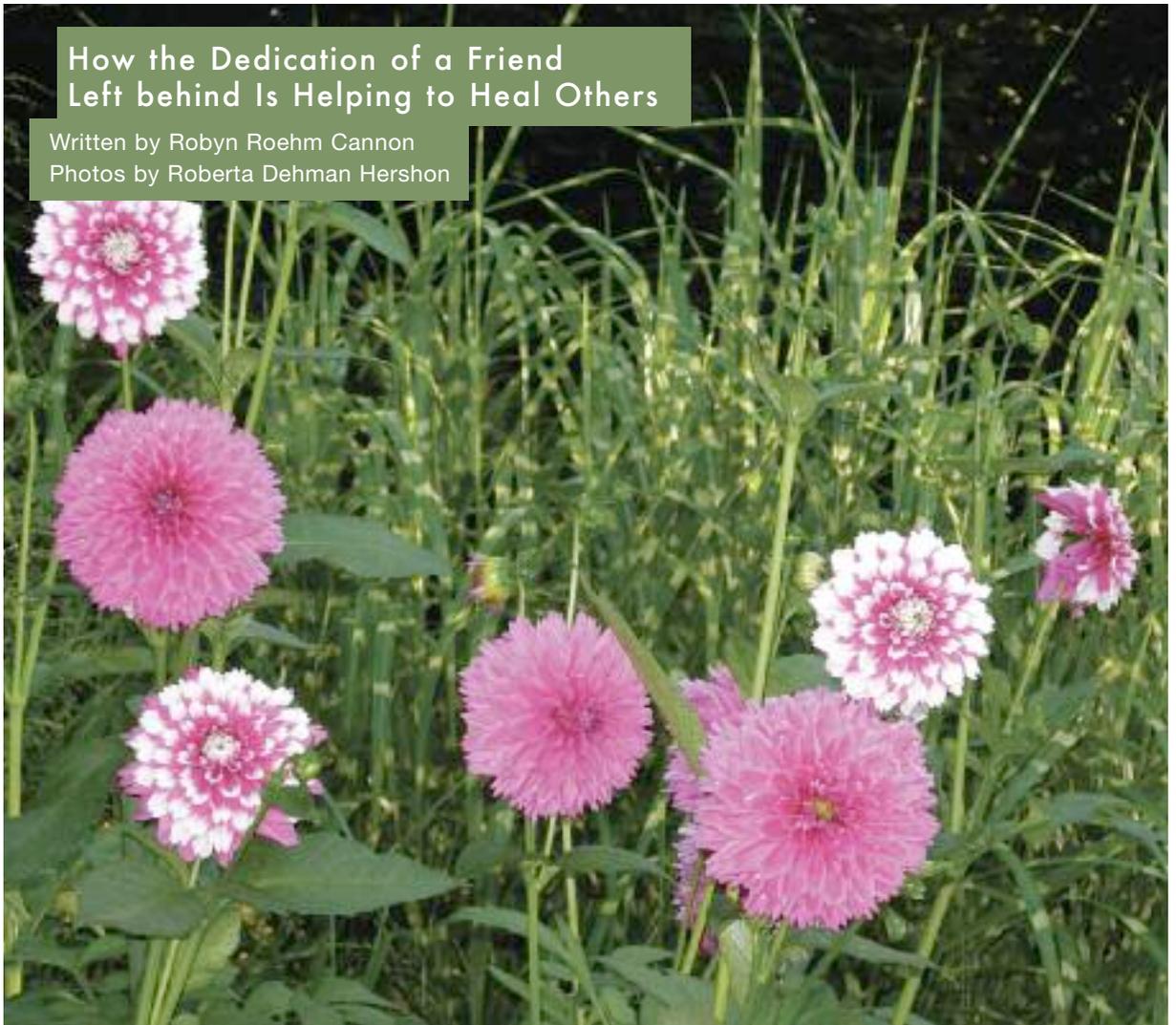


Hope Springs Eternal

How the Dedication of a Friend
Left behind Is Helping to Heal Others

Written by Robyn Roehm Cannon
Photos by Roberta Dehman Hershon



More than one hundred years ago, American writer Orison Swett Marden said, “There is no medicine like hope, no incentive so great, and no tonic so powerful as expectation of something better tomorrow.” He would be gratified to know that his sentiment was the founding principal for an amazing nonprofit organization started just over two years ago by Roberta Dehman Hershon, a lifelong friend of Beverly Eisenberg. This is the story of how the loss of someone dear and the desire to honor her memory led to some powerful hope in the lives of others.

Dehman Hershon is a former journalist who owns a public relations firm near Boston called Blue Plate Communications Inc. But in her private life, she has always taken refuge and pleasure in her suburban garden. She and Beverly spent many a happy hour visiting nurseries, poring over seed catalogues, and planting together. The two met when they were in the second grade of elementary school and had

known each other nearly 50 years when in 2004, Eisenberg was diagnosed with breast cancer.

Suddenly, Roberta’s friend became one of the legions of brave women and men who undergo treatment for the deadly disease each year. As she became too weak to tend her garden, Roberta and others close to her made certain that it was cared for, and when she was too ill to enjoy the outdoors any longer, her

group of friends surrounded her with colorful bouquets and plants to bring her closer to the garden she loved so much. After ten months of treatments, Beverly passed away in August 2005.

Dehman Hershon immediately sought a means for channeling her grief into something positive to help others who were struggling with the reality of breast cancer. And so she founded Hope in Bloom to plant gardens—indoors and out, free of charge, at the homes of cancer patients. “One in seven women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in our lifetime,” states Dehman Hershon matter-of-factly, adding, “This translates into a new case being discovered every two minutes.”

