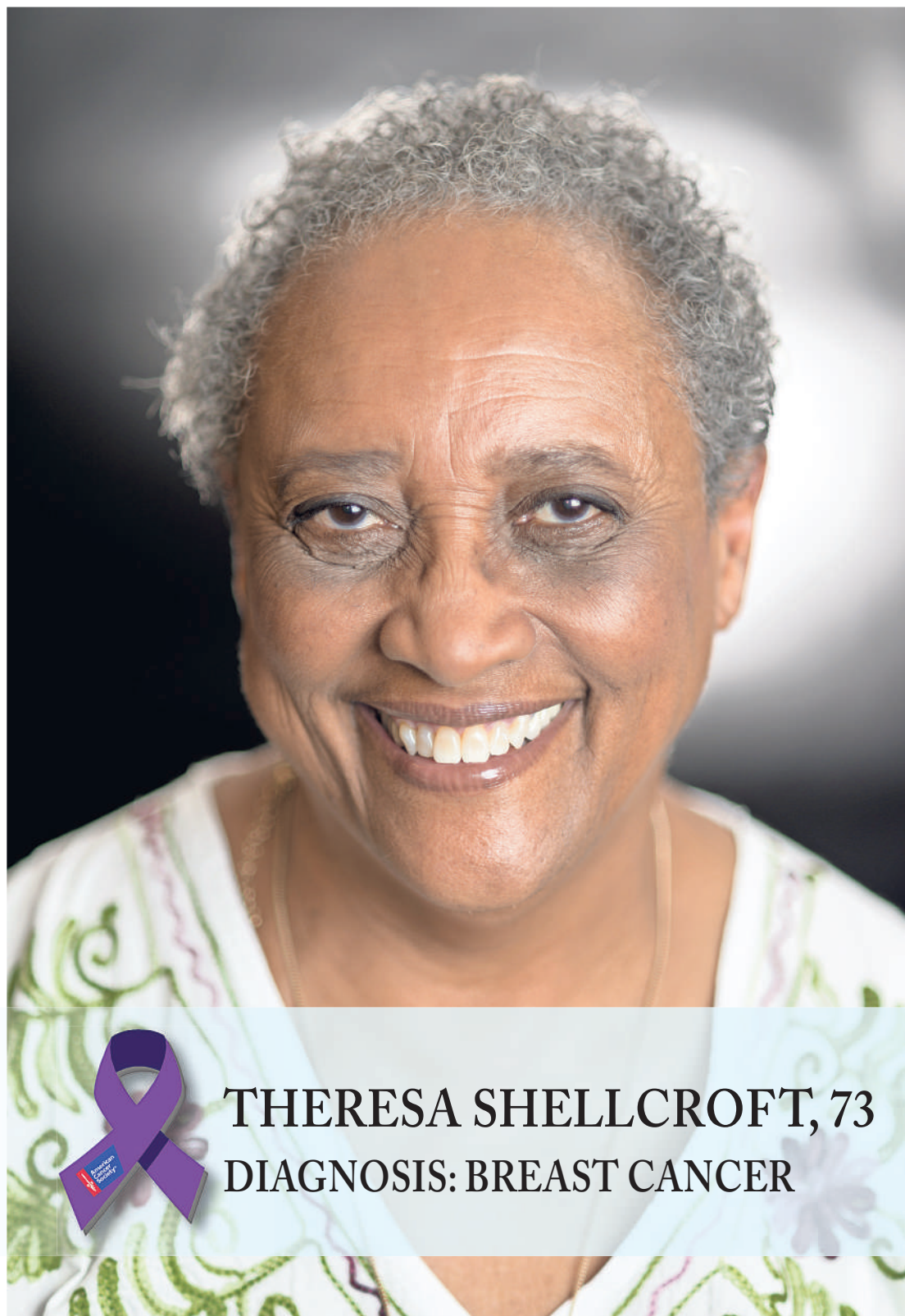



Survival and Hope *Life After Cancer*



 **THERESA SHELLCROFT, 73**
DIAGNOSIS: BREAST CANCER

The Basics:

- **Residence:** Victorville
- **Family:** Retired art history and school teacher
- **FAMILY:** Son, Christopher Shellcroft, 39; Goddaughter also 39, Danyelle Beal
Passions: Quilting and painting – a passion, not hobby
- **Passions:** Quilting and painting – a passion, not hobby
- **Philosophy:** I had to deal with my own mortality and accepting that. Live life to its fullest every day; every day is a blessing.

