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Memorial for Ellen Rappaport

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Memorial for Ellen Rappaport

collected by Ellen McGrath

May 12, 2003

We all had sad news this morning, Ellen Rappaport, our Head of Technical Services until very recently, passed away during the night. She first came to Albany Law School in January 1993 and has made enormous contributions to this library and to the larger world of librarianship. She was intensely committed to the development of clear library standards, and has worked on NISO and CONSER projects. She will be remembered by many in the library community as a wonderful colleague and mentor.

Her fight with cancer was a valiant one and she was generous and courageous to the last day here. She had announced that she would retire and called many of us last week. We will all miss her.

Nancy Lenahan
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From the Schenectady *Daily Gazette*, May 13, 2003:

Ellen Coolman Rappaport, 58, of Davis Avenue in Albany, died Monday morning, May 12, 2003, at her home.

Ellen was born in New York City and resided briefly in New Jersey, later moving to Norwalk, CT, where she spent most of her childhood as well as where she graduated from high school. She had been a Capital Region resident since 1980. She was a graduate of the University of Rochester and received her graduate degree in library science from Syracuse University. She had been employed as a librarian at Syracuse University and later was employed in the same capacity at the State University College at Cortland. She also worked for SUNY/OCLC Library Network. She was later employed by OCLC in Albany.

Ellen had also been employed by the Ameritech Information Systems and from 1993 to March of 2003 she was employed by the Albany Law School as a technical services librarian, later becoming head of technical services. She was a member of Congregation Ohav Shalom in Albany, NY, and was active with the Helderberg Madrigal Singers. In Syracuse, she was an active member of Schola Cantorum and participated in Schola's Summer Workshops after she moved to Albany. She also was involved with many library professional activities and was a member of many state, national and law library associations. She was also a member of a cancer support group sponsored by the First Unitarian Society of Albany.

She is survived by her husband, Louis A. Rappaport; her sister, Ann Speyer of New Britain, CT; and several nieces and nephews.

Memorial contributions in memory of Ellen may be made to the American Cancer Society, 260 Osborne Road, Loudonville, NY 12211, Congregation Ohav Shalom, 113 New Krumkill Road, Albany, NY 12208 or the First Unitarian Society, 405 Washington Avenue, Albany, NY 12206, the sponsor of Louis and Ellen's cancer support group.



ALLUNY has donated \$50 in Ellen's name to the American Cancer Society, according to an announcement by Marie Calvaruso, ALLUNY President, on June 5, 2003.

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One of our former colleagues here at Cortland, Ellen Rappaport, has died after a long and courageous struggle with cancer. For more than a decade she made use of her reference skills and her considerable perseverance to learn about and fight for her own treatment with the best available strategies of the time, staving off the disease to live yet again a "normal life," where she continued to contribute professionally as a serials and technical services librarian at local, state, and national levels. Being a former Syracuse University serials cataloger, former SUNY Cortland technical services librarian, former SUNY/OCLC Network librarian, former OCLC serials system training and support person, cataloger/technical services librarian at Albany Law School, and working member of NYLA SMART and ALA serials committees, she either knew what she was talking about or found it out and got back to you.

As the obituary notes, learning and making and enjoying music was a constant in her life, whether playing the violin in earlier years, or using her voice and appreciating others' at concerts, coffeehouses, and festivals. For the many years they have been together, Ellen and Louis would grab vacations to wonderful and different places in the world, from inside the Arctic Circle to down under, Australia. Some of us left may live longer, but nobody will out-live Ellen.

Dave Ritchie
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I remember her as a good instructor when she was with (then) SUNY/OCLC.

Carol Shapiro-Joseph
Head of Technical Services
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Ellen was one of the first people I met when I joined the staff at SUNY Cobleskill as a young librarian in the early 1980s. I went to training at SUNY/OCLC and Ellen was the trainer. I remember being completely awed by her knowledge and ability to instruct us in the nuances of the MARC record. She will be missed.

Nancy Van Deusen
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I've known Ellen for thirty years, beginning in 1973 when I returned from two years working in Boston to Syracuse University Library (where I'd worked from 1969-1971) to a position checking in government documents. Ellen was the head of the serials department then, and my supervisor's boss. Those were tough times at SU--the library went on strike in December of that year, just months after I'd come back, and I became an active member of the union, while Ellen, a manager, was (in theory at least) the 'enemy.' But she was never that, of course, understanding perfectly what we were doing and why, so she stepped through that minefield with great care and compassion. I remem-

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ber in particular one day as things were heating up towards the strike. My kardex (remember those?) was very near Ellen's desk. When the phone rang, she answered, listened for a moment, then handed the phone to me. "It's Lou, for you," she said, with a grin. Lou, of course, was her husband, who was then working for the Syracuse newspapers and covering the negotiations.

