



Jacqueline Rita Griffin

December 15, 1946 - September 10, 2015

Most weekends before she was diagnosed with the cancer that would take her life on Sept. 10, 2015, Jackie Griffin could be found inside a Petco store where volunteers offered homeless pets for adoption. Most of the volunteers knew her as a warm, funny, unpretentious person who cared passionately about animals, especially cats and dogs. What many didn't know was that during the week, Jackie was the Honorable Jacqueline R. Griffin, the distinguished, no-nonsense Fifth District Court of Appeal judge who kept a sign on her desk that declared: "Read the rule, Fool."

Jackie was born Dec. 15, 1946 at the Chelsea Naval Hospital, Mass., to Gladys and John Renna Griffin, Jr. She and her younger sister, Patti, were Navy brats who lived in eight different cities. Jackie graduated from high school in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, one of the family's favorite posts. It was there that her high-school Spanish teacher, Mrs. Suarez, inspired Jackie's passion for Spain and its language. In college at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, she spent her junior year in Spain at the University of Madrid, sparking a lifelong interest in its food and wine. After receiving her master's degree in Spanish at UNC, she taught Spanish at Lyman High School in Seminole County and was named Young Teacher of the Year in 1972. She then changed direction to discover and embrace two new passions that came to define her life's work: the law and the University of Florida.

As a law student, Jackie won many honors and awards, including being named only the second woman editor in the history of the Law Review at the University of Florida, before graduating in 1975. She then practiced law in Orlando until she was appointed by then-Gov. Bob Martinez to the Fifth District Court of Appeal in 1990. Former law partner and long-time friend Charles T. Wells, a former chief justice of the Florida Supreme Court, said what distinguished Jackie from many lawyers and judges was her extraordinary preparation. “She always read the record in every case,” which requires a great deal of time and patience, he said. “She was a gifted writer and could explain complex issues in an easy-to-understand way.” She had a powerful voice that she projected like a stage actor, and was known, even by her doctors, as a quick study. Simply listening to her expound – on anything – was both interesting and entertaining.

It took no time for Jackie to catch Gator fever at the University of Florida, and she became a life-long, die-hard, vociferous Gator fan (is there any other kind?). Though on her deathbed – and in a deep sleep – she smiled at the sound of the Gator game on the TV in her room last week. Retired U.S. District Judge Anne Conway, a classmate in law school and close friend ever since, recalled they started going to Gator football games in 1973 when they were in law school. They formed the Conway-Griffin partnership to buy tickets when the Touchdown Terrace was first opened. “We started the tradition of drinking champagne before the games back then because we often had nothing to cheer about afterwards,” Conway recalled.

It was in the last 20 years that Jackie discovered a new passion that is as much a part of her legacy as her love of the law: caring for and protecting animals in Orange, Volusia and Flagler counties. Fellow rescue friend Julie Ozburn said that Jackie “saved hundreds” of neglected and abandoned animals. She regularly sat in pet stores on weekends trying to adopt out animals. She also would check out prospective adoptive families and do home

inspections to ensure the families were right for the pet, and the pet was a good fit for the families before she personally delivered pets to their new homes. If she was going to a football game in Gainesville, she sometimes transported rabbits abandoned in Volusia County to a shelter in Gainesville. Besides her time and energy, Jackie poured money into animal causes for food, shelter, crates, spaying and neutering and medical care. Jackie ran tabs at various veterinary clinics that provided care for neglected animals the way some people run tabs at a bar. She also contributed to all manner of rescue operations and wildlife refuges. Though cats and dogs were her favorite, she cared for all animals small and large.

Jackie's deep love of Spain and Spanish, Southern food, red wine, Gator Nation, the law, and animals of all kinds was surpassed only by her devotion to family and love of friends. Attorney Carol Ponton, one of Jackie's closest friends for 41 years who helped care for her at the end of her illness, said what she valued most was Jackie's character. "She stood for something. She was the most ethical person you could ever know. She was there for you, but she would tell you what she thought – right or wrong," Ponton said. "There was a power to her . . . a force. She was a shining light about the law and wanting to do the right thing."

Since her father's death in 2008, Jackie was one-third of the Griffin-family triumvirate. Nearly every evening, even when her energy was depleted from chemo and radiation treatments after complex uterine cancer was diagnosed in 2013, Jackie joined Patti at their mother's home for dinner. Jackie often was chief cook, preparing her specialty pork dishes and Patti's favorite – Spanish tortilla. The three women, each with her own collection of dogs or cats, were a universe unto themselves. There was nothing one would not do for the other; both survive her.

A memorial service will be announced at a later date. In lieu of flowers, charitable contributions can be made in memory of Jackie to: the Florida Law Review Endowment Fund, P.O. Box 14412, Gainesville, FL 32604-4412; or Solomon's Place, Inc., a tax-exempt animal-rescue fund, P.O. Box 9357, Daytona Beach, FL 32120-9357.

Tribute Wall

JW

“ Jackie was the finest human being I have ever met. I spent many years volunteering with her at the Humane Society and did many weekends with her at PetSmart. Such a great loss to the animals and society in general. I will never forget you my friend.

Janet Webb - September 27, 2021 at 05:36 PM

KO

“ My husband and I have been out of town and just learned of Jackie's passing. We bowled with Jackie for many years until my husband's stroke in 2009. We adopted two dogs through her and she helped us with a 3rd (stray) dog after my husband became disabled. She was the most unpretentious person I have ever met. The world has lost a very special woman.

Kathy Olswski - September 23, 2015 at 01:41 PM

LE

“ Judge Griffin taught me how to spell "motorcycle" and "sponge" when I was five years old, while we sat in her office together and I wondered if she had read all of those books on the wall behind her (and why she even would bother to, for that matter, since they were completely devoid of any pictures). Yet, her powerful, commanding and gentle presence made the impossible somehow feel attainable. So with all of the dexterity and cognitive capacity a five year old could muster, I learned how to spell out "motorcycle" and "sponge", the words scrawled across extra-large-ruled paper which, I tentatively handed over to Jackie's beaming face. She imbued all she did with care and with possibility. I know she fostered a similar bridge, where both people and animals, crossed over from a sense of fear or daunting into an experience of what suddenly became viable and attainable. I live an amazing life- Jackie was, and still is in many ways, a huge part of it, and it is a life for which I owe her a great deal. Now that she is gone there is a hole in the world. I am aware of it daily and my heart goes out to her close friends and family- who must be experiencing this loss so much more acutely. I thank you Jackie, for showing me how to be fierce but gentle (when either are called for in good measure), disciplined and hard working while also not sacrificing a good time and for what an incorruptible spirit can achieve. So to honor Jackie, and all she relentlessly gave, I will try to pay forward the level of discipline, compassion and integrity she so boundlessly shared- maybe this will help that empty space in the world to feel a just little smaller over time.

LeAnn

LeAnn - September 20, 2015 at 03:02 PM

MH

“ I had the pleasure of working under Jackie as a litigation secretary when she headed up the litigation division of Boroughs Grimm law firm. As excellent a lawyer as she was, she was even a better person. She cared about people and animals and quietly went about doing what she could for both. She was loved and will be missed by so many people. My heartfelt sympathies to her family and friends.
Marge Hunter

Marge Hunter - September 14, 2015 at 01:49 PM