Annette Hopgood is very open about her breast cancer journey. Living a “normal” life, working and enjoying hobbies with her husband, she was just 45 when she found a lump in her breast. “I work in healthcare but I froze,” she recalls. “My husband was wonderful. He called the doctor, made sure I had the right diagnostic tests. But I just sat there like a doll.” Her doctor talked to her about ABCD but Annette was still numb and unsure. She did not know anyone who had survived breast cancer.

“The doctor said ABCD could contact me if I consented, so I signed the form and ABCD called right away,” Annette recalls. “They were so compassionate and they assured me there were breast cancer survivors. A doctor can say ‘don’t worry’ but that’s not the same as talking to a survivor.”

ABCD matched Annette with Vernette Crum. When Vernette was diagnosed with breast cancer she wanted to talk to someone right away to take the mystery out of the experience. She learned about ABCD through a support group that included ABCD mentors as members and trained as a mentor herself in 2006.

The two women both insist that ABCD could not have made a better match. “I felt Vernette’s spirit leap over the phone,” Annette remembers. “I get emotional just talking about the power of that first phone call. The connection was instant. Vernette wasn’t starchy or tense; she just wanted to make me feel comfortable.”

The pair settled into a pattern of speaking every Thursday. “I would say a prayer before I called her each week. Those calls are important. A woman with breast cancer needs to know that she is not alone so she knows the real deal when it comes to getting through it all,” notes Vernette.

Like many breast cancer patients, Annette had challenges during surgeries and treatment, but credits ABCD with making her journey pleasant because her ABCD mentor saved her from imagining the worse. “Vernette made it clear that you have to be positive about the outcome but also that you have to put effort into getting through the journey.”

“My mentor taught me so much, especially that talking and listening has real healing power; it takes the burden off. The only way I could give back and honor Vernette was to become a mentor, too,” observes Annette.

“When Melodie Wilson was first diagnosed, I wrote her a letter of support. I didn’t mail it, but instinctively I knew reaching out is what women who have had breast cancer should do,” Vernette confides. “Now that I’m a trained mentor, I am more confident. After all, mentoring is a gift you give yourself. Just giving someone encouragement and support fills you up.” Vernette was really pleased when Annette called her after completing mentor training. “She was so proud,” Vernette remembers. “She said, ‘I did it’ and I told her, yes, you did.”