

Karla Irvine Remembered:



Dr. Karla Irvine passed away February 19, 2010, in Cincinnati, Ohio at age 76. She is remembered by colleagues and friends as a leader in the fair housing movement and a strong woman who passionately fought for equality and justice.

Karla served as Executive Director of Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME) for 27 years from 1977-2004. She studied political science, at Swarthmore as an undergraduate and then for a Master's degree at Columbia University. In 1973, she received a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Cincinnati. Prior to coming to HOME, she served as director of the North Avondale Neighborhood Association at a time when the neighborhood was struggling to stabilize as an integrated community.

When Karla joined HOME, fair housing law was still relatively new and developing. She built HOME into a robust agency that enforced the law against real estate companies and landlords who illegally discriminated, but also actively provided training to ensure that housing providers understood the laws. In 1999 she settled a racial discrimination case against Nationwide Insurance with an agreement that the company would pay HOME and the NAACP \$750,000 to set up a down payment assistance program that helped over 300 African Americans buy homes in the Cincinnati area.

Karla began a Mobility program to help families move to neighborhoods of choice and was an early fighter against predatory lending in minority communities. She became a national leader in the fair housing movement and was a founding member of the National Fair Housing Alliance. She mentored many new fair housing agency directors around the country.

Upon her retirement in 2004, Karla began spending summers at a family home in Vermont. But she stayed active in Cincinnati including serving on the Executive Committee of the NAACP and chair of the Housing Committee.

Karla's husband Peter Irvine died in 1976 at age 44. She is survived by her daughter Celia, son-in-law Steve Kolman, and two grandchildren, Asher and Nina. In a 2002 newspaper feature on her mother, Celia was quoted as saying, "My mother really believes that people could be good. Deep down, she believes racism could go away. I don't think she ever thinks she's going to see that day, but she has hope."

Statement by Harold Jones, President, HOME Board of Trustees:

"In 1982, I met Karla Irvine after returning to Cincinnati from Washington D.C. and was denied housing. I contacted H.O.M.E. on Saturday evening and was meeting with Karla on Sunday morning and by Sunday afternoon Karla had an investigation underway. Every step of the way Karla was there not to just provide leadership but to hand hold and comfort. Every step was made manageable because of the comfort Karla was there to provide. I fondly tagged her 'The Mother of Fair Housing.' Karla took fair housing issues to a high level and believed that violators and discriminators must be held accountable for their actions. Her fearlessness led her to challenge anyone that was a violator of civil rights; whether it was a landlord or a major corporation, they were held accountable.

A few days prior to her illness, we shared dialogue on some current housing injustices and the need to correct them. I could feel the passion and determination in her voice and I remember thinking, 'Look out Cincinnati.'

While Karla will not be here to continue the fair housing battle, I challenge each of us, as fair housing advocates, to continue the battle for equality in housing, civil rights and just basic human rights, all in the name of the Mother of Fair Housing, Dr. Karla Irvine."