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# PASSION WITHOUT BOUNDARIES

Barbara Lazaroff

BY CLAIRE SANDER

**IF EVER A WOMAN COULD BE** described as inexhaustible, it's Barbara Lazaroff, A.S.I.D. An award-winning interior designer and restaurateur, Lazaroff is president of Imaginings Interior Design, Inc.; and she co-owns many successful restaurants, food and kitchen accessory product lines, and a world-renowned catering company (with ex-husband Wolfgang Puck). But as busy as her career may be, Lazaroff has never lost sight of her children, her family, her extensive network of friends, or her community.

"I feel very strongly about the idea of family. The idea of loyalty, fidelity, giving back, altruism, compassion—these are the elements that make life truly meaningful," Lazaroff says.

Lazaroff emphasizes that her children have always been her top priority. Her goal with her two sons—Cameron Lazaroff-Puck, 18, who attends college on the East Coast; and Byron Lazaroff-Puck, 13, who is busy preparing for his bar mitzvah—has been to raise young men who will make a difference with their lives. She has worked tirelessly to set a good example.

As co-founder of the Puck-Lazaroff Foundation, Lazaroff has made measurable improvements in the lives of the elderly. Since its inception in 1982, the foundation has raised more than \$13 million for the Los Angeles chapter of Meals on Wheels, according to the website of the American Wine & Food Festival, the main fundraising event for the foundation.

Lazaroff has also set her sights on improving the circumstances for at-risk girls in residence at the Wal-



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lis Annenberg Center treatment facility. The center is administered by Aviva Family and Children's Services, a nonprofit agency in Los Angeles that has served abused, at-risk youth and their families for more than 90 years.

Leveraging her connections in the design and construction world, Lazaroff elicited donations of art tables, paint, construction

supplies, and more for the center's much-needed overhaul. She believes that creating a beautiful environment for the 36 girls who live there will foster learning and help them heal.

"My mother taught me that education is your passport," Lazaroff says. "You have to raise your children to understand that getting an education, accessing information, and showing kindness toward others are probably the most important things they'll learn in their lives."

Growing up in a working-class home in New York City, Lazaroff applied these lessons early. She took her first job at 14 to earn money for college. Scholarships and working three jobs paid for school at NYU, where she studied lighting and set design. Along the way, she changed majors, transferred to various colleges (studying bio-chemistry and experimental psychology to become a doctor), and finally ended up in Los Angeles, where she revisited her love for space and interior design.

Lazaroff's varied background and subsequent success have made her passionate about helping other women.

"I really feel, as a woman who has been able to excel a bit, that I need to extend myself to other women," Lazaroff says.

At a recent regional function for NAWBO, the National Association of Women Business Owners, Lazaroff looked around the room at the 900 women present, most from California, and realized that they were collectively worth a couple of billion dollars.

"It's a very inspirational and powerful thing to see all these women in one room," she says. "And these are women who are networking with other women and helping them and mentoring them. And that's what we need to do."

Lazaroff has lived her life exploring such opportunities to give back, enriching her life and the lives of others with service.

"There are lots of things that I find interesting," she says. "When people say, 'I'm bored,' I don't get it. There's not enough time to do everything I want to do."

Indeed, she is currently in development for a television show, has a book offer, continues to maintain a strong foothold in the design community, and supports many other charitable causes.

"It's really kind of hard to get it all done," she confesses. But to her, the effort is worth it. "Those things that we do within the scope of our lives—the kindness, the compassion—ripple out to make the world a better place." ☺

"...the flame of hope  
is inexhaustible,  
the flame of the bounty of the earth  
delights and fulfills,  
the flame of life  
is a circle with no beginning  
and no end."

*Excerpted from the poem "Flame of Life"  
by Barbara Lazaroff*

