

Holly Cheever, DVM
1950 - 2025

Mary Helen “Holly” Cheever arrived on January 22, 1950 in Cambridge, Massachusetts — the youngest of three born to Dan Sargent Cheever, Sr. and Olivia Thorndike Cheever. She was raised Unitarian amidst an expansive yet close knit community of cousins who trace their American roots back to Ezekial Cheever’s arrival to the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 1630s.

In what would prove to be among the most defining tragedies of her life, Holly lost her mother to cancer in 1954. She was only four at the time, yet Holly carried with her this grief for the rest of her life. (The Altamont Enterprise published a [column](#) in 2018 describing the impact of this loss on her.) Her father remarried in 1956, at which time Holly welcomed the Heaven-sent “Auntie” May Bryant into her life.

Holly attended high school at Milton Academy in Massachusetts, whereat she was Captain of the girl’s field hockey team. She studied anthropology and Greek folklore mythology at Harvard University, from which she graduated summa cum laude in 1972. Eight years later, Holly graduated #1 in her class from the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine and began her practice as a large animal (dairy) veterinarian.

Holly met attorney Dean Sommer in 1978; they were married in June 1980 and promptly conceived four children in just five years. Their first child, Jesse, was born in July 1982; he was followed by sisters Caitlin (December 1983), Robin (January 1985), and Brenna (1987). She and Dean moved to the Town of New Scotland in 1983 and immediately set about establishing a wildlife preserve on property that they fashioned into a sanctuary for abused and neglected animals. Throughout her forty years in Albany County, Holly’s home was shared by dogs, cats, guinea pigs, goats, horses, cows, ponies, and chickens hatched in a slew of local grade school classes.

As a result of Holly’s interfaith marriage, the family observed both Christian and Jewish traditions, yet its core moral ethos was and always will be vegetarianism. Her most fervent and desperate hope for humanity is that it ends the cultivation and consumption of sentient life, as Holly viewed all sentient lifeforms as being her equal and in need of human guardianship. In a story she relayed to Altamont Enterprise columnist Dennis Sullivan [in 2015](#) about a cow she’d encountered years earlier: “There is a lot more going on behind those beautiful eyes than we humans have ever given [animals] credit for, and, as a mother who was able to nurse all four of my babies and did not have to suffer the agonies of losing my beloved offspring, I feel her pain.”

“Dr. Holly” viewed her patient population to be of the furry and feathered variety; their human companions were merely the gracious chaperones who ferried them to her for care. As testament to her nascent entrepreneurship, Holly founded Voorheesville’s Village Animal Clinic in the Town of New Scotland [in 2010](#) after a long veterinary career in adjoining Bethlehem and Guilderland.

It was in caring for the community’s pet population that she became ingratiated to the entire Capital District. Following her passing, Holly’s family was stunned by the *thousands* of comments on social media expressing their condolences and sharing tearful anecdotes about the magnitude of her compassion for the four-legged members of their families. Dr. Holly occupied a lofty posture in town, having been welcomed into the homes of those who would turn to her to treat, save, and rehabilitate the family dog or the squirrel found injured on the side of the road. She was most praised for the

genuine empathy and commiseration she displayed in the end-of-life care she afforded families which were compelled to say goodbye to their old and suffering animal companions.

Holly was an avowed and impenitent feminist, she was militantly anti-war, and she was a committed preservationist. She was a pioneer in so much of what she did and in ways taken for granted today. For example, in retaining her maiden name, in pursuing a career in veterinary medicine, and in serving as a coach for her daughter's' hockey teams, Holly was committed to expanding, redefining, and safeguarding women's roles in public life.

Holly was an avid reader, brilliant writer, and a ferociously talented public speaker. She was a polyglot, musician, artist, athlete, seamstress, choir singer, horseback rider, sailor, gardener, and baker. She was notorious for her signature piercing whistle and for rollerblading all about town throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. And, when her children were young, Holly was also known for never letting them eat Froot Loops. Yet despite the indignity of such a tyrannically outrageous restriction, she was nonetheless named "Mother of the Year" by the City of Albany [in 2021](#). As she said at the ceremony heralding this distinction: "I feel very humbled and very delighted. I care a lot about animal rights and animal welfare. I think a vote for me is perhaps a vote for the entire planet of animals that we share this world with."

After a long battle with Parkinson's disease and, ultimately, dementia, Holly passed away surrounded by her entire family on Sunday, February 9, 2025. She was 75.

In the words of her dear friend and business partner, fellow Village Animal Clinic Dr. Mike McCarthy: "Dr. Holly was a brilliant veterinarian [and] fierce advocate for animal health and welfare. . . . Dr. Holly was Good Housekeeping's veterinary columnist for many years. She was a founding member of the New York State Humane association. She testified, in front of congress, about animal abuse in circuses and about the carriage horse industry in New York. She also taught in many veterinary schools across the country, instructed the New York State Police about animal abuse laws, taught veterinary forensics courses, testified in many animal abuse cases across the country and, of course, co-founded The Village Animal Clinic in Voorheesville."

Holly's mission in life was to end humanity's abuse and disregard of animals; she refused to eat "anything with a central nervous system," and she dedicated her life to dozens of causes focused on alleviating animal suffering. She worked to remove elephants from circuses and carriage horses from the streets of New York City. She worked to ban the canine tail cropping ("docking) and feline declawing. She forcefully advocated against the brutality of foie gras cultivation and factory farming. Her work was both national (testifying before Congress) and local (introducing dozens of Voorheesville's students to what's *really* in a hot dog), and she never relented in the face of the (often enraged) critics she made uncomfortable by her uncompromising, unselfconscious, and unapologetic truth-telling.

Dr. Holly Cheever, DVM, was an unparalleled talent with an unrivaled intellect and an unmatched capacity for compassion. To the community she was Dr. Holly, to her husband she was "The General," to her children she was "Mum," to her grandchildren she was "Moo Moo," and to the many animals who were lucky enough to find themselves in her care, she was their voice. She is missed, both because she was so loved and because her advocacy was so crucial.

Holly is survived by her brother (Dan Cheever, Jr.), her sister (Olivia Cheever), as well as her husband and four children, two of whom gave Holly the grandchildren (Weylin, Lilly, Griffin, and Ella) for which she'd

been waiting since the moment her own youngest was out of diapers. She is now finally reunited with her own mother and the many guinea pigs who accompanied her on her journey through life.

Holly's family has directed charitable donations in her memory to the Catskill Animal Sanctuary. Yet for those seeking to pay their respects and honor Holly's legacy, her family has expressed the following: **In lieu of flowers, don't eat meat. In lieu of not eating meat, always be kind to animals.**

Dean S. Sommer, Holly's son.