When I caught up with her it was the end of summer, and she and her crew of volunteers were still planting gardens on a weekly basis. In 2007, the first two dozen Hope in Bloom gardens were planted throughout the Boston area, and since that time, Dehman Hershon has seen to it that the number has more than doubled, as requests were answered in fourteen towns throughout western Massachusetts. “Each garden is tailored to the recipient’s residential situation and lifestyle,” she notes.

Roberta told me that just as cancer changes the lives of its victims, her life has forever been changed because of the positive effect she has seen the gardens have on the women Hope in Bloom has served. “There’s no doubt about it,” she says. “Healing gardens have been proven to be therapeutic sanctuaries offering both comfort and hope to meet the emotional and psychological needs of patients and their families. Our goal is to help breast cancer patients keep the sights, sounds, and smells of nature in their lives and to offer them beautiful, tranquil places to escape from the world of doctors, hospitals, and sickness. All of the gardens we build have symbols of life including color, texture, fragrance, and sound incorporated into their design.”

She has not only enlisted the help of volunteers by the dozens, but to date she has also recruited more than 52 partnering companies, both regionally and nationally, including nurseries, florists, designers and landscapers, movers, garden products, artists, and even a caterer. “Gardening is an expensive hobby,” she comments, “and the need is great. We’ve built gardens for women from their thirties to their eighties, and we’re beginning to get requests for help in starting chapters in other states. I’d like nothing more than to expand this effort as soon as possible. With a presenting sponsor, we’d have the power to do that.”

As H. Jackson Brown Jr. was once recorded as saying, “Never deprive someone of hope—it may be all they have.” He must have known Roberta. Because it’s clear that there’s no stopping this philanthropist. She’s just getting started. ■

For more information on Hope in Bloom, and to read the inspiring stories of Hope in Bloom garden recipients and learn how you can become involved with the organization, visit www.hopeinbloom.org.



OPPOSITE PAGE: Hot pink dahlias and zebra grass perk up a suburban garden.

THIS PAGE FROM TOP: Hope in Bloom volunteer Laurie Phillips arranges a patio planter; a backyard spring bulb garden in bloom.