

Rachel A. Rosenfeld, 1948-2002, SSS Past President.

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Abstract:

“Rachel brought an abundance of joy, a spirit of inclusiveness, and great professional stature to the SSS presidency, the scholarly community that constitutes the SSS, and to the profession. She has left a legacy that will continue to inspire and humanize our scholarly community.” Dan Cornfield, Member of the SSS Executive Committee

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Rachel Ann Rosenfeld died on 24 November 2002 at UNC Hospitals, of lung failure resulting from metastatic breast cancer, after a battle of 14 years with the disease. She was 54 years old.

Rachel was born in Baltimore, Maryland, on 15 November 1948, the first child of Jerome Rosenfeld and Ethel Hanners. Jerry, a bacteriologist, grew up on New York's East Side, the son of Jewish immigrants from Galicia, Austria (now Poland). Ethel, a psychiatric nurse and later professor of nursing, is of English, Scottish, Irish, Scandinavian, and Native American stock. Rachel moved around the country with her young professional parents, living part of her early childhood on a farm in Kankakee, Illinois. The family settled in Little Rock, Arkansas, and Rachel grew up there with two sisters (Deborah and Diana) and two brothers (Peter and George).

Later she was a devoted aunt to her nieces and nephews, Rachel "Shay" Kohls, Nathan Pang, Jessica Kohls, Leah Babb-Rosenfeld, Reid Kohls, and Josh Pang, and an equally devoted godmother to Claire and Sam Nielsen, the children of her close friend and colleague, François.

Rachel showed an early aptitude for academic pursuits. She attended Hall High School in Little Rock and received many honors, including a National Merit scholarship. She attended Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, graduating in 1970 with a degree in Anthropology and Sociology. She then went to graduate school at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, graduating in 1976 with a PhD in Sociology (with minor in Economics and Statistics). She was a student of Aage Sørensen, with whom she maintained close ties until his death in 2001. Her first academic position was at McGill University in Montreal, Quebec. In 1978 she took a position as Senior Study Director at the National Opinion Research Center where she was involved in major survey research projects. Among the outcomes of that experience was her book, *Farm Women: Work, Farm, and Family in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985; paperback edition, 1987), based on a large study of female farm operators that she conducted at NORC.

In 1981 Rachel became Assistant Professor at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. She rose rapidly through the ranks, becoming Professor of Sociology in 1988; in 2002 she was named William R. Kenan Distinguished Professor. She was also a Fellow of the Carolina Population Center, and held administrative positions including Vice Chair of the Division of Social Sciences (1991-1992, 1993-1994) and Acting Associate Dean for Programs and Budgets of the College of Arts and Sciences (1991-1992). At the time of her death she was Chair of the Department of Sociology (since 2000). As Department Chair, Rachel exhibited the same qualities she displayed in her other roles—fairness, consideration of others, supportiveness of people, especially graduate students. While her illness sapped her strength considerably in the last few months of her life, she remained engaged in departmental activities and in her responsibilities as Chair until the end.

In her research, Rachel was interested in the influence of social stratification on career and job mobility, particularly for women. Her recent research included studies of the U.S. Women's movement, work histories of women, academic careers, and work-family policies in advanced industrialized countries. She has been working with Heike Trappe (former CPC postdoctoral scholar) on gender inequality in the early work life in the former East and West Germany and in the U.S. She had recently begun a new project studying the nursing profession, inspired by the career of her mother, Ethel. In the course of her highly productive research career she published, in addition to *Farm Women* (mentioned above), *Reconstructing the Academy* (editor, with Jean O'Barr and Elizabeth Minnich; Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1988). She has published numerous articles in books and in professional journals including *American Journal of Sociology*, *American Sociological Review*, *Science*, *Signs*, *Social Forces* and *Social Science Research*.

Rachel, who was the immediate Past-President of the Southern Sociological Society at the time of her death, had previously served this organization in a variety of capacities, including as a member of the Publications Committee (1985-1990), Executive Committee (1992- 1995, 1996-1998, and 2000-2002), Vice President (1997-98), Honors Committee (1998-2001), Program Committee (1999-2000), and President-elect (2000-2001). Despite her self-concept as a “low energy” person, colleagues remember her as someone who accomplished every task, no matter how menial, as well as it could be. As Vice-President, for example, in response to a concern that the faculty of PhD-granting departments were not attending the Southern Sociological Society meetings as frequently as they had in the past, Rachel sent letters to each such department encouraging attendance. Also during her Vice-Presidency, Rachel suggested (along with Barbara Risman) that the Southern Sociological Society host a dance to foster solidarity among the members. Thanks to her persuasiveness, many of our membership remember dancing ourselves into Durkheimian rapture at the Atlanta 1998 meetings. She continued championing an annual dance as a member of the Program Committee and Chair of the Dance Committee for the 2000 meetings, and expressed disappointment that the Society could not afford such an event at her own Presidential meetings in Baltimore (2002).

