

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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Remembering Iris Holland

The passing of Iris Holland last week brought a sad close to the exemplary life of a wonderful lady. As the state representative of our 2nd Hampden District for 18 years, she was the model for a public servant. Here are some of my memories about Representative Iris K. Holland.

For the first 20 years of our acquaintance, I knew Iris the same way all of the people she represented knew her. I met her when she knocked on my door in the summer of 1972. She was accompanied by her little poodle Charlie. She smiled, introduced herself, handed me a potholder and asked me for my vote. Everyone in town at the time got the same introduction.

We gave her the vote and were repaid many times over in the succeeding years.

After she was elected, she became a bright light in the sea of dark-suited men in Boston. She rose in the ranks of the Republican Party and proceeded to rise above the party label. In the eyes of all legislators she was known as a statesman and a lady among politicians. At home, she remained the woman who was totally tuned in to the people she represented. I saw her at dinners, Eagle award presentations, all kinds of functions. Not that I went to all of them, but that any time I was there, so was Iris. She attended them all.

She responded to every call or letter, answering the letters-with her famous hand-written replies. As an indication of the extent to which she represented all of the people, the Longmeadow Democratic Town Committee even honored Iris as Citizen of the Year.

I was surprised that Iris remembered my name when she met so many people, but others who talk with me have a better story to tell. They say that after a single introduction, Iris remembered the names of their kids - and the dog. It was Iris who called me with her good wishes and some good advice when I decided to enter politics as a neophyte school committee candidate.

Iris's political career came to a sudden end when she suffered a debilitating stroke in 1990, shortly after being elected to her tenth term of office. During her illness, I came to really know her both personally and professionally.

I witnessed the deep relationship between Iris and her husband Gil that had fed her career and sustained her in her illness.

I knew her as the state budget watchdog, the author of the enduring, Holland Amendment that is still introduced during the House budget debate. Born of economic hard times; it requires that any budget addition be matched by an equivalent deletion.

I visited with her to keep her informed about goings-on at the State House. She liked hearing the stories, and she took issue with my commentary only one time. A colleague who was a fellow Turnpike commuter talked about Iris whizzing past him on the way home, and when I reported that comment back to her, Iris shook her head vigorously.

During lulls in sessions the, legislative veterans reminisce about Iris. "She was effective," "She was independent." "She was a "role model for me." And part of the conversation would always be "She is such a lady."

After a successful legislative career, Iris spent the last ten years of her life confined to a wheelchair. Even though her speech was severely, limited, she retained her relationships with friends and family and found new fans among her caregivers. The essential character of a lady defined Iris to the end of her life.

She is remembered with love by all who knew her.