

KAREN HENDRIX

August 26, 1940—December 8, 2008

by Glenda Stansbury

December 12, 2008: *The Fine Art of Living*

A death has occurred, and everything is changed by the event. We are painfully aware that life can never be the same again, that yesterday is over, that relationships once rich have ended. But there is another way to look upon this truth. If life went on the same without the presence of the one who has died, we could only conclude that the life we remember made no contribution, filled no space, meant nothing. The fact that the person left behind a place that cannot be filled is a high tribute to this individual. Life can be the same after a trinket has been lost, but never after the loss of a treasure.

Whether Karen Hendrix touched your life personally or you were touched by the work she did and the life she lived, your memory of Karen is a testament to the great influence that she had in her world. Karen is a past president of the Stained Glass Association of America and served for a number of years as the Association's Magazine Controller, responsible for consulting with the editorial staff and helping to guide *The Stained Glass Quarterly*. Everyone who reads this publication and works in stained glass was touched in some way by Karen and the work she did for years on behalf of the Ancient Craft.

On December 12, 2008, her family, friends and colleagues gathered in Oklahoma City for Karen's memorial service. Her long, brave fight with cancer was over. We gathered to laugh together, to cry together, to let music lift our spirits, and to begin turning stories



into memories. And, in the end, we all saw that everyone's life was changed because Karen lived.

The Beauty of Stained Glass

The artist gathers a diverse mixture of glass pieces, places them in a pattern that seems random to the untrained eye, creates a firm foundation in the bars and

Christ Church Episcopal

lead channels to make it strong and impenetrable, and then holds it up to the sun. The light hits each piece of glass and breaks the rays into myriad particles that refract into a multitude of directions. The effect can be visually explosive. It feeds the soul and can bring



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beauty, joy, and inspiration into one's life. At the same time, this work of art provides a practical purpose of protection from the elements, a barrier from the storms of life—a vigilant guardian.

Karen Hendrix's life was much like the beautiful art she created. She brought together a diverse and colorful group of people and experiences, blended them into a breathtaking picture, and

wrapped them in a protective layer of love that would withstand the trials and tribulations along the way.

Karen began her fine art of living on August 26, 1940 in Oklahoma City, born to Wynn and Thomas Kroier. Her life with brothers, Richard and David, and sister, Sandy, was a typical southwest growing-up experience with a father who was a mechanic and a mother who stayed at home. She was a little young to be affected much by the war,

though little did she know that her life would definitely be touched by the military in the future.

The DNA of an artistic soul had been passed down to her from her grandfather, who created wonderful, massive iron works and ornamental art, some of which are still standing around the city.

Walt Whitman wrote:

*Afoot and light-hearted, I take to
the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown path before me,
leading wherever I choose.
Henceforth I ask not good-fortune—
I myself am good fortune;
Henceforth I whimper no more,
postpone no more, need nothing,
Strong and content, I travel the
open road.*

At the age of eighteen, the open road called to Karen. She was ready to begin her life of gathering experiences into her multi-faceted life. She found places to live and worked in various theaters until she met a military man, Steve, married him, and moved to California. Her first bright sheet of glass in her pattern of life was her daughter Kathy. Then, a dark cloud covered the sun and kept the rays from shining through when her husband was traumatically injured. She faced her first true test of her foundations as a very young woman with a baby dealing with a terminally disabled man.

After making the difficult decision to separate herself from the situation, she met Ed, another military guy at the same base. They made an instant connection, and he joined the pattern of her growing work of art. Soon the family included Kathy; Kenneth and Jimmy Karen Michelle, known as Micki; and Sharon—a true “yours, mine and ours”



