

Obituary

Bridge over troubled water: In the spirit of Karen Hunter (1945–2018)

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Good evening. I am very pleased to be with you this evening to remember and honor our friend and colleague, Karen Hunter. It is a challenge to speak about Karen with this audience, where many of you knew her personally and those who did not certainly know her by reputation. She was widely recognized for her strategic vision of scholarly publishing during the transition from print to electronic and well beyond. She recognized, and helped others to understand, the value of digital tools for researcher access and the improved productivity that results.

After early career positions at the Cornell University library and Baker & Taylor, Karen joined Elsevier in 1976. She established her reputation in the industry and the library community after she joined Elsevier, and it is through her time with Elsevier that most of us came to know her. I confess that I have been unable to identify my initial meeting with Karen, but I know that our paths crossed many times.

Occasionally we worked on issues of common interest, occasionally our contact was more casual or social. I heard her speak at a variety of library and industry meetings through the years, and always found her thoughtful, challenging and forward thinking, without being confrontational or abrasive – a difficult task at any time but particularly during the tumultuous changes that technology, especially in Internet, brought to publishing, to libraries and to society as a whole.

Karen served a unique role in Elsevier and the information industry during this time. This is how she described her role in an interview as she retired, “I felt I was being paid to to speak up, to say things that ought to be said – or things others couldn’t. To have that level of freedom, trust and ability to make a change, to make a difference, was really extraordinary”.

Her time at Elsevier ended formally with her retirement as Senior Vice President of Global Academic Relations in 2010, although she continued to consult with Elsevier for several more years. Those of us of a certain age participated in those tumultuous changes with Karen, but all of us continue to adapt and to help for our organizations improve services for our users, based on the new opportunities that continue to arise. It is an endless challenge to prepare for the future in an environment that continues to evolve rapidly. Even as we meet current challenges, we must prepare for the future challenges we think we can foresee — and those we can’t — to create sustainable organizations as Judy [Judy Verses, Executive Vice-President, Research, Wiley, Inc.] recommended this morning.

In preparing for this talk, I spoke with a number of people who knew and worked with Karen and read a number tributes to her. There were many words and phrases that came up over and over again and I began to list them. I had a boss many years ago who frequently said, “To list is to limit” and that is certainly true with respect to Karen’s attributes. It became a very long list! I chose to create the Word Art that I am showing to you this evening to share some of those terms with you. I couldn’t use all of words, even those that were often repeated, so you may be surprised at some that are missing as well as recognizing many of the words that are there.

If you look carefully, you will see the words wit and humor – characteristics that may be ones you yourself would ascribe to Karen. I like to think that she would be amused by my Word Art – not just its imperfections and limitations, but in particular, by the fact that I am presenting it to you using PowerPoint! In 2001, Karen delivered the prestigious Miles Conrad Memorial Lecture at the NFAIS Annual Conference. She began with a single PowerPoint slide saying “Friends Don’t Let Friends PowerPoint!” And here I am using PowerPoint to honor her, but as you will see, I have very few slides which will rotate in the background while I speak.

It is surprisingly hard to find useable pictures of Karen, but I have included a few recent ones, including the “portrait” from her retirement. I also included selected comments that acknowledge her contributions and her attributes. I have simplified and consolidated those comments, so they are not true quotations and

therefore not attributed to specific individuals, but you may recognize some of your own words on the slides.

Karen was a well educated woman, with three masters degrees: one in history from Cornell, one in library science from Syracuse and another in business from Columbia. But while her education certainly contributed to her credibility, it was her personality, her intelligence, her ability to see both sides and find common ground, and above all her willingness to challenge herself and others, that made her such an important contributor in the development of digital access to scholarly publishing.

