

## Tribute to Karla A. Henderson

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It is a long way from Coggon, Iowa to the base camp at Mt. Everest. Yet as we write this tribute to Karla Henderson that is exactly where she is heading. In many respects, her current journey is a metaphor for the long distance Karla has come in life. Growing up on a farm in northeastern Iowa, and being told as an 8-year-old that girls were not allowed to play Little League baseball, Karla learned her first lesson about social injustice. Unabashedly, she went on to set a single-game scoring record in girls high school basketball that stands in Coggon to this day, and otherwise distinguished herself as someone who, in her own inimitable way, would make a significant mark on the world.

Karla earned a bachelor of science degree in physical education from Iowa State (1971) and worked for five years as a 4-H Youth Development Extension Specialist. She then earned a master's in education with an emphasis in guidance and counseling from Iowa State (1976), followed by a PhD in education with an emphasis in recreation, park, and leisure studies from the University of Minnesota (1979). Her first academic posting was a split assignment as an assistant professor and recreation extension specialist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. While at Madison, a group of graduate students approached Karla and asked why women's voices were silent in leisure studies. Without a satisfactory answer, she challenged her students to co-design a seminar in "women's leisure" (Henderson, 2013), thus marking the beginning of a 35 year scholarly agenda that has changed the way the field of recreation, park, and leisure studies thinks about women, leisure, gender, feminism, diversity, and qualitative research methodology.

After a brief stint as a Department Chair at Texas Women's University (1985-1987), Douglas Sessoms recruited Karla to the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. As Karla recounts it, the next 17 years were her most rewarding. She prospered under Sessoms' tutelage, was tenured and promoted to professor, and eventually took her turn as Department Chair. When the program was dismantled in 2004 following Sessoms' retirement, Karla was invited to move

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next door to North Carolina State University, where she has continued her prolific teaching, scholarship, and service. Now, as Karla approaches her own retirement, it is fitting to recap the significance of her academic achievements.

Given what Karla Henderson has accomplished in her career, she is refreshingly humble. Describing herself as Salieri to most everyone else's Mozart (Henderson, 2007), this "mediocre" talent has managed to author or co-author several books, including *Leisure, Women, and Gender*, 3rd edition (with Freysinger, Shaw, & Bialeschki); *Camp Counseling* (with Meier); *Evaluation of Leisure Services: Making Enlightened Decisions*, 3rd edition (with Bialeschki); *The Noble Experiment: A History of NRPA* (with Sessoms); *Service Living: Building Community through Public Parks and Recreation* (with Wellman, Dustin, & Moore); *Dimensions of Choice: Qualitative Approaches to Research in Parks, Recreation, Tourism, Sport, and Leisure*; *Leisure Services*, 7th edition (with Sessoms); *Introduction to Recreation and Leisure Services*, 8th edition (with Bialeschki, Hemingway, Hodges, Kivel, & Sessoms); and *Volunteers in Leisure: A Management Perspective* (with Tedrick). Karla has also published regularly in a variety of journals, including the *Journal of Leisure Research*, *Leisure Sciences*, *Women and Health*, *American Journal of Public Health*, and the *Journal of Physical Activity and Aging*. All told, she has written over 200 juried articles and 250 other scholarly pieces.

Karla has served the field in a number of leadership roles, including terms as president of the Society of Park and Recreation Educators (SPRE), president of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance Research Consortium, and president of the Academy of Leisure Sciences. She also served as editor of *Leisure Sciences* and on numerous state, national, and international boards and committees. Karla received the J. B. Nash Scholar Award, the Julian Smith Award, the North Carolina Recreation and Park Society (NCRPS) Special Citation, the NCRPS Honor Award, the SPRE Excellence in Teaching Award, the SPRE Distinguished Colleague Award, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt Award for Excellence in Recreation and Park Research, the NRPA Literary Award, and the World Leisure George Torkildson Literary Award. Karla received a Doctor of Science (honoris causa) from the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada, in 2011, and in 2012 North Carolina State University honored her with a Lifetime Achievement Award for her contributions to the field of parks, recreation, and leisure. Salieri, indeed; Mozart is more like it.

Karla has made a positive difference in the lives of countless undergraduate and graduate students, the larger academic community, and colleagues throughout the United States and Canada. She has been a worldwide ambassador not only for leisure studies, but for organized camping, yet another of her professional passions. Most recently Karla has served as the American Camp Association's (ACA's) Chair of the Committee for the Advancement of Research and Evaluation. She has received numerous ACA awards, including seven Golden Quill Awards for scholarly contributions to the literature, the ACA Honor Award, and the Hedley Dimock National Camping Award for years of dedicated service to advancing the cause of organized camping.

In the midst of all her professional accomplishments, Karla has somehow found time to practice what she preaches. She is an avid runner, hiker, backpacker, bicyclist, community band member, and world traveler. Her life has been a celebration of the merger of vocational and avocational interests in a way that makes for a constant adventure. Karla is always on the go, whether she is traveling to a national or international conference, visiting family in Iowa, vacationing in some far off land, or relaxing and connecting with friends in Estes Park, Colorado, her second home.

More than anything, Karla Henderson has been a wonderful role model for her students and colleagues. She carries herself with dignity and grace. Imbued with modesty fed by self doubt, this “Little Engine that Could” (Henderson, 2007) has been a tour de force in raising awareness of women’s leisure over the past 35 years, advancing our collective thought about social and environmental justice in the context of leisure, and broadening the field’s acceptance of, and appreciation for, qualitative inquiry. She is one of the most, if not the most, influential scholars of her generation. Her feminist perspective, prompted by an early childhood injustice and egged on by a handful of Wisconsin graduate students, has had a monumental impact on the leisure studies literature we count on today for our intellectual growth and development. All of this from an Iowa farm girl who was told that Little League was for boys.

### References

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