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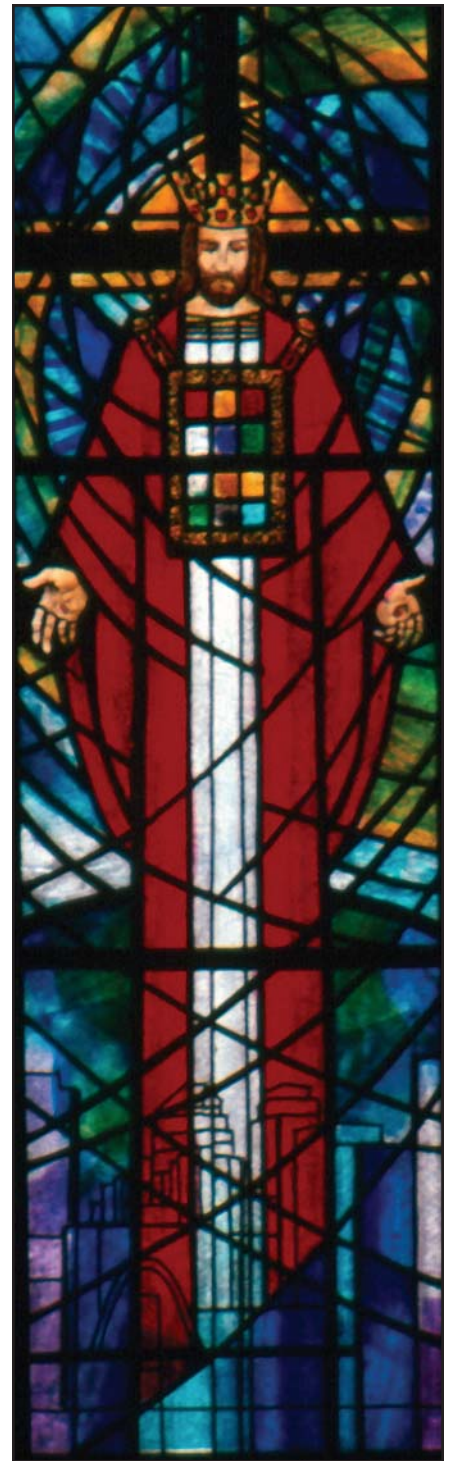
blending of diverse souls into one loud, active and loving picture.

In one of the most amazing acts of compassion and kindness I've ever had the honor to hear, when Karen and Ed moved back to Oklahoma City, they brought her former husband with them and placed him in a nursing home so he could receive care. And, Karen was not satisfied to leave it to others; she went to work for the facility. This was her first opportunity to be paid for her artistic bent as she became the arts and crafts specialist. Ed also found his life's work as he became involved in the nursing home and went on to a successful career as a nursing home administrator and with the state nursing home administrators' board.

There is a plaque hanging in the living room at Karen and Ed's home that says *Sempre Familigia*, which means "Family Forever" in Italian. That was

the loving theme of Karen's masterpiece. Her family life was one of fun, of a myriad of experiences, of bringing everyone together into the growing story panels of the windows of her life. Her children remember adventures running in the neighborhood, playing the arrow game and usually leaving poor Sharon, the baby of the family, out of everything. Karen was an excellent cook—what better way to keep her crowd of children quiet for a few minutes but to put some food in front of them. There was a menagerie of animals and people running through the house at all times—Ed used to answer the phone "Hendrix Mule Barn" because there were so many busy and strong-minded bodies living under the roof.

She was a voracious reader; historical novels were the best, and James Michener her favorite author. Ed said that when that when Michener died, he



First Christian Church

ran out of presents to give her because no one could match that prolific writer.

Of course, the artistic Karen made all the Halloween costumes, the prom dresses, the school projects and took any and all opportunities to dress up. She and Ed hosted Medieval Dinners, partly because it was a wonderful time to get

together with friends, but also because it gave her a chance to wear really great costumes.

They enjoyed Scandinavian dinners with friends, and she loved anything Egyptian or Russian. For a young woman who grew up in the middle of the nation in the middle of the state, in the middle of Oklahoma City, she cultivated quite an eclectic appreciation of the world and all the gifts it had to offer.

The favorite corner of Karen's window? The holidays. It was a time to bring everyone together, to decorate every inch of the house, and to bind hearts as one. Even during the early years, when money was too tight to purchase a Christmas tree, Karen and Ed stacked tumbleweeds into a tree shape and sprayed them white.

Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners were sit-down affairs, complete with the good china, silverware, and candles. There were no paper plates in Karen's world. It had to be right. It had to be perfect. It had to be a magical time of blending all the colors of her world together into heartwarming and sacred moments. And when the grandchildren began arriving, those were additional facets to add to her work of art—little darlings to be spoiled, loved, and embraced into the beautiful world of Karen.