By Alberta Hale Crigler

Theresa Shellcroft has a history of cancer in her family. Still, in July 2014, when she was diagnosed with breast cancer, “My reaction when I got the final report after the biopsy was disbelief, and then acceptance, and then taking the next step,” she said.

One of her sisters had died of breast cancer. After two consultations – one with City of Hope, the other a doctor in the High Desert – Shellcroft decided to have bilateral mastectomies. Her surgery was in the beginning of October 2014, and she began chemotherapy in November.



Shellcroft's chemo lasted for about five months, and she said she had “no major issues” with it.

She started breast reconstruction but changed her mind when she developed complications at the beginning of the process.

“This is what it is and I had to deal with it,” Shellcroft said. “I can't say that I'm angry, or hurt, or woe is me. I have always been a pretty positive person.”

An artist, Shellcroft has maintained a sketch journal chronicling her journey. “I did that all the way through,” she said. “I found a lot of emotions I wasn't aware of. Through my art, I could become aware of and express more than I could verbalize.”

She participates in the cancer support group at St. Mary Medical Center in Apple Valley. Shellcroft is also a member of the High Desert Cancer Connection's Cancer Awareness Action Team, a group of women who provide direction and

opportunities for cancer survivors and their supporters.

Shellcroft tells people newly diagnosed with cancer to “read everything they can; learn everything they can. Get with a support group.”

When she was newly diagnosed, Shellcroft received advice from other survivors, too.

“Two of my friends were diagnosed just a little ahead of me, she said. “When I was diagnosed, they told me things to do to prepare for chemo.

“But they also told me about of book called *The Silver Lining*, written by a nurse. I learned to look for the silver lining through the process – actually through every day.”

cleaning, cooking, taking care of her, helping her get around, fielding calls and visitors, and help with bathing.

“The way she carried herself through that, it was such an honor for me to witness a woman who was so strong. She was never negative, she didn't talk about it, she just did what she had to do to survive for the people she loved.”

Caregiver: Chris Shellcroft

Chris Shellcroft remembers the day in 2014 his mother told him about her cancer diagnosis.

“She called me one afternoon, and it was pretty jarring,” he said. “Her sister passed of cancer. Other family members passed away and some friends.

“She was so calm and collected. She looked at it as another obstacle in life. She was resolute that it was something that would come and go.

“Her diagnosis brought into focus how much she plays a role in other people's lives. I appreciate every moment I have with her and every moment I have ever had.

“When she was going through chemo, that was hard to watch. You could tell by her voice it was taking its toll. But she is such a strong-willed person. I was never in doubt she would come through it. She is a great role model.

“Now she does everything with a smile on her face. There is not a day in her life where she doesn't go out of her way for someone.

“I am really grateful she is in my life and in my daughter's life. I used to think my mom was unrealistic. I try to see the positive now.

“First and foremost, (people battling cancer) are not alone in this. It is obviously something that has touched everyone in some capacity. You are always one phone call away from someone you can talk to.”

“This is what it is and I had to deal with it,”

Caregiver perspective: Danyelle Beal

Danyelle “Dany” Beal was 16 when she met Theresa Shellcroft. “Her son Chris and I were friends in high school,” Dany said. “Chris introduced me to his mother. I fell in love with her immediately.”

“I am like the daughter she never had and she is the mother I never had. I feel like God sent her to me,” she said.

But in 2014, “I was going through a really rough time in my life,” Dany said. “I was struggling with a lot physically and mentally. I was in a really bad state of depression.

“She was sitting on my couch and said, ‘I was just diagnosed with breast cancer. I am going to need you to be strong for me.’

“This diagnosis, when she told me, it shifted the dynamic. She didn't cry, she didn't waver, she said ‘we have work to do.’ That was my opportunity to give back.”

After Shellcroft's mastectomies, “I came and stayed with her,” Dany said. “I was her fulltime caregiver:



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