

ANNE-MERETE ROBBS

April 11, 2013

I am Catherine Kauffman, chairman of the Historical Committee along with Patricia Livi here to interview Anne Robbs.

Anne: It's really Anne–Merete Robbs – A-N-N-E- - M-E-R-E-T-E. It's Danish.

Catherine: I want to ask you if we have permission to quote you in part or in whole from this interview.

Anne: Sure

Catherine: Thank you and also thank you for taking the time today for allowing us to interview you.

Catherine: When did you first come to the Town of Paradise Valley?

Anne: In 1968

Catherine: Where did you live?

Anne: We lived on Pepper Tree and Desert Fairways - on the corner. Desert Fairways was my husband's house. Then we bought a house further down on Desert Fairways. The Mennen's lived there and also Lou Grubb.

Catherine: Was your husband already living in the Town before you came?

Anne: He was born and raised in Phoenix. He passed away in 2000 – February 2000

Catherine: What was his name?

Anne: Albert Robbs – Bob Robbs - Albert Robert Robbs

Patricia: Everyone knew him as “Bob Robbs”

Anne: He grew up in Phoenix. His father was running the old Adams Hotel – Adams and 2nd Street - so they lived up there in the penthouse.

Catherine: How did you meet your husband?

Anne: I was teaching tennis.

Patricia: She was a famous tennis player

Anne: I was the Danish tennis champion and ice-skating champion. For ice-skating, I got this big trophy. I was 16 years old. But I didn't care about the trophy. Dick Button was there. He was a

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famous guy. He is still judging. That was fun. Then I toured the world playing international tennis. They needed a tennis pro at Phoenix Country Club so they hired me. I came in my white teddy tingling dresses and my lace panties. There were all these people in their Bermuda's and horrible colors and everything else. Dale Trailer was there at the time. I had him build a tennis shop for me. Then I ordered all this stuff and I told everybody, "Nobody goes on the tennis court unless they wear white!" Of course, I made a lot of money too! They all did. Do you know Jimmy Walker from Fight Night? He came here two years ago. He said "I have to confess something." I said, "What?" He said, "When we were at North Central in High School, during our lunch hour, we guys would go over to the Phoenix Country Club to see what you were wearing". Then I would get a call from the Men's Grill, "we are mad at you." I said, "I haven't been up there eating, what's wrong?" "No, because all the guys are going down and eating at the snack shop by the pool and tennis court to see what you are doing." So that's how I met my husband too. He was a driving golf (cart) and coming through.

Catherine: So he was playing golf while you were playing tennis?

Anne: Oh he played good tennis too. He was a scratch handicap – very good - played with Arnold Palmer and all of these guys.

Catherine: What year was it that you met your husband?

Anne: 1968

Catherine: When did you get married?

Anne: We got married on our yacht in Acapulco in 1970. He was also an ocean racer, my husband. He won the Honolulu race - did the Bermuda, Mazatlan, Nassau, - did all of these races. It's just so much sports, sports, sports.

Patricia: Do you still have the boat?

Anne: Yes

Catherine: Did you move to Pepper Tree over by the PV Country Club in 1970?

Anne: Yes, we were right in there – on the fairway.

Catherine: Did you continue as tennis pro?

Anne: After I got married - no.

Catherine: Did you retire from tennis?

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Anne: Well I didn't retire

Patricia: She became a socialite. She did all the fund raising.

Anne: Heart Ball Chairman twice, Cancer Ball, Samaritan Ball – you know just did so much

Catherine: Do you have children?

Anne: I have two boys.

Catherine: And what are their names?

Anne: Bruce and Christian

Catherine: Do they live in Arizona?

Anne: Bruce lives here – just at the end of the street – down Lincoln.

Catherine: In Paradise Valley?

Anne: No, I think it's in Scottsdale. Christian lives in Greece.

Patricia: What school did the boys go to?

Anne: They went to school in Switzerland. But the first couple of years they went to Madison.

Catherine: Was your husband still involved with the Adams Hotel when you got married?

Anne: No, his father had passed away. But the old Governor Hunt was his (Bob Robbs) babysitter sometimes – taking care of him. After the Adams Hotel, they lived in the Valley Ho on top.

Patricia: Tom Chauncey used to babysit for him too.

Patricia: He was married to the Wrigley heir.

Anne: Tom and those guys would put him in the trashcan.

Catherine: As they were babysitting him?

Patricia: Yes, because he was running all over the hotel.

Anne: His father would come out of the elevator and say, "Look who's here - oh my God!" He told him that they put him in the trashcan. His father said, "Well you probably deserved it."