The poet Marion Kehrley wrote:
*I watched my Mom fill out an
application.
I looked at the line that asks about
past professions.
I thought to myself, that space is
too small
To write down what she's been, to
cover it all.
She was a nurse when I fell and
scraped my knee.
She was a maid when I didn't wipe
my feet.
She was a designer when my
clothes didn't match.*



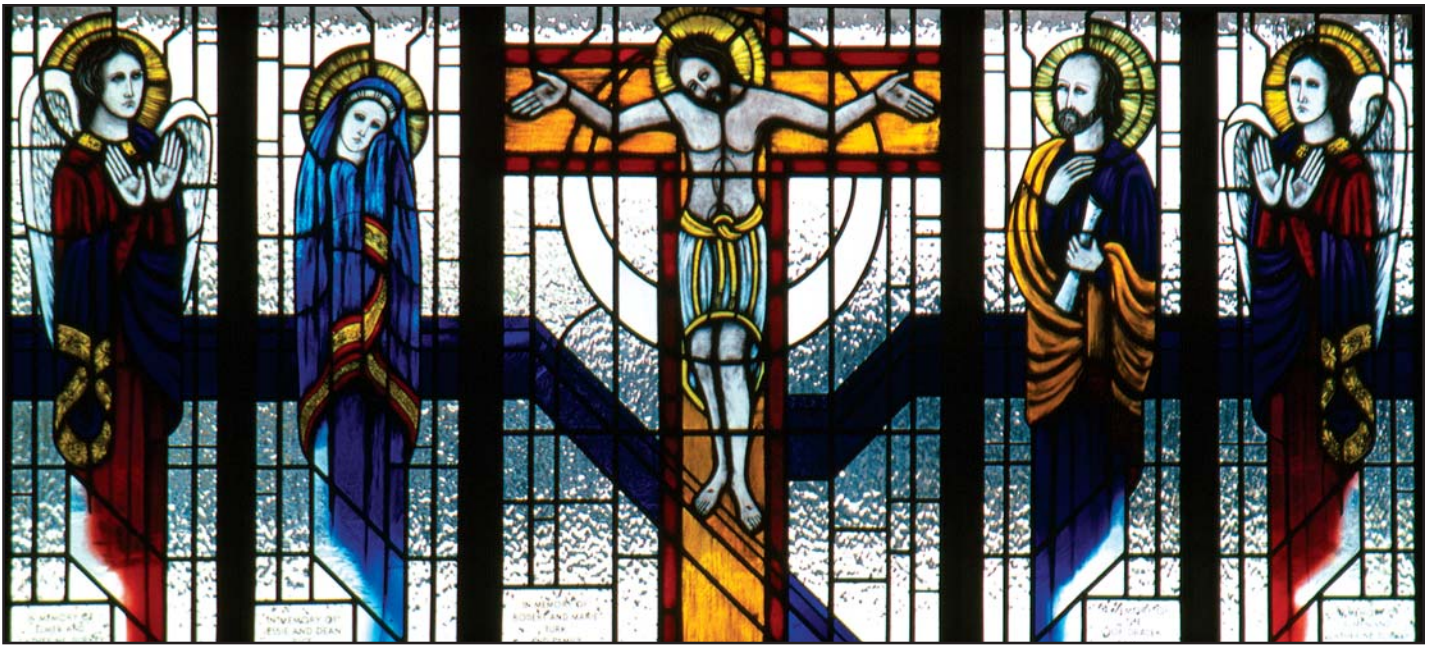
Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane

*She was a tailor when my pants
needed a patch.
She was a teacher when I asked a
question.
She was a priest when I had a con-
fession.
She was a psychiatrist when I
came home crying.
She was a preacher when I got
caught lying.
She was a singer when she sang
me to sleep.
She was a lifeguard when she said
the water's too deep.
There are many more, yet the best
one to me,
She was a best friend, and mine
forever she'll be.*

World Travel

Traveling was another way for Karen to gather new pieces to add to her work of art. She was always ready for another experience, another way to let the sun shine through and illuminate all the beautiful corners of her life.

One particularly memorable family vacation was a trip to Mexico. Road trip! They made it to Mexico City and had a wonderful time. Then the car broke down. After much hassling to get back to town and to convince the mechanic to fix the car, they were told that the part that was needed was not available and would have to be ordered. Suddenly, they saw the part that they needed being carted away by a peasant



“The Crucifixion” and “The Virgin Mary and Christ Child” from Immaculate Conception Catholic Church

on a bicycle, and they knew that they had been had. Finally the part was where it was supposed to be, and the family was ready to leave, when the mechanic told Ed that the bill was going to \$50 thinking that they were really getting away with something. Ed was just glad to pay and head north.

And then there were the European adventures. Karen organized three trips which included stops in Germany, France, Switzerland, England, and Italy, taking other artists with them to soak in the soul-stirring beauty of the cathedrals, the ancient windows, the typical tourist stops, and the quiet streets of everyday life in each of these countries.

