Remembering Karen Baldwin, Folklore & Education Pioneer

by Jan Rosenberg

At the annual meeting of the American Folklore Society in 1988, Karen Baldwin addressed a group of us who were participating in a forum on folklore and education. She invited us to join her in the formation of a Folklore and Education Section of the Society. She passed around a clipboard to which we excitedly signed our names and provided our addresses. By the end of the meeting, the creation of the Section had been approved by the AFS Board.

Why didn't we think of this earlier? Folklore and education was to be the new kid on the block, and Karen Baldwin its shepherd. She ran the section for two years which included the production of a newsletter and the creation of section sponsored sessions at subsequent meetings.

When Karen Baldwin died at age 64 of cancer, she had amassed studies in a variety of subjects: bikers, birder lore, women. Ever active, Baldwin kept her eye on the educational value of what she explored. She let go of the Section knowing it would grow on its own. She had other fish to fry, exploring and extolling the cultural aspects of various groups in the United States. Indeed, she carried the American Folklife Preservation Act wherever she went. And the Act is an educational tool in and of itself.

Karen wasn't new to setting folklife ablaze. She wrote the first dissertation on family folklore as a genre. She was one of the original members of

the AFS Women's Caucus that became the Women's Section of the Society. She was active with the Children's Folklore Section of AFS as well. She worked with the North Carolina Department of Education to create a folklife in education handbook based on fieldwork in east Carolina, and she worked with the Department of Education to incorporate folklore in the elementary and secondary classroom.

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She was raised in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania suburbs and experienced the light found in the Quaker tradition. She attended Guilford College, a Friends School, in Greensboro, North Carolina and went on to study English at the University of Pennsylvania. It was there that she learned of the study of folklore and she transferred to the Department of Folklore and Folklife where she received the PhD in 1975. Her dissertation Down on Bugger Run: Family Group and the Social Base of Folklore (University of Pennsylvania, 1975) was the first of its topic. She also honed other interests in folk culture and she presented extensively on those interests. There was never a dull moment with Karen.

She will be honored with the establishment of the Karen Baldwin Folklore Archive at East Carolina State University where she taught for 30 years. She will be remembered for her dedication to the furthering of understanding of folk culture. She will be treasured for her passion for all matters of folk culture. She will be missed.

Folklore and Education **is the newsletter of the Folklore and Education section of the American Folklore Society.**

Individuals may join the Folklore and Education Section without joining the American Folklore Society. Annual dues at $10. See the Online Membership Form at www.afsnet.org/membership/service/.

We want to stay in touch! Please notify the AFS business office if your e-mail address or other contact information changes. E-mail address changes to Tim Lloyd, Executive Director, at lloyd.100@osu.edu, or Maria Teresa Agozzino, Associate Director, at agozzino.2@osu.edu.

Questions, comments, and contributions about this newsletter are welcome at all times. Section members and others interested in submitting materials relevant to folklore and education may send such materials to the editorial staff, either by e-mail or regular mail, at the addresses below.

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