



From left to right: Barbara Herman (WG Board Member & Treasurer), Lorette Gross (President), Judy Briskin (immediate past president), Abby Levy (past president) and Georgina Rothenberg.

WOMEN'S GUILD OF CEDARS-SINAI

INTERVIEW WITH TREASURER, BARBARA HERMAN

by Elizabeth Carol Savenkoff

Women and Charity are as natural as the sun is warm. Giving, forgiving and always first in line to help another in need. It's a bit surprising, then, that charities were only recently established in the US during the late 1870's through the inspiration of those in Great Britain and their desire to help the poor. The assumption, then, was urban poverty was a direct link to moral deficiencies and could be eliminated by cooperation of charities. About thirty years before women were given the permission to vote in this country, they were already starting to claim some power, the natural kind of power to be who they are collectively: **nourishing mankind**. Charitable organizations quickly became professional organizations growing slowly across the country with many obstacles in between, the Great Depression and world wars. By the mid 1940's, movies became more abundant as the biggest form of (hope) entertainment that consistently presented the unconquerable fever: Movie Stars with an outstanding array of headstrong leading ladies. By the 1950's, woman's roles on and off screen were cut back; changing times, as raising a family became the priority.

In 1957, a group of women gathered in Los Angeles. Seven of the eighteen were connected to the film industry. They were all beautiful, smart, engaging and collectively powerful! They were also delicately aware that their life style was not a typical “homemaker’s.” Their need grew during one of their usual gatherings to nourish those who needed help. With teamwork and ethics, the decision to utilize their social standing and pioneer a new organization was made. That night they became **THE WOMEN’S GUILD Cedars of Lebanon Hospital**. (Years later the name changed to **Cedars Sinai Medical Center**). These women designated each member with an assignment to use their resources to create the first of many charitable events. **Barbara Herman**, a long time Board member was Treasurer from 1971-1993, is today once again, the Treasurer.

ECS: Growing up with one of the major components of the charity, your mother Carolyn Blywise, do you recall your first encounter with the Women’s Guild? How did your mother explain the need for it? As children we haven’t the knowledge, yet, to understand why other people, ones we might never meet, would need our help.

BH: In the beginning, many **Women’s Guild** meetings were held in members’ homes. Whenever my mother hosted one, I was encouraged to observe. It was fascinating to learn how these women planned to raise funds which could make a positive difference in the growth and development of the hospital’s operation. Charitable causes were an important factor in my parents’ life style. While in High School, with my parents’ approval, I decided to work at a camp for under privileged children from South Central Los Angeles. It was an eye opening experience. When I saw many children arriving with food unfit to eat because of economic problems at home, I was appalled. Hearing this, my parents arranged for me to bring healthful food from home for them. The impact of that experience had an indelible, positive affect on the way I respond to worthy charitable causes.

ECS: These women who founded the Guild were all friends. I would imagine, every now and then, there might be a competitive edge. How did they manage to keep all the meetings friendly?

BH: Strong leadership made good use of competing ideas from all those dedicated women by using tact and emphasis on the need to cooperate in order to accomplish the goals for which they hoped to attain.

ECS: I’m sure it must have raised a few eyebrows back in 1957 that these women were able to raise a half a million dollars in the first few years! How did they manage that?

BH: The **Guild** members consisted of women who could exert a great deal of influence in the business and social communities of the city. They also were very creative about fund raising. With associations in the film industry, they conceived the concept of having a (film) studio sponsor the premier of a major release with the proceeds going to Cedars. Studios were happy to pay for everything, which in turn, provided them with a major publicity launch.



ECS: These ladies were making one footprint after another.

What were some of your early memories of their pioneering ways?

BH: Being privileged to observe **Guild** meetings and helping my mother when a project was activated, I was exposed to women who knew how to provide the best in entertaining and staging an event. I remember how they would offer ideas, discuss the pros and cons, and then, go about bringing the best to fruition.

ECS: Do you have any special memories about one of the events during the early years that you can share with us?

BH: That was so long ago, that I really can’t bring to mind any colorful anecdotes. The parties after each premiere were beautifully, elegantly prepared and always had a relaxed feeling about them.

People enjoyed themselves, happy to have committed financial aid for such a worthy cause.

ECS: When did you decide you were going to be a part of the organization, and where did your responsibilities start?

BH: In the mid 60s, the **Guild** wanted to attract young, fresh volunteers to join. In those pre-computer days, all the office work was done literally by hand. They had one part time office person who needed help. With the growing success of the **Guild's** efforts, the new members provided that help.

