

## **Memorial: Karen T. Orlando (1953–2004)**

¶1 Karen T. Orlando, librarian for the law firm of Spilman Thomas & Battle of Charleston, West Virginia, died February 5, 2004, after a courageous and dignified battle with cancer. Upon learning of her diagnosis, Karen went to stay with her family in Hubbard, Ohio, where she was surrounded by their love and support throughout her treatment and during her final days.

¶2 Karen was devout Christian, a Catholic. It was a side of her that not many of us knew, because she was also a very private person. But you would catch a glimpse of Karen’s Christian side if you asked her to “do lunch” on a Wednesday and were turned down, as she usually attended noon Mass on Wednesday.

¶3 Karen was also an ardent walker. She walked an hour every evening after work, through her neighborhood of wooded hills and stately homes, and she walked everywhere around town, be it on a mission to retrieve a legal resource from a library or law firm, or to Mass at Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral on Charleston’s east end. No doubt Karen put more miles on her walking shoes than on her car, which had only 26,000 miles on its odometer after ten years!

¶4 Shopping was another of Karen’s loves. Candace Cooper, her friend and the librarian for the Fourth Circuit Satellite Library in Raleigh, tells the story of when she and Karen arrived together in Minneapolis for the AALL Annual Meeting. Karen told the cab driver, “Take us to the shops as fast as you can!” Karen worked evenings and weekends at the mall, because she said she wanted to get business experience in the hopes of one day opening her own business—a bakery. Had she lived long enough to realize her plan, there is no doubt that it would have been the best bakery in town.

¶5 Karen attended every AALL Annual Meeting, and she always had the best time of anyone there. She went to learning sessions all day, she browsed through the exhibit hall for hours, and she attended all the luncheons and banquets, where she would save enough places at her table for her friends, both new and old. I remember that at the AALL conference in Baltimore, Karen ate so much seafood she broke out in hives and suffered badly for several days after. But she said it was worth it.

¶6 Karen even arranged for us librarians to eat together at home, arranging the monthly lunch meetings of the Charleston Area Law Librarians. She would come up with the list of dates and restaurants for an entire year in advance. And we still maintain that it was merely coincidence that three restaurants burned down within days of our meeting there! We called Karen our social secretary, and we took advantage of her need to keep her friends from losing touch with each other.

¶7 We had fun. When Karen laughed, her whole body laughed. She had the darkest and sparkliest eyes I’ve ever seen. She loved baby showers and birthday parties, and she always brought a beautifully wrapped gift. She was trim and petite

from her walking. Red was her best color. Karen was a constant in our lives—she was always there. She was Spilman Thomas’ librarian for twenty-two years, and every year she would remark how the summer clerks got younger and younger all the time. Many of those former summer clerks, who learned all they know about legal research from Karen, were in attendance on March 19, 2004, when Bob O’Neil, the managing partner at Spilman, presided over the dedication of the firm’s library to Karen. In its 140-year history, Spilman Thomas & Battle has dedicated facilities to only five people, and Karen is the only nonlawyer among them. The Karen T. Orlando Library now has her name etched in glass on the door, and her portrait hangs behind the reception desk. Karen was as devoted to her library as she was to her friends and to her God.

¶8 But as I said before, that was Karen’s religious side, her private side, the side we didn’t know. We knew her only as a wonderful and loyal friend, a devoted employee, a person who listened to us loudly bemoan our heartbreaks while quietly enduring her own, an encourager, an organizer, our shepherdess, a walker, a shopper. This is the Karen we knew—we didn’t know the Christian Karen.

¶9 On second thought, perhaps that’s exactly the Karen we knew.—*Mary Ann Shetzer Parmelee*<sup>1</sup>

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1. Attorney at Law, Highlands, New Jersey. Formerly Law Librarian, U.S. Courts Library, Charleston, West Virginia (1983–1998).