



Yolanda Annette (Finch) Neville passed away on August 22, 2019 after a long struggle with a very rare cancer. She was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on February 15, 1965, daughter of the late Elisha and Laura Finch. She is survived by her husband of thirty one years, Steven Neville, her three sons, Stephan, Malcolm and Jaris Neville, daughter-in-love Christine Clarita (Lanagan) Neville and her beloved aunt, Arthur Dale Bizzell. She is also survived by several cousins, their spouses and children, as well as a slew of “Village” sons whom she took into her heart as her own.

Yolanda graduated from the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City in 1987, having earned an Associates in Fashion Buying and Merchandising and a Bachelor of Science in Marketing. After a brief engagement in retail, she discovered her true passion in education, taking a position as an administrator at Andover Newton Theological School. She later studied at the American Montessori Institute in Atlanta, receiving certification to teach using the Montessori methods and tools. She earned a Master’s degree in education in 2010 from Lesley University where she served as a faculty member and administrator until her passing.

At very little more than five feet tall, Yolanda can accurately be described as a giant of a personality. A commanding presence from her earliest years, she is a person who could be counted on to get things done and to direct others in how to get things done. At 15 years old, as a summer day camp counselor, she led a cohort of middle school students, many of whom were much larger than she, in such a way that her colleagues on the staff nicknamed her “Sergeant Finch”. She crowded much life into the short time she was granted on earth, including the founding of a baking business (Yo’s Tasty Treats), the founding of a Montessori School (New Heights Montessori School), and the founding of a Life Coaching business (Neville Unlimited). She exercised leadership in programs as varied as a little league baseball program serving over 600 young people to a neighborhood political association representing the interests of a large swath of Southwest Atlanta. She was ever an educator, teaching children, parents, teachers, educational administrators and members of her network of family and friends from the seemingly inexhaustible well of her wisdom and knowledge.

Above all, Yolanda taught us how to love; how to love ourselves and love others. She taught that love is like the fire of a candle that can share its flame with innumerable others without, at all, diminishing itself. She stood squarely at the center of a phenomenon called The Village in both Atlanta and Boston and helped many, who were drawn to it, to understand how the love expressed through the life of Jesus in the bible and that so many have learned about in church can be made active in a society and culture that too often fragments rather than unifies. Give Yolanda some food, a few willing hands and a moderately comfortable space and she would build community among women and men that will reach deeply into souls, hungry for the living bread of love and service.

Yolanda was a devoted mother, certainly and assiduously to her three sons, but also to any child or young person whom she felt needed a mother. In addition to the friends and classmates of her children who, rather mysteriously, became members of her family, she would also have to be restrained by her own sons from publicly addressing some youngster sitting in the arms of a parent, using the code “OPC” – “other people’s children”. Her last days were spent, in part, fretting



about the children and youth of Metropolitan Baptist Church whom she loved deeply and in whose future she believed and invested.

Fifty four years is but a flash in the distended length of time. Yet one would be mistaken in thinking that Yolanda's footprint on this earth was small because of the shortness of her life. She did not live long, but she lived deeply, touching the lives of virtually everyone with whom she came in contact and creating for them an encounter with the love of God. Her impact may not be large, but it is indelible nevertheless. While sorrow at her departure is inevitable, we rejoice at the end of her suffering at the hands of the dread disease that sought to undermine her existence. We also rejoice that the disease failed in that pursuit, for she lived the full and abundant life, despite the struggle, right up to the last day on earth. Now she rests eternally with her Lord in peace and freedom.

