

Coming into

BY LINDA L. MEIERHOFFER
PHOTO BY TAILI SONG ROTH

Some people say cancer is the worst thing that could happen to them. But Annette Bloch calls it a catalyst, one that not only fueled her and her husband's philanthropy but also radically changed the direction of their lives in ways they never could have imagined.

Richard Bloch, Annette's late husband and the "R" in the H & R Block tax chain, was diagnosed with lung cancer in 1978. He was told by his doctor that he had two months to live. "So we went to M.D. Anderson (Cancer Center) in Houston where the doctors said, 'We're going to cure you so you can work for cancer, and Dick said, 'If you do, I will.'" That second opinion gave Richard Bloch 27 more productive—and philanthropic—years in partnership with Annette. "It was after Dick was cured that he said he had a great debt to pay...his goal was to help the next person who got cancer to educate themselves, to find out their options and to go to the right doctors," explains Bloch. "His goal, as mine is now, was to make a difference in people's lives."

THE GIRL FROM PHILLY GIVES BACK
Annette grew up in a middle class Philadelphia family, where mom stayed home with Annette and her sister, and dad worked as a manufacturer's representative for furniture companies. "We were happy, and I thought I had everything," she says of her beginnings.

She met Richard Bloch when she was 16 and married him three years later. A move to Kansas City followed where the couple had daughters, Linda, Barbara and Nancy. Annette immersed herself in their activities while Dick worked to make

his business a household name. It was a time during which Annette's mother-in-law, Hortense Bloch, offered this advice: "Someday your husband is going to be very successful, so remember you have to give back.' I've never forgotten that," Bloch says. "She was my mentor."

With Dick's lung cancer cured by 1980, he and Annette traveled the world, speaking about their approach to fight cancer. "It was upbeat; it gave hope and educated people that there is life after a diagnosis of cancer," she says of their inspirational, tag-team talks. The couple started support groups in Kansas City for the newly diagnosed and offered a hotline where people could speak with someone who had the same cancer and was a survivor.

They co-authored three books (see sidebar) and established panels of medical specialists where patients came for a free second opinion so they could hear their options and make an educated decision about treatment.

The Richard & Annette Bloch Cancer Foundation continues to help those diagnosed with cancer to have the best chance of beating it, and it continues to be a family affair. "I have seven grandchildren who are the advisory board of our foundation. We give each one money at our yearly board meetings and they have to research charities and nonprofits and present their findings to the executive board," Bloch

says. "I am so excited that they're involved and giving back, too."

Dick's death from heart failure in 2004 became yet another turning point for Annette. "My daughters said I'd go one of two ways: I'd either fall apart or show the strength they knew I had...it came out, and I'm loving it," she says. That strength, ever present during the decades-long journey helping others fight cancer, heart disease or simply tough times, was something she drew upon for her own battle. "I'm a four-year breast cancer survivor as of August 2012," she says with the conviction of a woman who looks ahead, but never forgets where she came from.

A NEWFOUND CAUSE

Mrs. Bloch continues to split her time between homes in Kansas City and Rancho Mirage, embracing a newfound passion for causes that are "hers" rather than "ours."

"I came into my own," the petite, blue-eyed dynamo says. She explains that some years ago, her Kansas City decorator, "a Rhodes Scholar, handsome and wonderful man," died from AIDS, and she felt helpless. Then last year, Annette's friend, Barbara Keller, gave her a tour of the Desert AIDS Project campus in Palm Springs. "It took my breath away—there's not another facility like it," she says, noting the food department, apartments, free dental clinic and pharmacy on site.

her own



Annette Bloch takes a rare moment to relax in the Rancho Mirage home she shared with her late husband, Richard.



This life-size bronze sculptural work invites visitors into the Richard and Annette Bloch Cancer Survivors Park in Rancho Mirage.

That first impression was worth plenty to the more than 2,000 men, women and children affected by HIV/AIDS and served by DAP in the Coachella Valley. At the Steve Chase Humanitarian Awards benefit this last February, Annette Bloch stunned those in the audience when she announced her \$1 million donation.

