

Tribute to Bernice Blazewicz Pitcairn



Bernice Blazewicz Pitcairn, Class of '53

TEXT: Patti Tweed '95 PHOTO: provided by the Pitcairn family

Bernice Blazewicz was a beautiful woman. Through the eyes of **John Pitcairn**, she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. Thus began a 46-year love affair, back in the early fifties, when the young chartered accountancy student, John Pitcairn, met, and fell in love with the studious Bernice Blazewicz.

An Arts student at United College, Bernice had money for tuition and room, but virtually no money for books and, indeed, not much money for food. Determined to make the best of opportunities available, Bernice caught the attention of one of the librarians, who helped her to obtain the books she needed.

Following Bernice and John's marriage and John's graduation as a Chartered Accountant, the couple was transferred to San Francisco with Deloitte & Touche. Five years later Bernice and John became business partners, working side by side in their own firm of Pitcairn Accountants Inc. Intel and National Semiconductor were among their first clients. Specializing in forensic accounting, they worked on litigation projects all over the U. S., Europe, Asia, and South America. Theirs was a true partnership in marriage and in business, a success story, based on hard work, integrity, and good timing.

Bernice had always held the University and its library in high regard. When John received a letter from the University following Bernice's death in December 2001, he was especially touched by the Alumni Association's tradition of placing a book in the library in Bernice's memory. It is the custom of The University of Winnipeg Alumni Association to place a book in the library in memory of each alumnus who passes away. **Anne Cramb**, one of the University's library staff, chose *Children's Geographies, Playing, Living, Learning* as the right choice to honour Bernice's interests. Having earned a BA (United College, 1953 and a B.Ped. (University of Manitoba, 1954) Bernice had established a career in teaching before becoming a managing partner in Pitcairn Accountants Inc. For 38 years,

through her favourite charity, Childreach, Bernice had helped children directly with clothes, schooling, and health care in countries around the world. She wanted to make a difference in the lives of these children, to provide support for children who had tuition, but no books or uniforms. Sound familiar? In the grand circle of life, Bernice was giving back as she received.

This philosophy of giving continues even now. Thanks to a very generous gift from John Pitcairn, in memory of his wife, the Bernice Blazewicz Pitcairn Learning Commons opened on October 29, 2003, an integral part of The University of Winnipeg Library. The Learning Commons will include a media gallery, teaching laboratory, and state of the art technology. It will be the site of programs that assist students with special needs, reflecting The University of Winnipeg's highly personalized approach to education.

Adjacent to the other areas of the Learning Commons and a few steps from the general Library space, Bernice's Reading Room, with its large windows and broad skylights welcomes sunlight during the day and permits a clear view of Manitoba's night sky. The furniture has been comfortably refinished, offering an ideal place for quiet reflection, reading, and individual study.

When asked what would have delighted Bernice the most about the Learning Commons, John replied, "the accessibility, the universality of it." She had the ability to make learning practical and understandable and was a genius in the use of "plain language" to cut through the complexity of words. Bernice was a born teacher, and it appears that, in a very real sense, her ability to bring learner and learning together lives on.

Bernice and John were committed to "giving back" with gratitude for the gifts given to them over time. Together they built a living and a life, and now, through Bernice's memory, they are building a legacy. ■

For more information about how you may make a gift to The University of Winnipeg, please contact Patti Tweed, Development Officer, Major and Planned Gifts, The University of Winnipeg Foundation, at 204.786.9123 or by e-mail at p.tweed@uwinnipeg.ca