The Cedars-Sinai Founders’ Room means a lot to Susanne Bard. It was there in 2003 that the Medical Center honored Susanne and her husband Ervin for making a significant gift in memory of their parents.

“It was in that room that Ervin and I had one of the happiest days of our lives. In fact, I still have a photograph of the two of us smiling from ear to ear,” says Susanne. “He was so proud to be part of this great institution.”

The Bards had discussed a second gift to Cedars-Sinai but Ervin became sick and passed away in 2006. “I was inconsolable,” says Susanne. “I had lost my husband, the love of my life, and best friend.” Still, she intended to follow through with their philanthropy. “Ervin would have wanted that,” she says. So, the place that brought back joyful memories of a day in 2003 was named in Ervin’s memory.

The Bard’s gift also symbolized how far the couple had come from their once-humble beginnings. Ervin was born in Hungary. His parents perished in the Holocaust; Ervin and his sister Gabriella survived. He spent several years in Paris before moving to New York City in 1952, where he met Susanne.

Susanne was born in Hungary too. In 1948, she and her parents immigrated to Westchester County, N.Y., after leaving Budapest and living for a time in occupied Germany. “As a Jewish family, we were very lucky to get out,” she says.

She met Ervin only because he had approached her father to go into business with him. The venture never materialized, but her father was not one to miss an opportunity. “I have a nice daughter,” he said. “Why don’t you come out and we’ll have dinner for you.” That was the start of a two-year courtship. “Ervin thought I was the most beautiful girl in the world,” she says. “What more could I hope for?” Her parents adored him and that clinched it. They married—she at 19, he the older man at 29.

Within six months, the newlyweds moved to the Miracle Mile District of Los Angeles, and her parents followed. Ervin sold insurance then and Susanne accompanied him on his rounds, waiting for him in the car. “We were inseparable,” she says. They saved little by little and invested in some property. “First small ones, then bigger ones,” she says. “He gave up insurance when those investments took off.”

Through their success, Susanne says she and her husband never forgot the lessons their parents taught them about Tzedakah, the Hebrew word for “charity.” “I knew I wanted to give back to Cedars-Sinai when my parents fell ill and received such wonderful care here,” she says.

Susanne volunteers at Cedars-Sinai one day each week, staffing the eighth floor information desk in the Department of Surgery. “I talk to people in the waiting room and try to calm them when they’re upset and waiting to hear news about someone in surgery or recovery,” she says. “Helping them sort of helps me too. It gives me such a good feeling.”

She admits that it hasn’t been easy continuing on without her husband. “I feel the loss every day,” says Susanne. As she stands outside the room where it all began, she runs her fingers along the sign on the wall. The silver letters read: “The Susanne and Ervin Bard Founders’ Room.” “I cannot express what it means to me to make this gift in my husband’s memory,” she says. “Somehow it brings Ervin close to me, and I’m reminded that we did this together.”