HOLLANDER, ELIZABETH

10-14-15

PROVIDENCE



HOLLANDER, ELIZABETH L.

A city planner and leader in service learning, died of cancer Wednesday. She was 75. Liz Hollander, as she was known to her friends and colleagues, had a long and distinguished professional career, first in Chicago and later in Providence. In the former, she was Planning Commissioner under the city's first African-American mayor, Harold Washington, from 1983 to 1989. The first woman to hold that position, Hollander was a champion of city life, both through increased neighborhood development and the enlivening and reactivation of the downtown. During her tenure, the city adopted its first comprehensive homeless shelter laws and achieved the long delayed completion of a new central public library. She first came to prominence in Chicago as director of the Metropolitan Planning Council. After her time in city government, she founded the Egan Urban Center at DePaul University. She came to Providence from Chicago in 1997 to become executive director of Campus Compact, a national organization that promotes civic engagement in higher education. Her later focus on service learning also led to a position at Tufts University, and she published numerous articles in the field.

After retiring from Campus Compact in 2006, Hollander became a leader in civic and religious organizations in Providence. She served as president of the board of directors of Community Music Works, a prize-winning after-school music program. She was also a co-chair of J-Street in Rhode Island, an organization devoted to promoting peace between Israel and Palestine, and served on the Israel Task Force of the Community Relations Council of the Jewish Alliance. In addition, she created and led the Arts Allies, a non-profit group that advocated for greater resources and commitment to the arts in Providence public schools. Hollander was a member of many national boards, including the National Civic League and Public Allies, and received numerous awards for both her professional and volunteer activities, including honorary doctoral degrees from DePaul University and Milikin University, the Lambda Alpha International Public Official Award, and the Women Who Make a Difference Award, from the Chicago Network.

Hollander grew up in New York City. Her father, Russell Lynes, was a writer and managing editor of Harper's Magazine, and her paternal uncle, George Platt Lynes, was a highly regarded photographer. She attended Friends Seminary in New York and went on to earn her B.A. in Political Science from another Quaker institution, Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania. There, she first demonstrated her life-long commitment to social justice and equality by leading the civil rights organization on campus. In her adult life, she converted to Judaism and was an active member of KAM Isiah Israel Congregation in Chicago, Temple Beth-El in Providence and Hevreh in Great Barrington, MA.

She is survived by her husband, Carl Kaestle, her children, Daniel Hollander and Rachel Hollander, and her grandchildren, Edith Hollander, Emily Hollander, Jane Hollander and Sebastian Holst.

Reminiscences of Liz Hollander

BY ELEANOR LEWIS AND JUDY KAYE

Liz Hollander was an extraordinary human being.

"She was a truly righteous person," wrote one member of the J Street RI steering committee. Others described Liz as "warm," "insightful," "feisty," "generous" and "smart."

As her obituary shows (see page 31), Liz had a lifelong commitment to social justice, equality and service; her professional career was long and distinguished. Her energy and skills enhanced the life of our community. A gentle but determined leader ("pleasingly dogged," according to one colleague), Liz was able to talk to people across the political spectrum, always conveying interest and respect. She was open-minded, practical, diplomatic, humble and had excellent political instincts.

Liz worked tirelessly for peace and democracy in Israel, first through Brit Tzedek v'Shalom (The Jewish Alliance for Justice & Peace), and later through J Street RI,



Liz Hollander

where she served as co-chair for more than five years. She brought J Street's voice to the Israel Task Force of the Community Relations Council of the Jewish Alliance of Greater Rhode Island, earning the admiration and affection of its director and chair because she was "always a voice of reason and compassion."

Liz was a leader of Community MusicWorks, whose mission it is to foster a cohesive urban community through music education and performance.

Sebastian Ruth, artistic director of CMW, summed it up. "Liz 'got it,'" as she would say, and helped other people 'get it' too. At one point we were sitting with a potential supporter who didn't seem to understand that CMW was about students and professional chamber musicians, and didn't understand how the two groups were related. She said, "think of it as socially responsible chamber music. Right?!"

Sebastian Ruth had another wonderful story to tell. "One of the many people who thought of Liz as a central mentor was Michelle Obama. Liz served on her board when Michelle was running the Chicago Public Allies office. When the Obamas won the election, Liz served on a transition committee for service and helped write plans for the first administration. After Liz came to Providence, CMW won the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award from the first lady in 2010. We were instructed in the protocols meetings before going to the White House that we were not to speak to the first lady, but just to shake her hand, say thank you, and accept the award. However, when shaking her hand I said that Liz Hollander sent her greetings, and that she was our board president. The first lady smiled a huge smile and said, "I should have known Liz was behind this! Send her my love!"

Liz's devotion to Judaism was revealed in her ongoing efforts to study and to share her knowledge. She was a regular at the *parashah* classes at both Temple Beth-El and Temple Emanu-El; she gave *divrei* Torah talks at Beth-El and her congregation in the Berkshires; she *leyned* – chanted Torah portions; she took great pleasure in her weekly Torah study in *hevruta* with a friend.

It wasn't all work and no play. Liz loved her second home in the Berkshires where she relaxed and grew beautiful flowers in the garden. She was known for the intricacy of the needlepoint she fashioned over the years. Of course, her life was enriched by the love of her husband, children and four grandchildren.

The direct and candid way she processed her illness with her family and friends, knowing the end was near, was truly extraordinary. Liz battled cancer for more than two years and showed herself to be brave and not self-pitying. This past Rosh Hashanah, when she knew she had run out of treatment options and would likely die in a few weeks, she told a sister congregant, "I feel OK today, and that's the way I'll feel until I don't; and, by the way, I highly recommend Torah study with the new rabbi."

Her death is a huge loss for us personally, our local Jewish community and the Rhode Island community at large.