Mark Seeley, her colleague from Elsevier, wrote a memorial article in Library Connect, “Honoring Karen Hunter — a pioneer of digital publishing and library services”, in which he summarized Karen’s contributions this way:

Relations between academic publishers and research libraries have often gone through difficult times, and uniquely among publishing executives, Karen was able to genuinely communicate and negotiate, circumventing pre-determined positions. I’ve thought about the characteristics that enabled Karen to navigate these difficult straits, and I think they boil down to these points:

- **Command of the issues.** Karen’s expertise in digital publishing and library services was honed by decades of experience at the front lines.
- **Openness.** While Karen no doubt had proposals and projects of her own to discuss, she was open and interested in others’ views and was prepared to advocate for them with senior management.
- **Directness.** When proposals were made to Karen that she knew would be difficult for senior management to accept, she said so and explained why.
- **Genuine Interest in Others** — which I believe all who met and worked with Karen felt.

He concluded by saying:

In the final chapter of her career, Karen’s role was in library relations but always with a strategic dimension. Regardless of her title at any given point, many senior executives would routinely ask for her advice or ask others if they had sought her input. Her influence, while informal at times, was palpable and critical.

Karen led many pioneering initiatives within Elsevier and the industry, starting with scanned journal content on CD-ROMs for the ADONIS project in the 1980s, two print-to-electronic journal projects (TULIP and PEAK), and eventually the development of Elsevier’s flagship online product, ScienceDirect. She co-directed industry participation in digital preservation initiatives such as Portico and JSTOR and was instrumental in the development of important multi-publisher initiatives, remaining active in many as they matured. When she retired, she was on the boards of Crossref, CLOCKSS, the Copyright Clearance Center and ORCID.

But her contributions were not just important to Elsevier and other publishers. Karen was respected and admired by the library community as well. In 2006, Karen was the first publisher to receive the prestigious CSA/Ulrich’s Serials Librarianship Award from the ALA Association for Library Collections & Technical Services (ALCTS). She was acknowledged “for her leadership in the collaborative development of the electronic delivery of scholarly information”. The awards committee described Karen as an “innovator” and “thought-leader”. They praised her commitment “beyond any interests she may have as an employee of a single publishing company” and acknowledged her for spearheading research initiatives “that influenced the thinking of an entire professional community”.

Another colleague, Chrysanne Lowe, described Karen this way:

Karen had a gift that is sorely missing these days. She had the gift of listening and bringing people together, moving what at first appeared to be deeply entrenched thinking into positions that could come

together. Her strategic thinking always guided us towards the objective and the outcome. And she would persuasively go-to-task with those who put up barriers, be it an external customer or any CEO of Elsevier, she dealt with them equally.

Karen combined her background in Library Science and her astute business acumen to bridge a divide. ... Karen was the person who brought all of the perspectives together. She pushed both Elsevier and its customers out of our comfort-zones so that we could create something new together. She built trust and she demanded respect for all parties, ... understanding the value of all the players in the mix.

Reviewing even this brief summary of the many projects Karen led and participated in leads me to speculate about what she would be doing with and for us if she was still here. One example that comes to mind immediately is the development of CHORUS. It began just after Karen retired or I am sure she would have been actively involved. It is right up her alley!

Many of you are members of CHORUS, so I am sure you know that it was established in 2013 to support and promote open access to and continued availability of publications reporting on funded research. It does this by leveraging new and existing digital technologies that are used by the publishing and scholarly communications community. The participating publishers first engaged with funding agencies to identify their needs and later brought academic research libraries to the table to help CHORUS address the needs of our institutions, while simultaneously attracting additional publishers. I am proud to be among the first academic research library deans to participate in the development of CHORUS.

CHORUS exemplifies what can be accomplished with collaboration among publishers and libraries and funders. At the University of Florida, we are developing internal workflows to use the data compiled by CHORUS that identifies articles by UF authors reporting on research funded by US government grants. We will share that information with the authors, the associate deans for research in each author's college, and the office of compliance under the vice president of research. CHORUS not only identifies the articles by UF authors, it verifies whether the author manuscript appears on an agency's portal thus indicating whether the author has fulfilled the obligation to deposit the manuscript in the appropriate funding agency repository. This reporting confirms when compliance has taken place and provides notice in time to correct the omission when it has not.

