

# Richard A. Bloch

Entrepreneur  
1926-2004

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by Daniel Coleman

Hortense Bloch, mother of Richard Bloch, was known to tell her children, "Once you have three meals a day, it's time to do something for the next person." Over the course of his 78 years, Richard Bloch put these words into action. Possessed of an entrepreneurial spirit, Richard Bloch and his brother Henry helped found the world's largest tax preparation company, H & R Block. Later in life, Bloch's successful battles against cancer led him to devote himself to inspiring others in their struggles against the disease.



Richard Bloch was born February 15, 1926, in Kansas City, Missouri, to Leon and Hortense Bloch. The Bloch home was located near 58<sup>th</sup> and Wornall, and Richard attended Bryant Elementary School, then Southwest High. He went on to graduate from the University of Pennsylvania's prestigious Wharton School of Finance at the age of 19.

As a student in Philadelphia, Bloch attended a 16<sup>th</sup> birthday party for a young woman named Annette Modell, and over 50 years later he would still call her "the most wonderful girl in the world." They married when he was 20 and she 19, and returned to Kansas City to raise three daughters: Barbara, Nancy, and Linda.

Meanwhile, his brothers had started up a small company geared toward providing support to small businesses. When Henry Bloch placed a help wanted ad for an accountant, he received a call from a woman whose voice sounded familiar; it was his mother Hortense, suggesting that Henry hire his brother Richard for the job.

He took her advice, and in 1955, the Bloch brothers forked over a risky sum of \$200 to advertise their services in the *Kansas City Star*. The ad promised relief from the headaches of preparing an income tax return, for a fee of \$5.00. Out of a promising response to that ad rose H & R Block, a global firm that in 2003 prepared some 15.9 million tax returns.

In 1978, Richard Bloch was diagnosed with lung cancer and told he did not have long to live. Later in his life he would describe this experience as a "gift"; his fight against cancer taught him that the disease could be conquered, and he would spend the rest of his life helping fellow sufferers beat it. He founded the R. A. Bloch Cancer Foundation, as well as a cancer hotline, from which he often took calls personally. He founded the "Fighting Cancer Rally," an annual event now recognized in over 700 cities, and built the R. A. Bloch Cancer Survivor's park on the Plaza in which to gather.

Richard Bloch died of heart failure in his home on July 21, 2004. He was survived by his wife Annette, three daughters, and 13 grandchildren. He left a legacy of entrepreneurship and hope for the suffering.

### **Sources**

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