In later years, we collaborated on many things: workshops and presentations, the CONSER Publication Pattern Initiative, and others. It was always a pleasure to work with Ellen on something like that--she was the consummate professional, always prepared, on time, and thinking ahead. I also had the pleasure of being her ALA roomie for the past few years, helping in a small way for her to continue to attend and participate in ALA, one of the things she enjoyed most as a librarian. She was always stimulated by the discussions and the friends she saw there, always participating to the maximum her energy allowed. Her commitment to her professional life was humbling and inspiring at the same time. It was an honor, and a pleasure to be her friend and colleague, and I will miss her more than I can say.

Diane Hillmann
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Last summer Ellen organized an ad hoc AALL program on late-breaking, important new cataloging rules. Even though she was very ill, she arranged for a time for it to occur, arranged for two speakers, and then apologized for not being there to moderate the program. The room was packed with interested librarians. With her foresight, ingenuity and willingness to take on the job herself, she gave the catalogers at AALL an organized presentation of the issues. Without her, it would not have happened.

Susan Goldner
Technical Services Librarian
William H. Bowen School of Law Library, University of Arkansas at Little Rock/Pulaski County Law Library
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Note: The program was on "Integrating Resources" and was presented on July 23, 2002 during the TS-SIS Cataloging & Classification Roundtable meeting held during the AALL Annual Meeting in Orlando, Florida.

My memories of Ellen are like snapshots capturing a moment in time. There is Ellen at a SISAC meeting, anxious to learn about the new standards and ready to implement as soon as possible. There is Ellen at the Serials Section Committee to Study Serial Standards, laptop fired up, rapidly typing up notes on the meeting. There is Ellen at Lake Placid for NYLA, scarf covering the loss of her hair, but ready to give her talk at my program on, what else, standards?! And who else but Ellen could make MARC Holdings sound no more complicated than making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich? She was a warm, intelligent, funny and caring woman who will be missed in many, many ways. I am glad I had the chance to know her. My life is all the richer because of her.

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Ellen Rappaport was on the committee at SUNY Cortland that hired me in 1978. We remained friends for the next 25 years although our work spaces were not the same for most of those years. We did not see enough of each other (mostly ALA meetings since I moved to CA in 1995) but I have been a fan for all these years of that sharp, smart, funny, kind and considerate woman.

Johanna Bowen
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For Ellen Rappaport in Memoriam--

Once in a while, in our journey through life we encounter someone that makes an unforgettable impression on us. We find a person who is at the same time both very professional and very likeable: dutiful, thorough, knowledgeable, indeed-- but also warm, loving, self-sacrificing, and fun to be with. Ellen Rappaport was all those things, and more.

She will be remembered both for her in-depth knowledge of everything to do with serials, and library technologies, as well as her part in creating the uproarious comedy of the SMART Technostress skits at the NYLA Conferences of the late '90s. She was equally as adept at handling the intricacies of a MARC record as she was entertaining in a skit. With a simple, devoted commitment to her work as a librarian she attracted both love and respect-- that's not easy to do.

Working with Ellen was a pleasure; she was an inspiration to her profession, an asset to her library, and a great friend. I will miss her.

J. James Mancuso
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I met Ellen when she was Director of Technical Services at SUNY Cortland and kept in touch with her through her career in SUNY OCLC and many years after as I and other SUNY colleagues were welcomed into Ellen and Lou's home when we had meetings in Albany. Looking back, we were fortunate that SUNY was always too stingy to pay for hotels and that we could share midnight talks and morning bagels with Ellen. I remember one of her first pronouncements after her diagnosis was that she was not going to disappear into the disease; that she was going to continue to live her life. I have often thought of that as the guiding principle which allowed her to survive, and continue to contribute in many areas and support others throughout her final years.

Although older than Ellen, I always had the sense that she was mentoring and pushing me to reach beyond what was comfortable and contribute more to the profession than I otherwise would. I remember her putting me on a panel at a NYLA meeting she was organizing. We shared a room in Saratoga and, even though she was barely past one of her major crises, she was fully engaged with the topic and planning for the next year's session. Ellen was truly and exceptional librarian, person and friend and has touched many of us deeply in the relatively short time she was given. She

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will continue to be an inspiration for me.

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When Ellen McGrath asked me to co-author the ALLUNY "Technical Tips" column in October 1999, she promised that it would be fun and easy to do since Ellen Rappaport would be my co-author. She also mentioned that the next deadline was May 2000 and it was Ellen Rappaport's turn. With an offer like that, who could turn her down?

