ON JAN. 16, Tracy Baker, 47, of Cooperstown, got a diagnosis she never expected—triple negative breast cancer. It is estimated that 15 to 20 percent of breast cancers are triple negative, a form of cancer that does not respond to hormone therapy. Baker was told she would need chemotherapy, followed by surgery and radiation treatments to give her the best chance of beating the disease.

“I wanted to jump down a rabbit hole. You feel alone,” recalls Baker, who says she struggled with a litany of emotions following her cancer diagnosis. “I didn’t want sympathy; I wanted support. People who’ve been through this understand.”

As she began her chemotherapy treatments and cancer journey, Baker says she found that support from fellow patients, her doctors and the entire treatment team at the Bassett Cancer Institute in Cooperstown.

“The first four rounds of chemo were horrible, and one of the social workers at the cancer center told me, ‘Take it step by step—baby steps if you have to—you will get through this,’” she says.

‘I GOT BACK IN THAT CHAIR’
Following an allergic reaction during one of her chemotherapy treatments, Baker began feeling overwhelmed and doubtful again. She called the cancer center’s nurse navigator who said,
“Tracy, you didn’t think you could make it through those first four, and you did.”

“I got back in that chair,” Baker says. “The team at Bassett is so amazing, and you’re a name there—you’re not a number. They know me; you are in constant contact. They really become your family.

“No one wants this diagnosis, and you can’t change that, but you can control how you approach it,” Baker continues. “This is the path that is my journey, and the positive people, the support—they knowing my name and my face when I walk in there, knowing what I’ve been through and how to get me to a positive spot—makes all the difference. It’s a battle, but you can do it with the support. You can come out on top.”

‘I’M FORTUNATE’

Baker had surgery in July to remove any remaining cancer cells. Since then, testing revealed she is cancer-free, but because of the aggressive nature of the cancer, she also underwent a six-week course of radiation therapy.

“I’m fortunate that I discovered my cancer early through a breast self-exam,” says Baker. “I encourage other women to do regular self-checks rather than relying solely on screening mammograms.”