

Tyler Chapman Holt obituary



Tyler Chapman Holt, 54, a Foreign Service officer with USAID, died Sept. 28, 2021, at his home in Bethesda, Md., after a valiant battle with brain cancer.

The son of a U.S. Navy officer, Mr. Holt was born in Newport, R.I., on Nov. 7, 1966. He spent his childhood in Hawaii and Lafayette, Calif., graduating from Acalanes High School.

As a 15-year-old high school exchange student with the American Field Service, he lived with a Rwandan family in Kenya and attended the Nairobi School for Boys with his host brother. This experience was the catalyst for his interest in international development.

Mr. Holt received a B.A. in mathematics and economics from Wesleyan University in 1988 and an M.A. in international development economics from American University in 1997.

In 1998, he met his future wife, the daughter of a Foreign Service officer, in Washington, D.C. The two married in Shepherdstown, W.Va., in May 2000 and departed days later for a five-year tour in Egypt with USAID.

During his career as a Foreign Service officer, Mr. Holt focused on economic solutions to poverty, inequality, corruption and lack of opportunity. He was fluent in Arabic and did much of his work in the Muslim world and Africa.

Subsequent assignments took his family to the Philippines, Egypt again, Washington, D.C., Germany (for the Middle East Regional Platform, including projects in Tunisia, Yemen, Israel, Libya and Jordan) and Ethiopia, along with an unaccompanied year in Iraq.

Most recently, he served as the entrepreneurial environment team lead in USAID's Center for Economics and Market Development.

The great joys of Mr. Holt's life were his children, Lilly and Daniel. A lover of the classics, Mr. Holt would regale them with Greek myths as bedtime stories and often read from the "Odyssey" or "Iliad." He proudly saw his children off to college: Lilly at Maastricht University in the Netherlands, and Daniel at Wesleyan, his beloved alma mater.

Mr. Holt had developed a passion for running in high school and ran wherever he went—the trails of Rock Creek Park, the Boston and New York marathons, and through the dry wadis, chaotic streets, dense woods and high elevations near their homes in Cairo, Manila, Frankfurt and Addis Ababa. Even in his final year, his daughter would join him on regular jogs along the C&O Canal towpath.

At USAID, Mr. Holt's intelligence, patience and constructive and calm voice won him deep respect from colleagues who sought his guidance on economic issues. When the brain tumor forced Mr. Holt to leave work, he posted the news on Facebook, asking colleagues to remember why they did the work they did, "as this world still needs us all to try and improve people's lives."

Many recalled his encouragement, fearlessness in speaking up to leaders, sense of humor, enthusiasm and empowerment of local country staff. USAID Administrator Samantha Power, too, sent a note: "I am struck by your imprint across this agency you love so much. I can see it in the outpouring of affection and admiration that your colleagues have stepped forward to share with you. ... Their lives are richer because of the experiences they have had with you."

Tyler Holt is survived by his wife, Anne Martin Holt; children, Lillian and Daniel Holt; parents, Richard and Robin Holt of Lafayette, Calif.; his sister, Stannie Holt, of San Mateo, Calif.; and his brother, Spencer Holt, of San Diego, Calif. He is also survived by many aunts, uncles, cousins, in-laws and six nephews.

Because Mr. Holt's exchange student experience in Kenya was so life-changing, he wished that an American Field Service scholarship be established in his name. Donations may be made at bit.ly/AFSScholarship.