Tom would always tell me that story

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Catherine: What charities did you get involved with? You talked about the Heart Ball and the Cancer Ball.

Patricia: She got involved in philanthropy because her husband also was very charitable.

Anne: Carolyn Goldwater, you know she has passed away, but she always said, "You know now when we did all of those charities, the first person we would call would be Bob Robbs." Bob Robbs would say, "How much do you need?" He would give us a check – he was so generous.

Anne: I did the Heart Ball, the Cancer Ball, and the Samaritan Ball. I also worked for Phoenix Day.

Catherine: Phoenix Country Day?

Anne: No, Phoenix Day - the poor little kids downtown – I raised money for them. One year, Princess Ann came here for Phoenix Day. I had some of the little girls come to the house and got them dressed up. I showed them how to curtsy. I said, "Now when the Princess comes, you stay right there and then you curtsy and say welcome your Royal Highness."

Patricia: Queen Elizabeth's daughter, Princess Ann.

Catherine: Is Phoenix Day still around?

Anne: It's still there. It's just a charity that I give money. They are raising kids that didn't have any money or maybe they were divorced - just poor kids that had no family.

Catherine: Is the Samaritan Ball the same as Good Sam – part of Banner Hospital?

Anne: Yes, Banner – and I had the Temptations - the real Temptations at the Ball.

Catherine: The singing group?

Anne: Yes, it was at the Biltmore.

Patricia: She is on the Board of several organizations like Barrows. What other boards are you on?

Anne: Well the Heart Board, Cancer Ball – we are having our cancer thing on Saturday at Phoenix Country Club.

Patricia: And the Diamondbacks.

Catherine: What do you do for the Diamondbacks?

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Anne: I just help them out when they need fund raising.

Catherine: Did you do this for their Charities or for them?

Anne: Whatever they need the money for. They are very charitable. They give a lot.

Patricia: They gave her a ring.

Catherine: Did you get a ring for them winning World Series?

Anne: Yes

Patricia: For her philanthropy work

Anne: Do you remember Debbie Castaldo?

Patricia: Yes

Anne: She works there still. Because last year, she said, "Oh, I think I'll go back to Barrow's and St. Joe's." I said, "No you're not, you are not going back there because it's not the same as when you were there. It's different."

Patricia: So she stayed with the Diamondbacks?

Anne: Yes, She said to me the other day, "Thank God you told me not to go back." She is so happy there and has a beautiful office upstairs. You see her on TV too. You saw her on the opening night. She is very good and helps a lot.

Patricia: Anne was one of the most incredible party givers and also fundraiser. She would have celebrities from all over the world. Tell them about those parties and the story about Robert Mitchum.

Anne: Yes and Merv Griffin, Ava Gabor, and I had the Bushes – for George Bush, I had the big lunch with Barbara and George Bush. Goldwater was there. And then on New Year's Eve, we always had this big party. It was John Gardner's birthday and Barry Goldwater's birthday so they were always there for their birthdays together. Bob Goldwater would always sing.

Patricia: They did a lot of political things also and raised a lot of money, like I said for the George Bush family. I'm talking about George I and Barbara Bush, Barry Goldwater,

Catherine: Are you still involved politically?

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Anne: With the Goldwater's – Barry Jr. comes over and wants me to do this and do that and I go to the dinners. Now unfortunately I can't go to the one next Saturday because we have the Cancer Ball at the Phoenix Country Club outdoors.

Catherine: Is this the American Cancer Society that you are fund raising for?

Anne: Yes

Catherine: For the Arizona Chapter?

Anne: I say when I give to the Heart Ball and the Cancer Ball and all of this, the money I am giving has to stay right here and not go to Washington DC

Patricia: Yes, she always keeps her money in Arizona to benefit Arizonans

Catherine: Patricia, what is your connection to Anne-Merete?

Patricia: Anne and I met years and years ago through Joanne Anthony.

Catherine: Who is Joanne Anthony?

Patricia: She was a socialite from Dallas, Texas – a very wealthy family from Dallas. She moved here. It was Joanne Anthony and Madeline Smith. Her father owned Smith Pipe and Steel. Madeline and all of us - Anne just took us under her wings and said, "come on, we're going to have fun." And we did every time we were with Anne she would include us in everything. We were always at her house.

Anne: Do you remember the Senator's Cup - for the Hospice? John Gardner started hospice. His first wife died from cancer. When the senate was not in session, they would come down here, both the donkey's and the elephants. I had a donkey and an elephant made for both sides.

Catherine: Was that for Democrats and Republicans?

