



## Danee Barnett Life is a grand adventure

BY RUTH LANDO  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAN WAGNER

If you see a couple happily motoring down the road in a newly refurbished, emerald green, 1948 Custom Coach motor home with solar panels on the roof, wave hello to Danee and Bob Barnett. Lifelong partners in adventure, this duo from Minneapolis literally landed in Sarasota in 1981 after a trip down the Mississippi River. They ran out of cash and fuel for their 1935 Chris Craft Cruiser on Thanksgiving Day, just as they fatefully reached Marina Jack. The couple lived aboard while Danee found work as a graphic designer and Bob plied his many talents in

photography, boat building, real estate and other creative business endeavors. Feeling lucky to have discovered our town, they've been here ever since.

"It was a stroke of luck to run out of money in this beautiful city," Danee says.

In 1986, the Barnetts began working with an attorney to adopt a newborn, expecting a two-year wait. But on Danee's birthday, Feb. 10, 1987, their daughter, Annie, was born. Becoming instant parents to a premie-sized baby was a surprise, but then, a few months later, they were asked to adopt again — a boy due to be born on ... wait for it ... Feb. 10, 1988. When she heard the anticipated birth date, Danee felt it was meant to be. And so, son, Charlie,

joined the family. (He actually arrived on Feb. 4, but close enough.) Both children are bi-racial and grew up on their parents' boat and then in houses in Laurel Park, Longboat Key and Jewfish Key. Charlie has made his hometown proud as a much-heralded actor from Booker High School's Visual and Performing Arts program and a graduate of the prestigious Juilliard School. Danee says it's "weird" to walk down the street in New York with her famous son and see him swarmed by fans of TV's "Chicago Fire," which launched him as an international heartthrob.

Charlie is now bi-coastal in New York and L.A., and in pre-production on two new shows for Netflix. He recently gave his parents a special gift by coming

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home just to cast his ballot in the November midterm elections. Annie, who Danee says is “the really talented sailor in the family,” serves as the popular office manager of her mother’s business. “Annie and Charlie are the two best things that ever happened to us,” Danee tells me. “Not only are they both amazing human beings, but they really opened up our eyes to the fact that being black in Sarasota is much different than being white ... and that there is still work to be done here for racial equality.”

There isn’t much that can sidetrack the life force of the Barnetts. You might even call them unsinkable. Back in the early ‘90s, when the kids were in elementary school, Danee and Bob took them sailing to Cuba with a friend. The night was pitch-dark and their craft was sideswiped by a fishing boat that was running illegally, without any lights. Terrified, and left to founder in the sea with two destroyed masts cast dangerously on top of them, the young family was lucky not to be injured or drowned. Danee lauds her 6-foot-6-inch husband for his calm and expert nautical skills. Bob managed to deliver them, at great risk, to the Dry Tortugas where they found help. Danee has since vowed never to sail in any other craft but the intrepid Rocking Horse. She is now docked at the Sarasota Yacht Club, which is just walking distance from the Barnett’s downtown Sarasota townhouse.

After the completion of some remodeling and repairs, Rocking Horse is due to set forth on new journeys, although Danee is pretty rooted to her very successful health, wellness and weight loss practice, the Danee Barnett Image Recovery Center.

Ever the seeker, she became certified in acupuncture, traditional Chinese medicine and homeopathy from the East West College of Natural Medicine in 1998, earning the Doctor of Oriental Medicine title. The melding of Eastern and Western medicine has brought Danee to a place of great emotional harmony, and a career path helping others with weight loss, addiction, pain management and cancer recovery. In 2001, Danee was diagnosed with both breast and endometrial cancer. Asian therapies were a tremendous salve during her recovery from the damaging effects of chemotherapy and radiation. “Understanding cancer through the lens of traditional Chinese medicine made the journey much less frightening,” she says, especially when her breast cancer returned for a second time.

In 2009, Danee was invited to study at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center’s Integrative Oncology service, where she trained in acupuncture for cancer patients. In the process, she discovered that excess body fat generates estrogen, which can fuel certain malignancies. Danee realized that she was 30 pounds overweight. She slimmed down using a combination of homeopathic formulas, a low-calorie, nutrient-dense diet and behavior-modification therapy. The results of that three-week regimen and subsequent healthy lifestyle changes were so amazing that Danee created a custom weight-loss protocol for her eponymous Image Recovery Center to share with others. She now says that through the optimum balance of food and medicine, it is possible to lose 10 percent of your body weight in the first six weeks of treatment, and to continue to burn unwanted fat thereafter. As a measure of her commitment to the program, about two years ago Danee began donating 25 cents to All Faiths Food Bank for every pound her patients shed. So far, the loss of more than 65,000 pounds has meant a nice sum added to the coffers of the organization’s fresh produce program.

Danee says, “Never question a miracle,” has become her motto. There have been many for which to be grateful. An only child, she lost her mother at the age of 2 and was adopted and raised by her grandparents in Salt Lake City. Adopting two minority infants with Bob and navigating with them through all sorts of health, emotional and social challenges has not always been easy, but Danee is a positive life force.

She jokes that her unconventional story “has been so unexpectedly magical and interesting that it could be a screenplay, except that nobody would probably believe it!” The hardest thing right now is finding time to take vacations away from her growing medical practice. Each new client requires her personal attention, and when New Year’s rolls around, the weight loss resolutions explode and her patient list always soars. “It’s like lambing season for a sheep farmer,” Danee quips. “All the lambs are born at once.”