The major publishers are actively contributing content to CHORUS, among them AAAS, ACM, ACS, Elsevier, IEEE, New England Journal of Medicine, Springer Nature, Taylor and Francis and Wiley. Society and university publishers like Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, Rockefeller University Press, American Society of Plant Biologists and the American Mathematical Society, to name but a few, are also participating. CHORUS reports that 90% of its members are identifying funders as part of their workflow. As more publishers participate, this service becomes more comprehensive and more valuable to the funding agencies and to the authors and their institutions. If your company is not already a member of CHORUS, or is a member not yet identifying funders for this important initiative, I encourage you to imagine Karen challenging you – and cajoling you – to become an active participant.

Among the memorial tributes following Karen's death, her colleague Anne Gabriel made one that seemed particularly suited for concluding my remarks: "WWKD. 'What would Karen do?' is always with me. Her legacy is a high bar".

In the United States, we are watching with interest the developments here in Europe such as Plan-S and OA2020 and hoping that publishers and those who license their data will find new business models that are acceptable to publishers, funders, and academic institutions whose faculty perform the research and report on the results. If Karen were with us, she would be active in these discussions, at least behind

the scenes, and hopefully fulfilling her role as a person who can understand multiple points of view and create a bridge over these very troubled waters.

In her Miles Conrad Memorial Lecture in 2001, Karen reflected on her 1986 remarks at a Society for Scholarly Publishing meeting. She quoted herself as saying:

As to the issue of library-publisher relations, my concern is ... the general deterioration of relations over the past 10 to 15 years. Once the library budget difficulties of the early 1970s were juxtaposed with the continued expansion of publishing output during that same period, frustration began.

She then added:

Think about some of what I said: First, relations with libraries had been deteriorating already then for more than a decade. Now [in 2001] it is 15 years later. While some librarians are not hostile, others have built their careers on hating all publishers to some degree, but consigning commercial publishers to our special circle of Hell.

She critiqued her own 1986 statement that the “main concern is not about the overall level of funding”, saying:

What rubbish - of course the concern should have been about the level of library funding! We know that for decades the growth in the scientific literature has absolutely paralleled the growth in the number of R & D researchers. And we know that most libraries have not kept pace in their funding.

Now, 17 additional years later, that is even more true and continues to be a source of friction between librarians and publishers. While librarians acknowledge that publishers are delivering more high value content each year, and that our researchers need access to that content, we continue to call attention to an unsustainable business model, where the annual price increases exceed the growth in our budgets every year.

And it is not just the librarians who recognize this as an unsustainable business model. Our provosts, vice presidents of research, chief financial officers, senior research faculty and others on our campuses are well aware of this problem. What is surprising is that we have been able to meet the financial demands for as long as we have, but it has been at considerable cost to our collections and many of our other responsibilities, and it is unsustainable.

Several years ago, I told my provost he should accept these annual increases like utility rate increases. He normally has a great sense of humor, but his answer was completely without humor. He said that he only wished my e-journal price increases were as modest, and as infrequent, as his utility rate increases. For libraries, and our parent institutions, it is no longer a question of value. It is a question of affordability.

Many of you are involved in discussions about new pricing and access models within your own organizations. This is the next major challenge for publishers and their customers, and it is a challenge that Karen would have welcomed and to which she would have brought her usual insights and ability to seek meaningful compromise. But the perception is that the publishers may have waited too long to acknowledge the situation and take action to address it. Librarians seeking alternatives to what they perceived as fruitless and unequal negotiations with publishers have found new allies in the organizations that fund the research and that has shifted the balance of power.

Ricky Poynder writing about Plan-S in his blog in mid-October quoted Robert-Jan [Robert-Jan Smits, Special Envoy of the European Commission for Open Access and Innovation, European Political Strategy Centre (EPSC), European Commission], who spoke with us this morning, as telling *Nature*, “The ‘S’ in Plan S can stand for ‘science, speed, solution, shock’.”

