



PETER BAKER

A Woman with a Vision

Roslyn Goldstein

Some people might say that Roslyn Goldstein has had a difficult life. “I was born in Brooklyn, but when I was three years old, my family moved to the Bronx in the middle of the night because we couldn’t pay the rent,” laughs the 80-year-old mother of two, and grandmother of six. Roz was whip-smart, but she knew from an early age that her parents would never have the money to send her to college. Instead, after high school, she got a job with the telephone company, then found paralegal work for a law firm, giving her parents half of every paycheck.

Her husband, Leslie, whom she met when she was 14, came from a different world. “One time, he mentioned Yale, and I said, ‘I know what Yale is—it’s a movie set where Peter Lawford and June Allyson danced in the movies!’ I had no idea it was a real school—that wasn’t in my realm of reality.”

The difficulties continued later on in life, when Roz was diagnosed with uterine cancer, then breast cancer. Then, a month after 9/11, her husband, whose office was near the World Trade Center, developed signs of dementia. “He was a math whiz,

a financial genius,” Roz recalled. “But a month after the towers fell, he couldn’t calculate a tip in a restaurant.”

Yet despite these hardships, Roz has always considered herself a lucky person. “I’ve been loved my whole life,” she said. “My grandparents adored me. My parents, who weren’t crazy about each other, loved me. And my husband adored me until the day he died.”

All that love, she says, put her in a different position than most people. “I didn’t have the downside of life,” she said. “And because of that, I felt like I had a responsibility—that I had a debt to pay.”

That sense of responsibility drove Roz to contribute \$500,000 to the Yale Cancer Center Discovery Fund, which was created specifically to advance fundamental scientific research that will ultimately reap clinical innovations. “The goal is to translate the outstanding science going on at Yale and move it toward tangible changes in the care of cancer patients,” explained Charles Fuchs, MD, MPH, Director of Yale Cancer Center and Physician-in-Chief of Smilow Cancer Hospital.

By its very name, the Discovery Fund is earmarked for high-risk projects that, if successful, have the potential to be game changers in the treatment of cancer. One Discovery Fund project, for instance, is focused on coming up with a novel, immunological-based therapy for cervical dysplasia. “We’re working to reengineer current cancer treatments so that they enter the tumor cell more deliberately, avoiding normal cells,” said Dr. Fuchs. “We start with great science, then use that science in clinical trials in a thoughtful way that enhances the likelihood of success.”

Roz began supporting cancer research 30 years ago, when a good friend was diagnosed with breast cancer, and she appreciates that kind of bold thinking. “I’m a pain in the

neck,” she said. “I don’t stop when people say no. I’m not interested in anything that makes a straight line from A to B. Sometimes, you have to go around obstacles.” After her friend died, she began raising money for cancer research “at a very high level,” including sitting on the board of advisors of the Breast Cancer Research Foundation. She also established the Leslie & Roslyn Goldstein Foundation, from which the gift to Yale’s Discovery Fund originated. “I’m asked all the time—‘You’ve invested

Indeed, Roslyn Goldstein is a woman of action, a larger-than-life presence for her son, a Yale alum, her daughter, and her grandkids. “My grandson asked me, ‘Bubbe [the Yiddish word for grandmother], how come you think outside of the box?’ And I said, ‘Because I can’t find the box.’ And I wanted research done by people who couldn’t find the box. That’s what the Discovery Fund is.”

Ultimately, she believes, success can only come if scientists are not

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so much into cancer research. How come they haven’t found a cure? People don’t realize that money doesn’t buy a cure. Money activates the brains that will find a cure.”

Investing in research, she believes, also fuels hope. “If people have hope that something is happening with a disease, even if a cure isn’t there yet, they’ll feel better about it,” said Roz, who nursed her husband through his battle with dementia for a decade. “I’ve convinced myself that by the time I have Alzheimer’s, they’ll have found a cure,” she laughed. “That helps me, and if I can do a little something to give people hope, that’s a good thing. I never want to say to myself, ‘If I had done this or this, then maybe that would have happened.’ I don’t believe in regrets, or what ifs.”

afraid to try things, not afraid to fail. “What I love,” said Roz, “is that every single experiment they are doing is being recorded—the successes and the failures. So people can look back and see what didn’t work—which brings them closer to something that does work.”

In research, as in life, “history is important,” said Roz. “Failures are also important. Any step you take is a step forward, even if you don’t see success in the moment.”

Dr. Fuchs agreed. “When you take something out of the lab and move it into the clinic, you don’t know if it’s going to work. But it’s philanthropy like this that enables us to take these kinds of risks and advance the battle against cancer.”