Anne: Yes– now they are up at the Sanctuary. I gave them to the Sanctuary. I also found a bunch of pictures they would like to have and some of the trophies

Patricia: So are they going to display this at the Sanctuary?

Anne: Yes

Catherine: Were these a life size donkey and elephant?

Anne: Yes, I had them carved out of wood. They are flat and stand about 8 feet tall.

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Catherine: You had mentioned, Patricia, that Anne's husband had owned a bank. Can you tell me something about the bank?

Anne: Well he started the Guaranty Bank with David Murdock. David and Bob built the building. He was on the Board of the Guaranty Bank – the first high rise.

Patricia: Do you know who David Murdock is? He's the one that owns Dole.

Catherine: As in Dole Pineapple?

Patricia: Yes, Dole Pineapple and half of Hawaii

Anne: Then my husband decided he wanted to have his own bank. So he went to Washington DC and he sat with all these guys. The guys said, "I'm sorry sir, we cannot give you the license." He said, "Why not?" They said, "because, we have never given it to an individual person before." "Well there you see gentlemen, you did a first." And he got the license. So then he went out to south Central and opened Continental Bank. The building is not there anymore.

Patricia: But over here it is – on McCormick Ranch Parkway.

Anne: Oh yes, we had the one on 68th Street. We had several branches.

Catherine: The first Continental Bank was on Central?

Anne: 4000 North Central. He had to go to Washington. We built the bank building, which is now "Forever Living" at McCormick Ranch on the lake. I did most of the interior because I'm into architecture. Yes, that was a beautiful building.

Patricia: Here is a brochure with a picture of her home. This is in Paradise Valley on the corner of Yucca and McDonald. You can see all of her antique decorations

Anne: There was a lake, tennis court, five acres and an orange grove. It's next to the back entrance to Finisterre.

Patricia: Yes, she just moved out about four years ago. Her husband passed away, her children grew up but she still has a beautiful home and entertains – just doesn't have as many grounds. She doesn't have to worry about the upkeep of the yard

Anne: We had a lot of fun in that house. The parties – Bob loved black tie dinners. We just had a great time.

Patricia: One of things I remembered also was when you would go into her theater room, all of the bottles of champagne. Every year they would open up a magnum.

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Anne: Yes - the real big ones – remember the big ones?

Patricia: The big, big ones – I don't know if it's more than a magnum

Anne: Yes, it's more than a magnum. It took two guys to fill the glasses.

Patricia: Yes, but what was so incredible was every year, people would sign them and she would have them all behind her bar. So you would see all these incredible bottles of champagne throughout the years from the different parties. I remember the first time I saw those bottles.

Catherine: Where do you get those?

Anne: Vincent – he was our chef in our house before he opened the restaurant.

Patricia: He was their personal chef.

Anne: When Liza Minnelli would come to town or Merv Griffin would come to town, Liza would stay with us. We'd take them down there to see Vincent.

Catherine: Did you design this house?

Anne: No but we did redo the house a lot. The Talley's had it.

Catherine: The Talley's from Phoenix Country Day?

Anne: Yes, but guess who started Phoenix Country Day?

Catherine: Who?

Anne: Bob Robbs. He did the cafeteria and had the land and everything else. And she is saying she did the whole thing - baloney

Patricia: Yes it was Bob Robbs

Catherine: But your children were in school in Switzerland not at Phoenix Country Day, correct?

Anne: My grandchildren went to Phoenix Country Day

Catherine: How did Phoenix Country Day start?

Anne: Oh years ago, because Bob decided we needed another private school.

Catherine: Was it prior to you being married when he started the school?

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Anne: Yes, because it is 48 years old. It was before me.

Catherine: So it was your husband and maybe the Talley family who with a group of families started Phoenix Country Day?

Patricia: Did the Talley family helped start it with him?

Anne: That is what she says, yes.

Catherine: So what is the other side of the story? We have the Talley family who started Phoenix Country Day in our Town history.

Anne: Well I can get you some pictures.

Patricia: But he was one of the first to start it?

Anne: Oh yes – he was the one

Patricia: Did the Talley's come in after?

Anne: I don't know. The cafeteria, he built that too and his name was up there and then I heard that she had it taken down along with the pictures of everyone else.

Patricia: Bob was an innovator in many things.

Anne: He gave the Boys Club and Girls Club their first boat. I have a picture of that.

Catherine: Where did they take this boat?

Anne: On the lakes or wherever

Catherine: Was this a sailboat?

Anne: No it was a boat with a motor on the back.

Catherine: Are you still doing a lot of fundraising?

