



Brenda Mols Fraser

(1939-1980)

Brenda Fraser was born into an athletic and academic family. Her father was head of the science department and athletic director at the Park School, a private school near Buffalo. "We were a small school, and everyone was expected to participate in something," her father said, "but Brenda was able to excel in everything she did, whether it was schoolwork or drama or sports."

Brenda graduated in 1961 from Elmira College and received her masters degree from Yale University. She was a teacher at her alma mater, The Park School, and in New Haven, CN, before her husband accepted a job with Xerox and they moved to Rochester in 1968.

Upon arriving in Rochester, she immediately became active in the City School District. She became a volunteer at School 23 and served as vice president of the Citizens for Quality Integrated Education, a group that supported the school integration plan that was later rescinded. In 1973, she was elected to the school board. She was reelected in 1975 and 1979.

She was a strong leader, with good diplomatic skills and a profound desire to improve the education of city children. She fought for less secrecy in budget decisions and encouraged the Board to be stronger in its dealing with school administrators. She was respected and admired throughout the community.

Mrs. Fraser served as president of the Large City Conference of School Boards and was named by Governor Carey to a task force to study new ways of financing school districts.

In addition to her work on the Rochester School Board, Mrs. Fraser was a pioneer in community theater. She worked with the Rochester Community Players, first as costume manager and later as managing director. Later she founded the Rochester Shakespeare Theater. During one performance of the "King and I," Brenda sewed 120 costumes in a month and managed a myriad of actors, volunteers and wardrobe personnel. People eagerly volunteered to help Brenda, because she was always kind, good-natured, and grateful. Her delightful good spirits and sense of humor turned work into fun.

In August of 1979 Brenda was in good health. Suddenly, however, she began having trouble with double vision. She was working hard on her reelection campaign, and began having





difficulty walking door-to-door. Despite her condition she finished first among 11 candidates in the School Board election. Her health continued to deteriorate, and six months before her death she learned that she had a brain tumor. She was told that she had one chance in three of surviving. She told her family, "I am going to be that one."

Two months before her death, Mrs. Fraser attended her last school board meeting. She was partially paralyzed by then and could not walk without leaning on her husband Lawrence for support. It was at this meeting that a new president would be elected, and Mrs. Fraser felt that it was important for the vote to be unanimous. It was obvious that she was very ill. Her colleague told her that she did not need to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance, but she said, "I'm standing. If I fall, you will have to catch me." Her friend responded, "Well, then we'll both fall." Brenda laughed, revealing her good spirits even under such duress.

She received radiation treatments, but her health continued to deteriorate. "She was quite weak in the last few days," her husband said, "but we never thought there was no chance. It wasn't a question of delusion. She took everything day by day, and her courage gave us courage."

"She remained optimistic and cheerful right up to the very end," said her father, Herbert Mols. "That was the way she lived."

On March 1, 1980, Brenda Fraser died at the age of forty, surrounded by her family in her Westminster Street home. She left behind her husband, three children, her parents, three sisters, and two brothers. In addition she was survived by a community of friends and admirers, everyday people who appreciated her optimism and dedication to the dream of providing equal educational opportunities to all children.

In her memory and in gratitude for her devotion to city children, flags at all city schools were flown at half-mast for two days. After funeral services at Blessed Sacrament Church, Brenda Fraser was buried in her beloved Mount Hope Cemetery.