The result of that cash injection was the dedication of the Annette Bloch Cancer Care Center at Desert AIDS Project on November 30, where increased cancer screening, education about the spread of Hepatitis C and enrollment in cutting-edge clinical drug trials can now be offered.

“The extraordinary gift from Annette Bloch to DAP will allow us to broaden our base of medical care in a way that we could have only dreamed about before,” says David Brinkman, CEO of Desert AIDS Project. “With the uncertain future of ongoing government funding for HIV/AIDS programs, we rely more heavily than ever on the generosity of donors to make these dreams into realities.” At the Steve Chase gala this February, Bloch will receive its 100 Women Award for her generous support of programs helping women and children with HIV/AIDS.

A TASTE FOR THE ARTS

When Annette and Dick first moved to the desert 24 years ago, they saw a friend’s glass art collection and fell in love with the art form. “My friend gave us books to read and we began going to galleries to see what we liked,” she says. “Our tastes grew and changed...I now collect scul-

ture, glass and paintings, but I’m running out of space!” she laughs. Bloch’s artful passion and her willingness to step into a leadership role garnered an invitation to join the board of the Palm Springs Art Museum, a place she calls “a true gem.”

“In 2008, Annette made a particularly significant financial contribution to the

CURRENT PHILANTHROPIC HONORS

November 2012: Dedication of The Annette Bloch Education Wing in the Palm Springs Art Museum in Palm Desert

November 14, 2012: Named Philanthropist of the Year by the Association of Fundraising Professionals; nominated by Desert AIDS Project and the Palm Springs Art Museum

November 30, 2012: Annette Bloch Cancer Care Center dedication at Desert AIDS Project

December 4, 2012: ATHENA Award given by the Palm Springs Chamber of Commerce

February 7, 2013: Palm Springs’ Walk of Stars dedication at 110 N. Palm Canyon Dr., just north of Tahquitz Canyon Way

February 9, 2013: 100 Women Award honoree at the Steve Chase Humanitarian Awards Gala

“I’m so grateful that I
can do it.”
—Annette Bloch

museum,” says Harold J. Meyerman, chairman of the museum’s board of trustees. “This gift has allowed us to significantly increase the caliber of exhibitions offered to our members and the public. Annette has chaired our annual gala many times and has served on numerous councils. In 2012 she secured the naming rights of the education wing at The Galen, the newly opened Palm Springs Art Museum in Palm Desert. I particularly appreciate her wise advice and counsel. We deeply honor and respect her generosity and commitment to the museum.”

Bloch says she loves witnessing the fruits of her labor. “I want to give while I’m alive so I can have the joy and pleasure of seeing the good that it does; it gives me energy.”

Visitors to Annette’s contemporary Rancho Mirage home are greeted just inside the entry by 127 multicolored figures mounted on the wall. Crafted of scrap metal from old cars by Cuban artist Damian Ruiz, they perhaps represent people walking toward a common cause—but a lone figure stands out from the rest and faces the opposite direction, as if refusing to follow the pack. Kinetic, energized with conviction and doing it her own way seems an accurate summation of Annette Bloch, as well.

“I am so grateful that I can do it,” she muses. “I often think of little Annette Modell from Philadelphia growing up—who would ever think I could do what I’m doing now? I pinch myself that I’m so lucky,” she says with a smile.

CANCER SUPPORT SERVICE

Richard and Annette Bloch co-authored books for cancer patients and their families. They are free and can be ordered from the R. A. Bloch Cancer Foundation, 1-800-433-0464.

“Cancer...there’s hope”

“Guide for Cancer Supporters: step-by-step ways to help a relative or friend fight cancer”

“Fighting Cancer: A step-by-step guide to helping yourself fight cancer”

Additionally, there are 25 Richard and Annette Bloch Cancer Survivors Parks across North America, including one in Rancho Mirage, just east of city hall near the intersection of Highway 111 and Frank Sinatra Drive.

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