Spend just a few minutes with Anne Camp, and you'll understand how she beat two different kinds of cancer. This wife, mother and grandmother possesses a remarkable spirit and a thirst for life that have helped her overcome daunting odds to join the ranks of cancer survivors.

Mrs. Camp's first experience with the disease began in 1991, shortly after she and her husband, Bill, moved from their longtime home of Birmingham to Williamsburg, Virginia. "I started feeling tired all the time," she recalls. "It got to the point where I just felt horrible. I knew something was wrong with me."

Doctors were not convinced, however, and Mrs. Camp's condition worsened. Finally her gynecologist figured out the problem—she had stage IV uterine cancer. This type of gynecologic malignancy can be difficult to treat and has a low cure rate, particularly when

diagnosed in the later stages, as in Mrs. Camp's case.

She immediately underwent surgery at the Medical College of Virginia, followed by six months of chemotherapy and another six months of radiation treatments. It was an arduous process for Mrs. Camp. "Chemotherapy is the hardest thing I've ever done in my life," she says; not only did it take a physical toll, but she also found it tough to brace herself mentally for one treatment after another.

"I thought losing my hair would be the hardest thing to go through, but I learned that cancer patients don't really need hair. It's just something else to take care of," she says.

Though the five-year survival rate for uterine cancer diagnosed in stage IV is less than 20 percent, Mrs. Camp beat the odds. She survived the disease, and life returned to normal. After a few years in Virginia, she and her husband returned to Birmingham; Mr. Camp, an architect, began working at UAB, and she continued her career in art, a passion she had pursued since the birth of their first child several years earlier. For the time being, cancer was no longer a part of her life. That was soon to change.

Cancer Returns

In 2006, Mrs. Camp began experiencing some colon problems. She was not entirely surprised by this; her sister had suffered similar problems, and her mother had battled colon cancer. With that family history, Mrs. Camp quickly came to the UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center for a

sigmoidoscopy.

“At first, the test didn’t find anything,” she says. “But I knew something was wrong and told the doctors to keep looking. Sure enough, there was something there.”

Mrs. Camp was diagnosed with an early stage colon cancer. “This time was a lot easier than the first because it was caught so early,” she says. “I immediately decided that I was going to live because I’m a survivor. It was just there in my mind that I was going to make it through it.”

Mrs. Camp had surgery under the care of Martin Heslin, M.D., Cancer Center scientist and gastrointestinal oncologist. “Dr. Heslin and everyone at UAB were wonderful,” she says. “UAB has some of the best doctors in the world, sitting right here in Birmingham, and they really care about their patients. I’ve had doctors before who wouldn’t even know my name. I was just a number to them, and that was never the case at UAB.”

This time Mrs. Camp did not require any chemotherapy or radiation since the cancer was caught early. She is now cancer-free and returns for follow-up visits with Dr. Heslin as well as Max Austin, M.D., Cancer Center senior scientist and gynecologic oncologist. “I don’t know why I’m still here sometimes,” she says, laughing. “I’m very blessed to be cured.”

Advice for Patients

Today, Mrs. Camp still works as an artist, painting whimsical characters and scenes in nurseries and children's rooms around Birmingham. She and her husband will soon celebrate their 45th wedding anniversary, and she is encouraging him to retire. Once he does, she doesn't plan to sit still; Mrs. Camp, an avid traveler who has already explored parts of Europe and Africa, has her sights set on a place she has always wanted to visit. "Venice is way up on my list."

Now that she has survived cancer twice, Mrs. Camp is also eager to help patients who are just beginning the cancer journey by sharing her experiences and what she has learned. "Patients need to know that life is going to change. Sometimes just getting out of a chair is going to be difficult," she explains. "But as difficult as it is, try to be positive. Try to laugh and heal yourself mentally. That's so important."

Mrs. Camp also advises patients to pay attention to themselves. "Know and listen to the signs of your body," she says. "Learn to be your own advocate.

"I have a theory that a survivor is someone who just makes it through the day and is still there. Personally, I knew to get the best medical care I could get, to stay positive and to have a deep faith. All of that works to bring out the good in your life," she says. "I honestly consider having cancer to be a blessing. It strengthened my faith in God, and it strengthened our family. There can be good things that come out of illnesses. I don't want cancer again, but I don't take what I went through for granted."