ECS: Right. So you jumped in and filled the gap, as did the others. The founders were strong women. And the glimmer of tenacity I see in your eyes reminds me of one of my favorite strong actresses and one of the founders of the Guild, Rosalind Russell. Were you ever intimidated and yet able to implement your own ideas?

BH: Yes, the founders were indeed strong, a trait I much admire. As one of the new members, they taught me and other newcomers the nuts and bolts of how the organization operated, particularly how to stage a major fund raising event. I helped with the office work, banking, event staging and whatever else was needed. It led to my appointment as Treasurer in 1972, a great responsibility for someone as young as I. Any ideas, I may have presented, were all carefully discussed and implemented, if thought viable.

ECS: You left that position fifteen years ago. Something recently lead you back. What was that?

BH: My husband and I had moved to Jackson Hole. I continued, however, to be involved peripherally with financial support. When I returned to live in Los Angeles, I was again asked to take on the post of Treasurer, which I happily agreed to do.

ECS: There were few women's charities 30 - 40 years ago. This is quite a validation for the Women's Guild of Cedars Sinai. How many areas in the medical field have you raised funds for?

BH: The Guild has sponsored and supported a number of projects at C.S.M.C. including the **Saul & Joyce Brandman Breast Center**; a **Project of the Women's Guild**, The **Women's Guild Lung Institute**, **AIDS & Immune Disorder Center**, **Annual Women's Health Conference**, **Women's Guild Chair in Women's Health** as well as providing funds to purchase new equipment for the hospital.

ECS: A mighty impressive list, which is perhaps how the W.G. of C.S.M.C. has stood the test of time. How does it differ from all the other fund raisers? For example, you don't have silent auctions. Why is that?

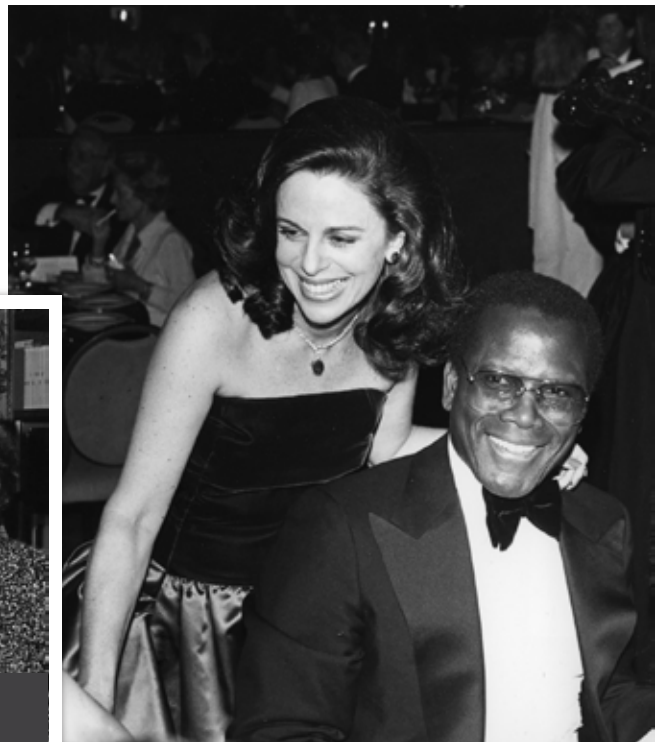
BH: In terms of fund raising events, we try to approach them in different and innovative ways. Times and tastes change. We try to apply those changes. Over the years, we have had Film Premieres; Antique Shows; Teas with illustrious guests, like Hillary Clinton as speaker; major designer fashion shows honored Christina Applegate, Donna Karan, Mavis Leno, Sharon Osborne, Olivia Newton John and Evelyn Lauder to name a few; and this year's wonderful, fun country gala at the Barker Hangar. Augmenting those, sometimes include live auctions. I don't know why we have not done silent auctions. Perhaps it's the excitement generated by a live auctioneer.

ECS: Barbara, I'm one of Hillary Clinton's biggest fans! Please tell us more about her speech.

BH: Hillary Clinton, aware of the **Guild's** efforts, spoke about her interest in advances with women's health issues and other general health care needs.



Beverly Mitchell, Anne Douglas, Kitty LeRoy, Harriett Deutsch, Jack Valenti, Joanna Carson, Nancy Sinatra Sr.



