

Florence M. Holland / Devoted her life to aiding abused, neglected kids

(Nov. 11, 1946 - April 25, 2008)

Florence M. Holland, who gave up a legal career to spend the past quarter-century helping abused and neglected children find foster homes, died Friday of cancer in her Squirrel Hill home. She was 61.

Ms. Holland, a graduate of Vassar College and the University of Pittsburgh School of Law, had a solo law practice Downtown for seven years, at a time when friends and relatives knew she had a strong bent to help both needy children and animals. A cousin running a placement agency for foster children elsewhere in Pennsylvania persuaded her to do likewise.

She left law to found Metamorphosis Foster Homes in 1982. It was based in Squirrel Hill but contracted at various times with Allegheny, Beaver, Butler, Lawrence, Washington and Westmoreland counties to find temporary homes for children in stressful family situations.

Ms. Holland assisted hundreds of children over the years by building a network of several dozen foster families that might care for them at any given time. She battled breast cancer the past six years, but kept active in running the agency as executive director through last fall.

"She was kind of a rescuer by nature," said the agency's assistant director, Angela Lucente-Prokop, noting that Ms. Holland also was known for taking in stray animals and restoring old homes that had declined under former owners. She often carried a dog bone with her to make friends with the pets in any foster family she visited.

Ms. Holland grew up in Cockeysville, Md., a suburb of Baltimore, but lived in Pittsburgh since arriving for law school in 1972. Whatever work she was doing, she approached it with an intensity that made others take notice. She did

not mind an argument, but it was usually from some sense of helping someone or making the system work properly for people.

"Her thoughts were that if you know where you're going to sleep tonight, and where your next meal is coming from, you have an obligation to help other people" who can't say the same, said her husband, Dr. Edwin G. Minkley Jr., a Carnegie Mellon University biology professor.

Her agency made a point of visiting every foster family and child at least once a week. Ms. Holland would frequently be called at night over the years to make emergency visits herself to calm difficult situations.

"She devoted herself to making sure the foster parents knew they were not in it alone," her husband said.

In addition to her husband, she is survived by two daughters, Amanda Holland-Minkley of Canonsburg and Dorothy Holland-Minkley, at home; and a son, Bryan Holland-Minkley of Squirrel Hill.

Arrangements were by John A. Freyvogel Sons Funeral Home.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Humane Society of the United States, P.O. Box 52137, Phoenix, AZ 85072.

Tuesday, April 29, 2008, by Gary Rotstein, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*