Poynder then offers this opinion,

Shock would certainly seem to be an appropriate word, and shock was surely what publishers felt when Plan S was announced. After all, they have successfully managed to delay and subvert open access for some 25 years now. They perhaps assumed they could continue doing so. But if successful, Plan S could bring this dilly-dallying to a dramatic end.

He also quoted Robert-Jan as saying “We expect publishers to come forward with offerings which comply with the principles outlined in Plan S” and “It is for publishers to provide Plan S-compliant routes to publication in their journals so that researchers can choose where to publish when accepting funding from those who sign Plan S”.

As Judy [Verses] said this morning, shock was a wake up call to get the attention of the publishers, but I think she would agree that it has no place when seeking to influence stakeholders and drive change. Whatever the past faults of the publishers that may have provoked this demand for immediate and dramatic change, this is not the way to continue negotiations and establish new business models. That said, publishers cannot afford to respond by taking umbrage or by waiting until 90 to 100% of funding agencies, including those outside of Europe, agree to Plan-S, or something like it, before they act.

We have too many examples in the United States right now about what happens when each side refuses to compromise or have meaningful dialog with the opposing side.

I am sure you realize that I prepared these remarks before hearing the presentations earlier today, and I am encouraged that there are definite signs of constructive dialog and evidence of movement on the part of publishers, exemplified by the announcement this morning of the new agreement between Wiley and the German consortium, Project DEAL.

If Karen was here, I am certain she would join me in saying that this is the time for the publishers to accept responsibility for their past failures (always a good first step when trying to engage the opposition) and propose bold new business models that, while they may not be fully compliant with the Plan-S principles, offer dramatic changes and show significant willingness to make substantial and rapid movement toward Open Access.

Librarians and funders need to acknowledge and praise positive changes that publishers like Springer Nature and, as we heard this morning, Wiley have already made (another good first step when trying to engage the opposition).

To keep things moving forward, all sides need to be less rigid. Seeking meaningful compromise should not be viewed as making concessions without receiving anything in exchange. It should be viewed as an essential step toward bringing everyone to the table so real progress can be made. And right now it seems that we are hearing more about shock than about successful collaborations and positive changes, though the Wiley announcement is certainly encouraging.

I don't have the answers. I know the issues are complex and that it is difficult to make such dramatic changes so quickly. But I also know the publishers have talented people who can find the answers and who can help your organizations through what are certainly going to be seismic changes. This is your chance to step forward and provide leadership. Embrace open access. Use your infrastructure, your resources, and your skills to be the champions, not the opposition. Rapidly develop and offer new innovative services that your customers will be willing to pay for, without holding the journal content hostage.

I know some of you already understood this tsunami was approaching and you have been preparing for it. Unfortunately, the ground has shifted and the timetable is now being set by others, so you need to accelerate your development. Others, who are less well prepared, will face an even greater challenge because they have to catch up before they can move ahead.

If you are leading these discussions, you need to empower your team and challenge them to come up with innovative options. If you are not leading the discussions and examination of options within your own organization, you still have the opportunity to look at this through Karen's eyes, to follow Karen's example.

You can listen and strive to understand all points of view, even when the opposition seems irritating or unreasonable. You can seek to identify compromises that can give something to all sides – hopefully enough to create new business models that most of us can live with.

You can speak “truth to power” within your own organization and challenge the entrenched positions – and the fear – that keep rapid progress from occurring. You can try to be the bridge – or at least a few sturdy planks on the bridge – over these troubled waters.

Whether you are with a publisher, a library, or a funding agency, I urge you to start by asking yourself, as Ann Gabriel does, “WWKD – What Would Karen Do?” – but proceed by asking yourself “WCID – What Can I Do?”. I can think of no better way to honor Karen's memory.

Thank you.