Wendy Goldberg, Sidney Poitier



Barbera Herman with her mother Carolyn Blywise

ECS: Brilliant. So many changes from the beginning to present time....politically, socially and economically. Obviously, you have created the magic formula for running the Guild. How do you navigate the storms?

BH: I cannot claim to be running the **Guild**. It is a group effort. All the women members of the **Guild** are dedicated to C.S.M.C. and the W.G. In any organization, many points of view are expressed. Discussion breeds consensus. That leads to cooperation for the maximum benefit of the groups' goals. It's why we encourage new members to help broaden our base of interest.

ECS: Great to know there's room for new members today. For some of our readers, who would like to get involved, who and how would they contact at the Guild?

BH: Membership on the Board is by invitation. However, interested parties can become members of the **Guild** or make donations by contacting Pamela Gabrielsen at 310.423.3667.

ECS: You've mentioned in one of our earlier conversations, that you've had a *non-event* event. This occurred during our economic crash a few years ago. Can you explain how that works?

BH: A Non-Event is a means of raising funds with a minimum of

expense (for the organization). People are invited to stay home, relax and make donations in casual comfort.

ECS: How successful was this approach....would you ever try this again?

BH: It proved to be very successful. However, it isn't something that should be done often; people would likely lose interest. Since it had a minimal cost to execute compared with a major function, it provided more income for **Guild** sponsored projects. In light of the economy, it was the right kind of event.

ECS: What are some of the outstanding contributions that W.G. has made to Cedars Sinai?

BH: I am proud of all the efforts made by the W.G. in the past 53 years. Having toured the **Lung Institute** project, I am particularly impressed with its state of the art facility and brilliant medical staff. Our current undertaking of \$20 million is awesome. Pride certainly must be taken in **The Breast Center**. It's a wondrous place for women. Their needs are seen to with tenderness, compassion and efficiency.

ECS: An awesome sum indeed...again, there is an obvious deep-rooted bond between W.G. and C.S.M.C. So is there constant open lines of communication with Cedars top specialists that determine which area of medicine will benefit from the next fund raiser?

BH: The **Guild** Board responds to suggestions from the hospital describing what they may need. Decisions are then made as to which proposals will be acted upon by the **Guild**.



Rosemary Stack, Rosalind Russell, Janet Leigh, Lita Warner Heller



W.G. 50th Anniversary Gala - Marcia Cross, Vera Guerín, Billy Crystal, Wendy Goldberg, Judy Briskin



Premiere Chairs - Harriet Deutsch, Vivian Lantin, Wallis Annenberg, Fran Stark

ECS: Do you have many volunteers?

BH: The W.G. Board is made of 65 members, some of whom volunteer in other areas of the hospital.

ECS: At your recent fund raiser, I listened intently to your celebrity guest artist, Wyonna Judd, as she meticulously spoke her very thought provoking anecdotes. In between singing, she was invigorating us to smile...dance...raise our arm proudly to state we've survived some tough lessons....some even quietly teared up. All the while we applauded with a new found inspiration from another very *strong lady*. To maintain your cast iron guarantee of success, many of your attendees have been from the "Who's Who" in the film and music industry. The list seems endless. Please name a few who have supported the Guild.

BH: With pleasure...Barbra Streisand, Sidney Poitier, Steven Spielberg, Neil Diamond, Kate Hudson, Sherry Lansing, Matthew Broderick, Sean Connery, Steve Martin, Ann, Kirk and Michael Douglas, Bette Midler, Goldie Hawn and Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and his wife Maria Shriver. The list is enormous, and we are most grateful.

ECS: It has been a pleasure meeting you, Barbara. Your organization has been and will continue to be a profound force to women and men worldwide. Thank you for your supreme focus and ceaseless efforts to work with Cedar's Sinai's most progressive medical teams.

The founders of **the Women's Guild**, 1957 - Mildred Allenberg, Sara Briskin, Carolyn Blywise, Harriet Deutsch, Anne Douglas, Doris Factor, Viola Hart, Lita Warner Heller, Vivian Lantin, Kitty Warner Leroy, Barbara Liberman, Pamela Rothschild, Rosalind Russell, Ingrid Ryan, Nancy Sinatra Sr., Fran Stark, Margery Tyre, and Doris Warner Vidor

SAVE THE DATE!

WOMEN'S GUILD SPRING LUNCHEON

May 13, 2011

Beverly Hills Hotel

Woman of the
21st Century Honoree
Julie Chen



For more info, please contact Pamela Gabrielsen
at (310) 423-3667