“Numb and shocked” is how Gertie Payne felt when she learned her breast biopsy had revealed cancer. With no family history of the disease and just a few weeks shy of her 50th birthday, the diagnosis hit hard.

Though her family was supportive, Gertie had never talked with anyone who had survived breast cancer. “I was real depressed,” she recalled. “I thought maybe it would lead to something worse and I wouldn’t survive.”

As she began treatment, which included a lumpectomy, chemotherapy and radiation, a hospital social worker suggested that talking to an ABCD mentor might help. The social worker facilitated the referral, and ABCD matched Gertie with Camellia Givens.

“During my first conversation with Camellia, I went from ‘I hope I survive,’ to ‘I will survive,’” said Gertie. “She ignited a spark in my mind that I will be well again.”

Now an 11-year survivor, Camellia was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1996 and underwent a mastectomy, chemotherapy, and radiation as well as reconstructive surgery six years later. She completed training as an ABCD mentor in 2006 and has mentored three women through ABCD.

“I’d been informally mentoring people anyway but the training taught me the proper way to do it,” Camellia said. “You let the other person do the talking. You’re supportive; you help them understand how they’re feeling and what to expect.”

Most of all, Camellia tells other women to have a positive attitude. “You have to fight it. There are more ups than downs.”

Gertie agreed. “Hearing that Camellia was a 10-year survivor gave me encouragement and inspiration,” she said. “Knowing that someone else has walked in my shoes—all women need this. “If I hadn’t met her, I don’t know if I ever would have reached the point of believing that I would get better.”