



HOLTON, SEAN M. 52, of Orlando, died Tuesday, November 29th 2011 at home of complications from the brain cancer he had been fighting since July 2009. Sean was a native of Kansas City, Mo., who adopted Orlando as a second home after moving here in 1987 to work as a reporter for the Orlando Sentinel, where he served in various high-profile reporting and editing capacities for 20 years. That experience capped a newspaper career that also included four years as a reporter for the Kansas City Star (1983-1986)

At the Sentinel, Sean was a city desk reporter, investigative reporter, national correspondent and Washington, DC bureau chief from 1991 to 1999 when he returned to the Orlando newsroom for a succession of senior editing and management positions—including associate managing editor for investigations and special projects and associate managing editor for local news. Sean was perhaps best-known for his direction of ambitious, nationally recognized projects such as the examination of uncounted ballots in Florida after the disputed presidential election of 2000, and a yearlong series of investigative stories about Florida’s water crisis in 2002. While serving as local news editor, Sean oversaw a staff of about 100 journalists who covered such momentous news as the Columbia space-shuttle disaster of 2003 and the unprecedented hurricane season of 2004, which brought four major storms to Florida in a single summer. Sean always considered leading that talented staff to be the greatest adventure and privilege of his career in journalism. Many of those reporters and editors who worked for Sean are still leading lights and among the most recognizable names at the Sentinel today, despite successive waves layoffs and other staff reductions during the past decade. It was Sean’s responsibility as a manager to implement many of the staff cuts, but eventually his own job as metro editor was eliminated when he chose to take a voluntary buy out in 2007 as part of a newsroom reorganization plan that cut about three dozen jobs. After leaving the Sentinel, Sean formed a communications and consulting company – focusing on freelance reporting and writing and media-relations advice for corporate and non-profit clients. Among the most satisfying of those was the Federation of Congregations United to Serve (FOCUS), a multi-denominational coalition of 14 Central Florida churches dedicated to helping residents of economically stressed and underserved communities organized to take action and make improvements in their lives.

In July 2009, Sean suffered a seizure and collapsed while working out at the Downtown Orlando YMCA. He was taken by ambulance to the Orlando Regional Medical Center, where doctors quickly diagnosed him with a glioblastoma multiforme brain tumor—an aggressive, Grade IV brain cancer that offers little hope of survival. Sean worked to accept the grim diagnosis with grace and aplomb. He started a blog to chronicle a course of treatment that included three surgeries, two rounds of radiation and numerous chemotherapy regimens. As his disease progressed, Sean was able to enjoy life longer thanks to the blessings of his wonderful caregivers from At Home Health and Cornerstone Hospice. Sean was born Oct. 29, 1959 in Kansas City, Mo, raised in Independence, Mo. and educated in Kansas City public schools He graduated from Van Horn High School in 1977. He was a 1981 graduate of Rockhurst University, where he received a Bachelor's Degree in English and Political Science In 1982, he received a Master's Degree in Journalism from Northwestern University. He was preceded in death by his father, Dr. Edward B. Holton and mother, Lucille S. Holton, of Independence, Mo. Sean is survived by his four beloved siblings and their spouses, each of which that each brought as an additional blessing into his life: Kathleen (Holton) Kaplan and her husband Richard of Las Vegas, Nev. Timothy Holton and his wife, Julie, of St. Louis, Mo.; Brian Holton and his wife, Sue Holton, of Philadelphia Pa; and Ellen P. Holton and her partner, Stacy Atchison, of Los Angeles, Ca. He will also treasure eternal memories of his nephew, Timothy and two nieces, Julia and Elizabeth Holton, of Philadelphia, Pa.

Sean's family is hosting a memorial tribute for him from 6p-8p, Saturday, December 10th, 2011 at the Baldwin-Fairchild Funeral Home – Ivanhoe Chapel – 301 N. E. Ivanhoe Blvd, Orlando, FL 32804.) In lieu of flowers, Sean and his family suggest donations be made to MD Anderson Cancer Support Community Initiative.

The family will also plan a service in Independence, MO in the Spring of 2012 in celebration of Sean's life. Details will be made available in the coming months.

Sean has asked that his cremated remains be scattered in places with special meaning to him: including the marshes of the St. Johns River east of Orlando, around his childhood home in Independence and on the dairy farm in Tonganoxie, Kan. started in 1906 by his paternal grandparents, who were both immigrants from Ireland.