When April 2000 rolled around, I received an e-mail from Ellen Rappaport asking if I could meet the May deadline, as she was traveling extensively for radiation therapy and could not. Sure, I said. I had been hearing about something called "pattern publications" and this gave me an excuse to delve deeper into learning about them. Little did I realize that Ellen Rappaport was a driving force behind CONSER's Publication Pattern Initiative.

After writing the article, I sent it to Ellen for her feedback. I will never forget the enthusiasm she showed toward my article and her passion for publication patterns. She offered me many positive suggestions and helped me to "take it up a level." I like to believe that she, too, was impressed with my treatment of the subject and my enthusiasm for "Technical Tips," as when the October deadline came, she suggested that I be sole author of the column.

Despite having been "thrown into the fire," the warmth of Ellen Rappaport's friendship, her support, and having her as a sounding board has been one of the best experiences of my career. I will always remember Ellen's enthusiasm for Publication Patterns, despite her health. I can honestly say that I attribute my "Technical Tips" success to Ellen for inspiring me in my first column.

Andrea Rabbia
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The first time I had the opportunity to work with Ellen was in 1988, when I was Head of Technical Services at Schaffer Law Library, Albany Law School. Ellen came to the library as our trainer for OCLC's Serials Control 350 system, which we had just purchased. This was the Law School's first automated serials control system, so we were nervous and anxious. To top it off, we were the first library in the country to install a 5-unit Serials Control 350 LAN. The pressure was on, but Ellen got us through our jitters.

If you ever had Ellen as a trainer, you know how patient and knowledgeable she was. She had answers to all our questions and had many questions for us. Because it was a law library, it must have been a serials paradise for Ellen. There were times during our conversations when she would squeak with glee.

About five years later, Ellen walked into my office with her resume in hand. "I understand you have an opening in Technical Services. I would like to apply for the position," Ellen said. I will never forget that day. It was the beginning

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of a wonderful working relationship and a cherished friendship.

Liza Duncan
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I came to know Ellen when she entered law librarianship, just ten short years ago. Ellen and I co-authored the “Technical Tips” column in this *ALLUNY Newsletter* for about six years. (I informally referred to it as the “Ellens’ column.”) We alternated columns and I especially looked forward to Ellen’s columns, not only so I wouldn’t have to do the writing, but because I knew I would learn so much when I read it. And not only about the topic, but about how to write clearly about technical issues. I marveled at Ellen’s ability to do that.

Ellen was a revelation to me. There were few academic technical services librarians that were in our ALLUNY chapter, so I felt rather lonely at times, writing this technical services column in the chapter newsletter. Ellen e-mailed me about one of my columns and she agreed immediately when I asked her to do it with me. And though her vast knowledge and experience intimidated me at first, Ellen soon put me at ease. She was so easy to get to know and she never made me feel stupid, though I did ask her stupid questions more than once. Ellen commented that I had the experience in law libraries that she lacked, so we balanced each other.

I learned only gradually about Ellen’s fight with cancer. Her determination and her active involvement in her profession in spite of it amazed me. Yet she always downplayed it and just matter of factly went about her business of being the consummate librarian. I encouraged Ellen to become the AALL representative to BASIC (Book and Serial Industry Communications Committee). There was nobody in AALL that could even come close to her in her knowledge of serials standards. I often felt guilty about this and I apologized to Ellen more than once for probably getting her into more than she could handle physically, since it involved travel and attendance at numerous meetings. I, of course, had no doubt at all on the intellectual level. But Ellen’s response was to thank me, because she said her work kept her going and she needed to be busy and contributing in just that way.

Standards are the heart of librarianship, yet only a small core of librarians knows the nitty gritty details about standards. Ellen was among that core. Her absolute dedication and willingness to speak about standards, in spite of all odds, set the best example I have ever had the privilege to experience. Ellen was the personification of mentoring and her contributions to our profession will live on through the standards she helped not only to develop, but also to spread the word about.

I know that I only caught a glimpse of Ellen in her career and her life. As I collected these remembrances of Ellen, I learned more and more about her wonderful versatility and the great respect her colleagues feel for her. Ellen’s friendship and professional contributions made a huge difference in my life, as they obviously did in so many others too. Most of our time together was on e-mail or on the phone. But I was fortunate to spend some extended time with Ellen in person when the ALLUNY Conference was held in Albany in 1997. I have always treasured that time and I will do so even more now.

Ellen McGrath
Head of Cataloging
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