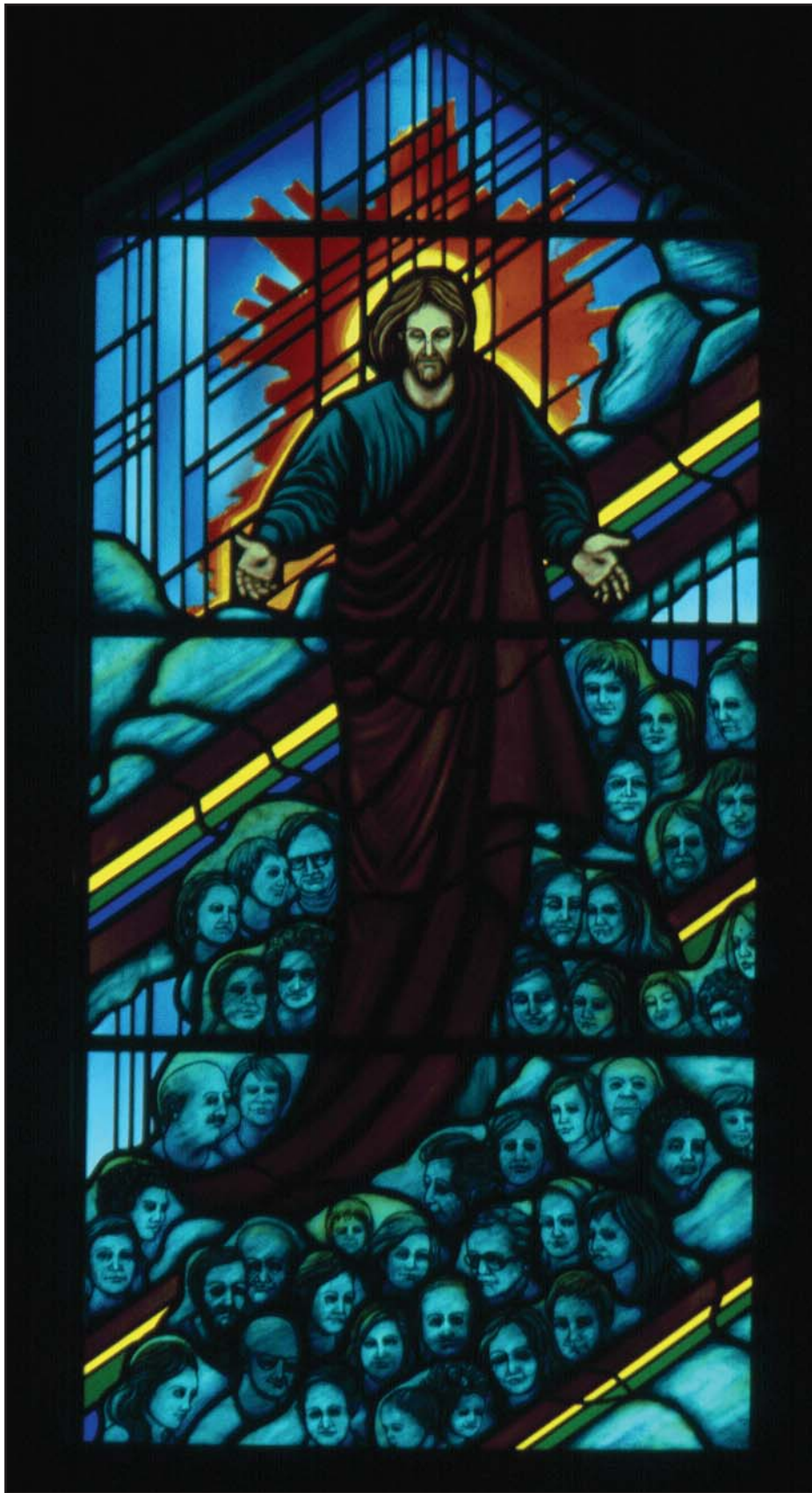
She could absorb the art of the ages and revel in the wonders of the world outside of her sphere of experience.

Suzanne Cooper, a stained glass artist, writes:

*Ancient wooden pews
Sit quietly and listen
Hearing songs of light
Colors dance around you
Soothing eyes and souls
Light dancing through bits of colored glass
Tilt your head to the right
Catch the glow through purple glass
Singing praises to the sun.*

Of course, no reflection on Karen’s fine art of living would be complete without honoring her work. She began as a sculptor and found a wonderful outlet in the shaping of materials to create a standing piece of art that reflected images of the past or hopes for a world yet to be, such as the statue at the Cowboy Hall of Fame.

