

YANKEE

Our 9th Annual Appreciation of Angels Among Us

Flower Power

Roberta Hershon



Photo/Art by Catherine Frost

“[For somebody who is sick] it makes such a difference to drive up to their house or look outside and see something colorful,” says Roberta Hershon, founder of Hope in Bloom, which for the past eight years has planted gardens for people who are actively receiving cancer treatment.

Roberta Hershon and Beverly Eisenberg were the kind of friends who fed off each other’s talents. Hershon loved to cook. Eisenberg had a passion for sewing. Hershon had an eye for design, while Eisenberg could tackle almost any home repair. Even their personalities differed and complemented each other. “I’m a much more realistic person,” Hershon says. “Beverly always saw the world as being three-quarters full. She never had a bad word to say about anyone. She was the kind of person we all want to be. Everything was always great.”

Eisenberg maintained that attitude even when she was diagnosed with stage-four breast cancer in October 2004. Ten months later she died at the age of 55. For Hershon, her friend’s illness and death were devastating. As her best friend fought her illness, Hershon decorated Eisenberg’s home in Sharon, Massachusetts, with flowers in the winter, then spruced up her garden when spring rolled through. Even as her friend’s health deteriorated, Eisenberg treasured the plantings, and her mood brightened whenever she saw them.

“After she passed away, I didn’t know what to do,” Hershon says. “I felt like I’d lost my arm. And then one day I thought about the garden I’d made for her—how much she enjoyed it, being out there smelling the flowers, feeling the breeze on her face. I thought, *What if I could do that for somebody else?*”

In 2007, Hope in Bloom launched. In the eight years since, Hershon’s nonprofit has installed gardens for people actively receiving cancer treatment. Projects range in size from simple indoor flower displays during the winter to more robust in-ground installations in the summer. Helping Hershon is a team of 850 volunteers across Massachusetts. The plants, the work, even the machinery when required, are all free to the recipients.

“When you’re sick, you have little choice,” says Hershon. “You’re told when to go to the doctor, what to do, and how to do it. You have no color in your life. Everything is a sea of white, from the doctor’s coat to the hospitals to the pills you’re taking. It makes such a difference to drive up to their house or look outside and see something colorful.”

For Hershon, the work is also a way to honor her dear best friend. “She truly made the world a better place,” she says. “Every time we plant a garden, I believe Bev’s spirit lives on.”

For more on Hope in Bloom, visit: hopeinbloom.org (<http://hopeinbloom.org>)



Author: Ian Aldrich

Biography: Senior editor of Yankee Magazine: Ian, a native New Englander who has worked and freelanced for Yankee for the past decade, writes feature stories, home pieces, and helps manage the magazine’s up-front section, First Light. His stories have ranged from exploring the community impact from a church poisoning in a small town in northern Maine to dissecting the difficulties facing Nantucket around its problems with erosion. In addition to his connection to Yankee, Ian worked as a senior editor of Cincinnati Magazine for several years.