For her Presidential meetings, Rachel chose the theme “Equality and Diversity,” which reflected her genuine concern that because it is impossible to treat all people equally, it is important to discover how to treat them fairly. In an article in *The Southern Sociologist* (Spring/Summer 2001) she prompted potential presenters to ponder questions such as: “What does equality mean when people and organizations are very different? How do we take into consideration—and even maintain— diversity while trying to increase equality of opportunity of outcomes? How do we recognize different skills, talents, and needs?” In her Presidential Address, which she feared she would not have adequate breath to deliver, she answered a related question: “What can the scholarship on gender teach us about studying difference and dealing with diversity in our professional and personal lives.” Her answer to this question is published in *Social Forces* (2002, Vol. 81, Number 1, pp. 1-24).

During her career, Rachel received many honors and awards including the Sociologists for Women in Society Award for Outstanding Mentoring (1992), and the first Sociology Department Graduate Student Association Award for Excellence in Mentoring (1998). She was awarded the Lara G. Hoggard Professorship for outstanding mid-career faculty (1993- 1999). In 1995, Rachel was the first recipient of the Katherine Jocher-Belle Boone Beard Award of the Southern Sociological Society, an honor bestowed on her for a distinguished career of sustained high quality scholarship on women. In 1995-96, she was a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in Stanford, California, and in fall 1996 a Visiting Fellow at the Australian National University. She was the 1998 Alpha Kappa Delta honor society speaker at Mississippi State University. She was also a deputy editor of the *American Sociological Review* (1997-1999) and at the time of her death was Chair of the Publications Committee of the American Sociological Association.

Rachel's death touches an unusually large circle of people because of her special ability to form and maintain deep friendships with many of the women and men she met during her life, including (current and former) students and postdocs, neighbors, and colleagues. Although many of her friendships had intellectual foundations, those who were close to her know that she loved to "be lazy" and read mystery and fantasy novels in bed, to go out on the town and swing dance, and to participate in marathon shopping expeditions in search of clothing for herself and pottery and other gifts for friends and family. Rachel's talent for friendship was based on her genuine feelings of love and admiration for other people and a truly non-judgmental attitude towards those around her. She discovered and appreciated the beauty and admirable qualities in people, no matter what their social status, and shared her discoveries with others. Rachel habitually said good things about people, to their face and behind their back. Many of us in the Southern Sociological Society have not only lost a friend and colleague, but an important part of our personal support network.

Rachel was buried in the Old Carrboro Cemetery in Carrboro, NC, following a funeral service that took place on November 29, 2002, at Eno River Unitarian Universalist Fellowship Church in Durham. Her funeral service was well attended by people who knew and loved her in her various roles. SSS members were well represented, including four past-presidents of the SSS: John Shelton Reed, Joel Smith, Ida Harper Simpson, and Rebecca Adams.

Survivors include her parents, Ethel and Jerome Rosenfeld of Chapel Hill, formerly of Greers Ferry, Arkansas; sisters Deborah Kohls of Chapel Hill and Diana Rosenfeld of Cordova, Tennessee; brothers Peter Rosenfeld of Collingsworth, New Jersey and George Rosenfeld of Chapel Hill; nieces and nephews and godchildren mentioned above; her partner, Kirk Denny; and her many friends. Rachel's CV, pictures, and other documents about her life and work can be viewed at http://www.unc.edu/depts/soc/web_pages/rfeld.html. A trust is being established in memory of Rachel through the Department of Sociology at University of North Carolina. The Sociology Department is still in the process of determining the exact way(s) in which this fund will be used to honor her; your suggestions are welcome. Among ideas that have been proposed are scholarships for graduate students, and prizes at the American Sociological Association and the Southern Sociological Society in Rachel's name, celebrating her and her work on issues in which she strongly believed. If this is your preference, checks may be made out to: Department of Sociology, and mailed to UNC-CH, Dept. of Sociology, CB# 3210, 155 Hamilton Hall, Chapel Hill, N 27599-3210. Please designate the check for Rachel Rosenfeld Trust.