Then, Ed gave her a stained glass kit; her life was changed, and the world became a brighter place. Karen lost herself in the design, in the selection of just the right pieces of glass, the scoring and



"The Risen Christ" is an installation at Nicoma Park, Oklahoma.

cutting, setting the frames for strength and longevity, and creating her legacy in windows of frozen beauty. The wonder of this magnificent art is breathtaking—the incredible blend of glass, paint, lead, and wood which results in a picture of the world that can withstand the passing of centuries. It is awe inspiring.

Her windows and art have been placed in more than 70 churches, in libraries, banks, schools and even the Oklahoma State Capitol, with a total of more than 200 works around the country. She lovingly and painstakingly repaired and restored another amazing group of works of other artists, including almost all of the windows that were damaged in the devastation of the Murrah Building bombing. Who could possibly count the thousands of people who sit daily or weekly under the beauty of light shining through Karen's special touch?

Karen was active in the Stained Glass Association of America, the more-than 100-year-old organization dedicated to the advancement and enhancement of the art of stained glass and the artisans who are called to this work, and served as president of the prestigious national organization.

A quote from the Stained Glass Association of America *Sourcebook* states, "Quality art draws the beholder to the Creator, who stands behind the artist sharing his own creative power, for the divine Artist passes on to the human artist a spark of his own surpassing wisdom." Perhaps that explains Karen's amazing talent and art—she had a spark of wisdom from a higher power that guided her heart and her hands.

Over the years, she had studios in various parts of the city, with her largest being in the center of artists in Oklahoma City, the Paseo. From there she could consult, design, oversee, and complete breathtaking pictures of spiritual stories as well as fun works like *HoHo the Clown* in the Village Library.



Village Library

She poured her heart and her soul into her determination for perfection, her drive for soul-stopping beauty, her decision to keep on working, in sickness and in health.

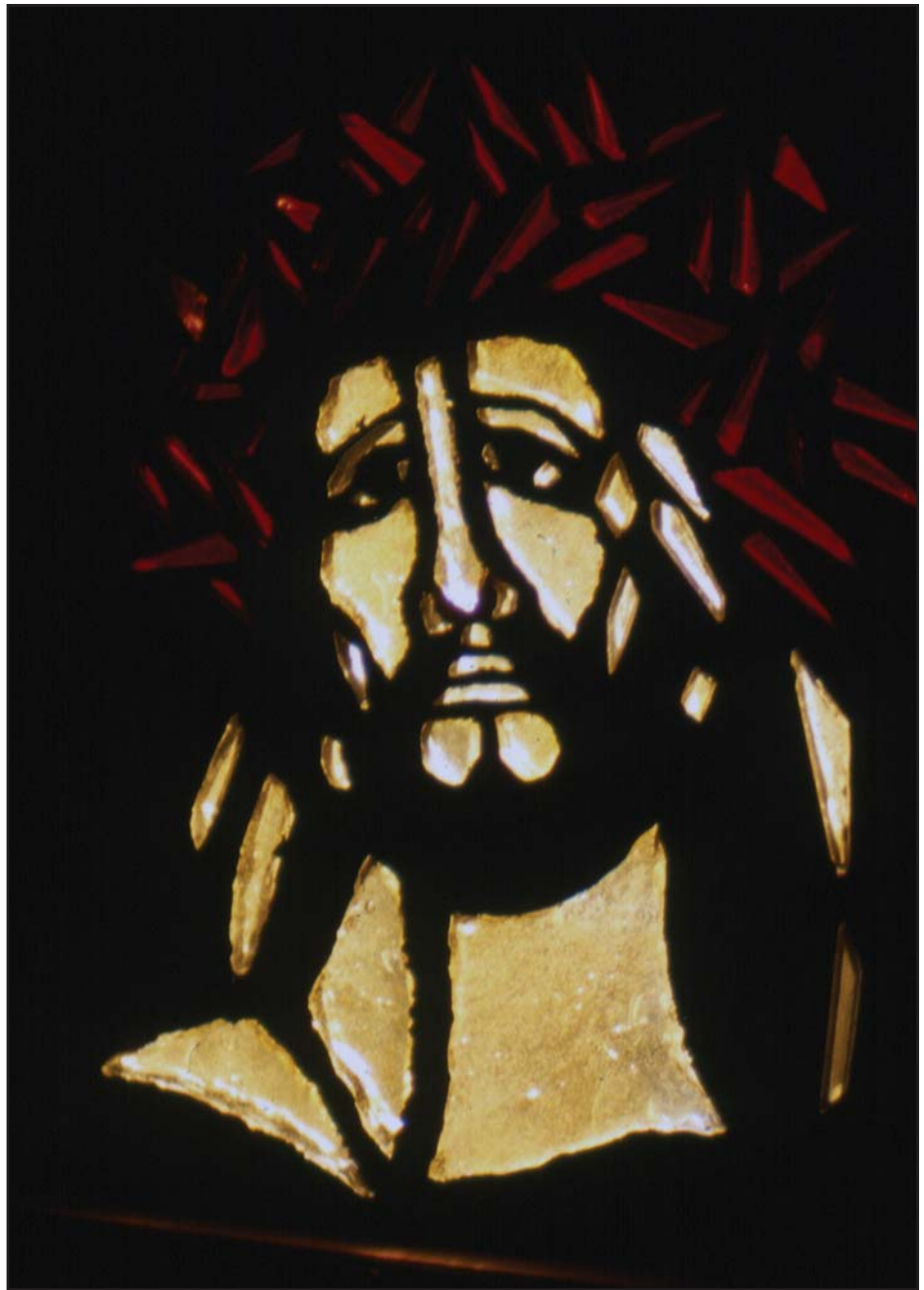
Kahlil Gibran wrote:

