

DEIRDRE ANNE RONEY

1962 - 2017 Obituary [Condolences](#) Flowers



RONEY, Deirdre Anne Lifelong Public Servant Deirdre Anne Roney, of Brookline, passed away peacefully on December 17, 2017, from metastatic [breast cancer](#). She was a friend and teacher to many and an outstanding lifelong public servant who lived her belief that government service is a sacred trust, which demands respect and fairness for all, not disrespect for some and favoritism for others. She was scrupulous in avoiding both partisanship and personal corruption, and adamantly against exploiting government positions for personal benefit. She was rewarded by the trust of the public and both complainants and those whose futures she conscientiously and quietly held in her hands. Fulfilling her wishes, her family had been caring for her 24/7 in her home, with the help of Good Shepherd Hospice. Up until the very last, she showed her characteristic calmness, dry wit, sharpness and compassion, caring for all even as they cared for her. Holding her hands as she passed were her spouse of almost thirty years, Patrick L. Taylor, and her son Nathaniel L. Taylor, surrounded by family members Marie Taylor Davis, Rebecca Taylor, Maggie Davis Daniel, and Alex Daniel. She had been attended earlier for a day or more by family members Janet Taylor, Stephen P. Taylor, Rachel and Molly Taylor, by longtime friends Mark Leduc, Eileen Chang, Maria Fernandez-Gimenez, Carol Morley, Jim Utermark and Maeve Morley, by many colleagues from the State Ethics Commission and the Attorney General's Office multiple evenings on their own time, and by visitors from all over the country. Special thanks are due to Commission Executive Director Dave Wilson and Senior Counsel Pauline Nguyen for facilitating administrative matters necessitated by the final, catastrophic downturn in her physical condition. Facing the prospect of death in one to four weeks, she had notified friends on Facebook and said goodbye. Characteristically, she was surprised at the response: visitors, and those who wrote or called to say goodbye and thank her in the last weeks of her life numbered several hundred, including agency commissioners, senior congressional and legislative counsel, former mentees now advanced in their professions, friends from every period of her life since early childhood, young lawyers she had encouraged personally and professionally, and people she had touched from most walks of life. Governor Charles Baker sent a personal handwritten note thanking her for her outstanding public service and wise advice. Although exhaustion and pain pursued her, her last month found her as much as possible living not dying, hosting as many as three sets of visitors each day, talking about whatever people

wanted to talk about, transitioning mentees to new mentors, and always giving each person a gift, tangible or intangible. Deirdre was born on April 22, 1962, of Edmund Burke Roney, a veteran of the 6th Marine Division/World War II, Broadway actor, director, and Professor of Drama at Ripon College, Wisconsin (buried in Walnut Hills Cemetery), and Lois Yvonne Cooper, scholar and Professor of Medieval English at Rice University and St. Cloud, whose ashes will be interred near Deirdre's remains, in Forest Hills Cemetery. Her younger brother, Patrick Roney, died of pediatric leukemia when she was eight. Both parents doted on, encouraged and trusted her, expressing not only high expectations of her academically, personally and professionally, but loving and contagious confidence that she would achieve them. She exceeded those expectations in all dimensions of her life. She was a kind and ever-supportive daughter; an able, reliable, forgiving and loving partner; a loving, attentive, committed and resourceful mother; and a steadfast supporter in all circumstances. Completing high school in three years with university level training in Spanish, Swedish, German and Arabic, she attended Harvard and Radcliffe Colleges, graduating in 1983 with a degree in Social Studies and Government and a mastery of Mandarin. Her senior thesis was on the limited potency of Chinese Criminal Law to address corruption in government. She remained proficient in these languages, surprising native speakers here and abroad throughout her life by speaking with them in their own tongue with little trace of an accent. She attended Columbia University Law School in New York, graduating in 1986 as a Harlan Fiske Stone Scholar. On her first day there, she resumed a friendship with Patrick Taylor that had begun when she was 13 and he 15 and which would continue into marriage and to the end of their lives. She resided successively in Ripon, Wisconsin; Madison, Wisconsin; New York City; Albany, New York; and Brookline, Massachusetts. In law, she pursued public service, despite wages initially insufficient to both live and pay education debt, refusing lucrative offers in the private sector. She worked successively for the Organized Crime Strike Force of the U.S. Attorney (SDNY), the Manhattan District Attorney's Office, U.S. District Court Chief Judge Barbara B. Crabb, Chief Judge Judith Kaye of the New York Court of Appeals, the New York Attorney General's Office, the law firm of Hinman Straub in association with B.J. Costello to compel Medicaid to pay poor children's dental costs, and to protect insurance pools to benefit the very ill, the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office, and finally the Massachusetts State Ethics Commission. She was an outstanding trial and appellate lawyer, successfully handling cases as diverse and high profile as the conviction of a whole drug gang for felony murder, preserving from invalidation years of convictions obtained by Manhattan prosecutor Leon Penofsky after the discovery that he never passed the Bar Exam and had no license to practice law, the jury trial of the New York Secretary of State on a complaint of gender discrimination, and the Hancock case, a challenge to Massachusetts' funding of public education. Her professional conduct earned the respect and admiration of both adversaries and judges, who frequently wrote to the Attorney General to compliment her clarity, calmness, credibility and ethics. She once led a small team of attorneys with limited or no trial experience through a nine-month long, mostly successful trial, unflappable, resourceful, and reassuring, earning extraordinary respect and praise from the presiding federal judge. Among many other legal achievements, she created the theory of recovery and strategy successfully employed against Bechtel-Parsons and other contractors to fund \$400 million in repairs following the Big Dig Disaster, for which she received a special award from the federal government, and led the only government attorney team in the country to win a state school funding case, which Attorney General Tom Reilly stated publicly had saved taxpayers over \$2 billion while protecting features that had made Massachusetts public education a success. Later, as General Counsel of the

