

Professor Henry C. Karlson
(1943-2010)
Indiana University School of Law—Indianapolis

Professor Henry C. Karlson, 67, died of leukemia on October 25, 2010. His death stunned the Indiana legal profession, his colleagues at Indiana University, from which recently he retired, and friends and officials throughout Indiana. Less than two (2) hours later, his death was announced at a meeting of the Indianapolis City-County Council, an indication of the respect he earned during thirty (30) years of teaching law and assisting many groups and persons.

On November 15, 2010, the Indianapolis City-County Council announced a “SPECIAL RESOLUTION honoring the life and accomplishments of Professor Henry C. Karlson.”

It noted that he was born in Evanston, Illinois, and he earned his Bachelor’s Degree, his Juris Doctorate (J.D.) and his Masters of Law (LL.M) from the University of Illinois.

It described his remarkable professorial career and his commitment to persons much less fortunate, especially children in Indianapolis. It said that for 33 years he taught criminal law, evidence, trial practice, trial advocacy, and seminars dealing with child abuse.

The Resolution observed that Professor Karlson co-authored a book on child abuse and wrote many articles that appeared in the APSAC Handbook on Child Maltreatment, the Indiana Law Review, the Journal of Child Abuse and Neglect, the Annals of Emergency Medicine and the Defense Law Journal.

Continuing, it said he was a member of the Order of the Coif, the Association of Counsel for Children, the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, the Association of Trial Lawyers of America, and a former member of the Indiana Supreme Court Committee on Rules of Evidence and the Board of Examiners of the National Board of Trial Advocacy.

As the Dean of the Indiana University School of Law in 1977, I was pleased to invite him to join the faculty, and I was especially pleased to strongly support his application for tenure.

Professor Henry C. Karlson’s Law School professorship was outstanding. He had an extraordinary understanding of his subjects. Additionally, he was a superb classroom professor. In his class a student discovered a level of learning that the student did not think possible or could not anticipate.

In short, Professor Karlson mastered the subjects he taught and the art of teaching. Excellent law school teaching is much more demanding than conducting a “dialogue.” Often it requires use of five or six different methods of instruction during one class period. A great professor knows and can use all of those methods as if they were a seamless web. Professor Karlson was a great professor.

He gave constant service to Indiana University. He served on the Faculty Council Executive Committee. He was the parliamentarian for the entire Faculty Council, and, separately, the Indiana University School of Nursing.

Professor Karlson was highly regarded in the legal profession. He taught in the venues of Continuing Legal Education and in the Indiana Bar Review. He was honored by the National Association of Social Workers and the United States Food and Drug Administration.

He was a powerful advocate and a gentle man. He lived a highly principled life. He introduced others to those standards. He taught students that they, too, could live by great principles, and he constantly sustained less fortunate people, especially children.

Years ago, Justice Felix Frankfurter said the law, more than any other calling, has been concerned with those standards, those principles, and those appeals to right and reason, that have had a dominate share in begetting a civilized society.

Those thoughts were the professional life of Professor Henry C. Karlson. Because they were, he was a man for all seasons.

He expressed endless pride in his wife and their accomplished daughter and son. When outside the classroom, he thoroughly enjoyed informal discussions with law students. He had eclectic tastes that touched many things: casual and pleasant banter; a cheerful rhyme; good poetry; beautiful music, especially at Christmastide; stern criticism of court opinions he thought were incorrect; the works of C.S. Lewis; Roman history, of which he had a keen understanding; science fiction; small arms and automatic rifles of every kind, about which clearly he was an authority; Macaulay's History of England; British common law; and, among many others, novels and mysteries by William F. Buckley, Jr., Louis Auchincloss, Thomas Wolfe, John Le Carre, and Alan Furst.

An Army officer, he *volunteered* to serve in Viet Nam. He was in the famous 101st Airborne Division. He received the Bronze Star. He served, also, as a military trial judge.

He returned to the United States. He was assigned to write the after-action report on the highly publicized Me Lie trials. That recognized his intellectual and personal integrity and the very high respect in which he was held.

He distinguished the University of Illinois from which he graduated, and Indiana University to which he was dedicated.

He was a beloved husband to his wife, Nancy Karlson, for 42 years, and father of their children, Elizabeth and Henry.

My colleagues at Indiana University and many alumni, associates in the Indiana legal profession, several members of the Indiana Supreme Court and the Indiana Court of Appeals, many members of the government of Indianapolis, Indiana, including Mayor Gregory A. Ballard,

and the City-County Council of Indianapolis and Marion County, Indiana, join in remembering Professor Henry C. Karlson.

He was a close personal friend, my professional associate and colleague, and my brother-in-arms who defended and protected the United States of America.

William F. Harvey
Emeritus Dean and
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