*Only when you drink from the river
of silence shall you indeed
sing.*

*And when you have reached the
mountain top, then you shall
begin to climb.*

*And when the earth shall claim
your limbs, then shall you
truly dance.*

Of course, not every moment of Karen's window of life was filled with sunshine and light. She walked through the valley of the shadow of death too



Private Collection

many times in her life—losing her mother; father; her brother, Richard; her sister, Sandy; and her daughter, Micki. There were many pieces of a broken heart that had to be added to the design. And then, just like some of those wonderful windows that begin to show the wear of time, her body began to betray her with heart disease and that insidious specter of darkness, cancer. She dealt with it in her usual determined manner, endured the procedures and treatments, and went on with her life. There were

still windows to be imagined, still beauty to be shared.

And then, as she grew weaker and realized that her time was growing short, she held out hope that she could see one more Christmas, gather her family to her heart one more time, see the lights of her life reflected in the windows of their eyes. When she had to go the hospital in early December, knowing that, when she returned home, it would be to face the end of her journey with hospice, her family lovingly decorated her home for her—fill-



St. Philip Neri Catholic Church

ing it with her special Christmas touches and hand-painted decorations. They were going to surprise her when she came home. But, that was not to be.

Genug is a term in Yiddish which simply means “enough.” Perhaps, Karen looked back on her full and colorful life, on her loving family, on her transcendent art, on her reflections of achievement shining in buildings all over the country, and she could smile with satisfaction of a job well done and say *genug*. It was enough.

Though, for her family and friends, it will never be enough. They will miss her energy, her sense of humor, her talks at the big family table, her consistent enthusiasm and optimism that life was meant to be relished and revered. The light doesn’t shine so brightly through the windows right now. The colors are dimmed and shadowed.

The SGAA Annual Summer Conference is going to be held in Oklahoma City this summer, and Karen was to be the host. She was slated to describe her work on the devastated windows that she restored after the bombing. She will be missed by all who attend the Annual Summer Conference.

Karen’s legacy is one of wonderful gifts of graciousness, talent, strength, acceptance, and love. She showed how to live with challenges and struggles and how to survive. While not every moment was easy and not every memory etched in gold, in the final analysis, Karen gave to everyone every inch of what she had to offer. She never held back and always tried to give it her all. She put all the pieces together in the very best way she could.



“HoHo the Clown”

Karen is survived by her husband, Ed Hendrix; her children, Kathy Leatherock, Sharon Land and husband, Cody, Kenneth Hendrix and wife, Debbie, Jimmy Hendrix and wife Betty; her brother, David Kroier; her 11 grandchildren, 5 great grandchildren and wide extended family. We stand beside you in silent vigil to your grief and your enormous loss.

This article was created from Karen Hendrix’s moving memorial service, held 12 December 2008 at Smith and Kernke Funeral Parlor, Oklahoma City. The service was celebrated by Glenda Stansbury. Glenda Stansbury is a Certified Funeral Celebrant in Oklahoma City. For more information about Celebrants or to find a Celebrant in your area, go to www.insightbooks.com or contact Glenda at glenda@insightbooks.com.