Anne: Yes, this morning we had a Lou Grubb golf tournament meeting that I've been involved with so many years. We are having it next week.

Catherine: And who are they raising money for?

Anne: Barrows – when Lou was playing golf at Phoenix Country Club, he got an aneurism or something terrible and Dr. Spitzler saved his life. Since then, for 49 years he has done that. We raise a lot of money for Barrows.

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Catherine: "Fight Night" was a couple of weeks ago. Is that your fundraiser for Barrows?

Anne: Yes, Mohammed Ali's Fight Night. I'm a founder in that.

Catherine: How did you come up with "Fight Night"?

Anne: Well I guess they approached some people with a big checkbook at that time.

Patricia: Basically, big donations.

Anne: And then we pay every year - a lot. Jimmy Walker was a big donor.

Patricia: Yes, he runs it.

Catherine: Jimmy Walker the comedian?

Patricia: No, Jimmy Walker – he was in insurance. He grew up here.

Anne: He's the one who came to see what I was wearing at the Phoenix Country Club!

Patricia: Right!

Catherine: Were you involved with the Town of Paradise Valley? Were you part of the Art Committee?

Anne: Yes, I was involved with that.

Patricia: At the beginning

Catherine: Are you still involved with the Art Committee?

Anne: No, I'm at the Biltmore now. I'm not in Paradise Valley any more.

Catherine: Do you have any fond memories of what the Town was like when you lived here?

Anne: The parties were fun. The police department was very good to me. I would have these crazy people come and pick up the (gate) phone and think it was Stevie Nicks' house.

Catherine: They thought your house was Stevie Nicks' house?

Anne: Yes, they would ask if I would please open the gate. So I would call my buddies down at the police station and they say, "Yes I'll be there in one minute." And they were right there.

Catherine: Did your children grow up in this house – the one on Yucca?

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Anne: No, we got the house on Yucca in 1981. I had the addressing lunch for the Heart Ball at that time and the Thank you party for the Heart Ball

Patricia: She was a "Fashionality".

Catherine: A "Trend Setter?"

Patricia: Yes, they're called Trend Setter's now

Catherine: You came from Denmark. Was there any place you lived before you came to Arizona?

Anne: I lived in Dallas Texas

Catherine: Were you playing tennis or ice-skating? Or had you given up ice skating by that point?

Anne: I wasn't competing any more but I'm still ice skating. I still put my ice skates on and skate. I still have my white skates.

Catherine: Have you lived in Arizona ever since?

Anne: Yes, though we had a chalet and a yacht.

Patricia: They cruised for a year and had their children home schooled basically on their yacht for a year.

Anne: I'm a tennis champion at Costa del Sol in Spain. The funny thing was we were on our yacht and they had this tournament and I said, well I haven't played tennis for about six months – maybe I'll sign up – you know Lou Hocks wife was there and all these German's were there. So I got to the finals, I mean after not playing all those years and then Bob and the 2 boys were sitting up there watching and then all of a sudden they left. I lost the first set 6 - Love to this German girl. I was behind Love - 5, Love - 40 and one more point – so they had left because they said, "You played so awful." They thought I was gone already. So I didn't have any water so I said in German to the girl – the coach "Konnte ich bitte haben Sie etwas Wasser?" Could I have some water please? "Nein dacht nicht" With that I got so mad that I said "I'm going to beat the you know what out of her – whether I am going to drop shot or run - do this or do that – I don't care how I am going to play – I'm just going to win the point. Guess what? I won the tournament. I still have the newspaper with a picture of me which says "Champion of Costa del Sol."

Catherine: What year was that?

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Anne: That must have been in 1979.

Anne: And then I was having lunch with Jerry Colangelo not so long ago and he's sitting and talking – you know he's from Toronto. I was playing up there – so I won the tournament in Toronto. The journalist came over and said, could we have a picture of you please. I said, sure. They took me over to this big salad bowl and said, "can you do like this?" I said, "sure." You know with the mixing salad and I was still in my tennis things. The next day - front page of the Toronto Star – "Salad Queen of Ontario." So I was telling that to Jerry and he laughed so much. So now when he sees me he says, oh there's the "Salad Queen."

Catherine: Did your boys play tennis or ice skate?

Anne: Yes, they are ice hockey players, tennis players, they play golf, and they swim. They won gold medals. Christian has now won the tennis champion in his age group in Athens.

Catherine: Was he on the national tennis team?

Anne: yes.

Catherine: So is there anything else you would like to tell us that is interesting in your life?

Anne: I will jot things down. If you would like to see some pictures, you can come to my house.

Catherine: Well thank you for spending this hour with us