Massachusetts State Ethics Commission, she incorporated years of experience listening to and advising state office holders, employees, and citizens into a broad modernization and simplification of agency regulations. She was specially known for her focus on misuse of government positions, a forceful anti-patronage advisory on constituent job recommendations by members of the Legislature to positions in State employment, and her traditional rejection of nepotism, the practice of some to favor relatives with high positions of influence in government, positions that ought to have been open to other, unrelated people based on qualifications and merit. As always, her positions transcended partisanship. She was part of a small delegation sent to Rostov-on-Don, Russia, to advise on the establishment of a legal framework that would hold public officials accountable, and also hosted delegations from China and the Ukraine who journeyed here to learn about improving ethics practice in government and the accessibility of the judicial system. Guests in her home included the top assistant to the President of the Ukraine, high reincarnate lamas from Tibet, policymakers and professors, to name just a few. When the Boston Globe sought her out for comment, she returned the calls; she considered transparency and truthfulness to the press every public servants' obligation, subject to legally mandated confidentiality constraints, just as she felt that every caller deserved respect. She answered her own phone, including a day on call each week, nearly always without indicating her elevated status, and the caller, whether part-time fire department volunteer, village clerk, Senator, dog catcher or senior staff to the Governor, received her complete and generous attention. Talking with and listening to people was, she said, the best part of her job, and the lifeblood of good government. The Massachusetts Municipal Lawyers Association recognized her qualities and achievements with its President's Award for 2016, the first time the Ethics General Counsel has received that prestigious award. Deirdre was an avid biker, rain or shine, routinely biking over eight miles, to and from work, daily, and adding 80 miles on the Minuteman Trail each weekend. Among her favorite rides was biking 20 miles to Walden Pond, swimming several miles in laps across it, and returning home, sometimes before her family had even gotten out of bed. She induced them to get up by bringing donuts. She also looked forward to the annual midnight ride before the Boston Marathon each year, to Hopkinton and back. She was a dedicated naturalist and birdwatcher. She often joked that she specialized in large, slow-moving birds, but in fact she possessed a swift eye for an arcane warbler or lilac-breasted roller. She was a lifelong reader. She had an unparalleled sense of adventure, and traveled with family often, organizing every aspect of the trips herself. With her husband and son, she visited every continent except Antarctica. She snorkeled in the Great Barrier Reef; boated through the tributaries of the Amazon deep into the Peruvian rain forest; scaled the Himalayas, the Pyrenees, the Andes, the Rockies, and the Great Wall of China; tracked rhinoceros, lions and leopards through the African bush; was moved to tears by an audience with Pope Francis then followed in the footsteps of St. Francis; explored an ancient necropolis to see St. Peter's grave; descended thousands of feet underground to understand diamond miners' lives in apartheid South Africa; and ventured twice behind the iron curtain as the Eastern Bloc dissolved and the Berlin Wall fell. In October, she fulfilled her lifelong dream of camping through the wildness of northern Botswana, where no fence separates people from animals and guns are prohibited. One night, she awoke hearing a hyena, inches from her head, drinking water right outside her tent. Courageous and curious, she remained motionless and silent, listening to the sound of lapping tongue in formidable jaws, and the hyena's sniffing tread as, refreshed, it explored the campsite. A memorial service for friends and family is scheduled at Forsyth Chapel at Forest Hills Cemetery, Jamaica Plain, on December 28, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to the

Deirdre Roney Memorial Research Fund addressed to the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute Development Office, 10 Brookline Place, Brookline, MA 02445. The purpose of the fund is to promote innovative research into preventing metastasis www.linkedin.com/pulse/deirdre-roney-compelling-life-unnecessary-death-hole-breast-taylor/

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