



Dr. Karen R. Fonde

September 26, 1949 - March 1, 2015

At 40, Karen Rhea Fonde achieved a longtime ambition: She walked across the stage at Hill Auditorium to receive her diploma as a medical doctor from the University of Michigan. Dr. Fonde loved teaching. She was mother, humanitarian, healer, scientist, feminist, Peace Corps volunteer in Africa, and teacher in a juvenile home before she became a family medicine physician and assistant professor at UM. Dr. Fonde died March 1 of complications from Alzheimer's Disease. She was 65. Dr. Fonde was valedictorian of her 1967 Ann Arbor High School class. She was a presidential scholar and shook hands with President Lyndon Johnson at the White House. She was high school editor of the Ann Arbor News and while studying at UM was an intern reporter at that newspaper. She was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of UM in Russian Studies and served as a health educator with the Peace Corps in northern Togo. Dr. Fonde and Joel Thurtell were married in 1974. For three years, she taught at the Berrien County Juvenile Center. After the couple's first son, Adam, was born in 1980, she decided to attend medical school. But first, she and Joel had a second son, Abe, in 1983. While studying science at Western Michigan University, she won the Freshman Chemistry Prize at age 32. At UM Medical School, she was inducted into Alpha Omega Alpha, the medical honor society. She received her MD from UM in 1990, and graduated from the UM Family Medicine residency program in 1993. She helped open a new UM family medicine clinic in Ypsilanti, where she treated patients and taught until 2008. Dr. Fonde was dedicated to helping new physicians cope

with the pressures of medicine and presented a research paper on “The Resident in Difficulty.” By 2008, she herself was a physician in difficulty, with memory and cognitive problems that eventually were diagnosed as Alzheimer’s Disease. In a family gathering, one could always locate Dr. Fonde by the sound of her infectious laughter. Long after she lost the power of speech, Dr. Fonde could still find things to make her smile. She loved her sons, her husband, her parents and siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins and friends. She loved to swim and ski, and enjoyed sailing around the family’s island in McGregor Bay, Canada. In addition to her husband and sons, Dr. Fonde is survived by two sisters, Julia Davis (Max), of Howell and Anne Potter (William), of Dayton, Ohio; and a brother, Charles Fonde (Linda), of Carmel, Indiana; a second brother, Mark Fonde (Stacey), of Ann Arbor, died a week earlier, on February 22. Memorial visitation Friday 6-9 PM at Vermeulen-Sajewski Funeral Home, 46401 W. Ann Arbor Road, Plymouth (Between Sheldon and Beck). Friends are also invited to gather with the family Saturday 10 AM until the Saturday 11 AM Memorial Service to be held at the Ann Arbor City Club, 1830 Washtenaw Avenue, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Memorials may be made to Arbor Hospice or Planned Parenthood. To share a memory, please use the Share a Memory tab on this web page.

Previous Events

Memorial Visitation

MAR 6. 6:00 PM - 9:00 PM (ET)

Vermeulen-Sajewski Funeral Home Plymouth
46401 Ann Arbor Road West
Plymouth, MI 48170
(734) 459-2250
plymouth@vermeulenh.com

Memorial Gathering

MAR 7. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (ET)

Ann Arbor City Club
1830 Washtenaw Avenue
Ann Arbor, MI

Memorial Service

MAR 7. 11:00 AM (ET)

Ann Arbor City Club
1830 Washtenaw Avenue
Ann Arbor, MI

Tribute Wall



“ *Dr. Karen R. Fonde*

December 07, 2023 at 05:11 AM



“ *I send my sincere condolence to the family and loved ones of Dr. Karen Fonde.*

I'll always have fond memories of her as 'My Doctor' at the Ypsilanti Family Practice. She made me feel as if I was not just a patient but a friend as well. Her smile was great and let you know right away that she was a caring person. We had lots of laughs together. She knew how to listen and was able to share her concern for your wellbeing. Not all physicians have that ability, believe me I've reached an age and seen enough physicians, before I found her and since, to know. I was lost when she had to leave the practice of medicine. I still have not found anyone to replace her (she set the bar so high) and I suspect that I never. She was definitely one of a kind. I will keep you, her family in my prayers during this difficult time.

*Norma Taylor-Bishop
former patient*

Norma L Taylor-Bishop - March 09, 2015 at 10:11 PM



“ *When Karen was a resident at Chelsea Family Medicine, I worked with her as the team nurse. Dr. Fonde was a wonderful person and an excellent, respected, and caring physician. Her patients loved her. I am so sorry for your loss. God bless you all. Toni Wilson RN*

Toni Wilson - March 07, 2015 at 11:35 AM

MO

“ I am so sorry to hear of the passing of Dr. Karen Fonde. She was my personal physician for many years at Ypsilanti Family Practice. Karen was so very supportive and educated me on so many medical issues. Patient and kind, Karen also had a keen sense of humor with all of her patients. She was the finest physician that I had the privilege of knowing over my 73 years of life. As an older adult returning to college, Karen in medicine and me in Gerontology, we had so much in common and many discussions on the needs of older adults. I have missed her so much during her illness and have prayed for her needs every night. May God bless you and all your family members during this time. I am so glad to have known Dr. Fonde. Marion Obryan

Marion O'Bryan - March 06, 2015 at 09:32 AM



“ Basket Full of Wishes was purchased for the family of Dr. Karen R. Fonde.



March 06, 2015 at 04:22 AM

DR

“ DR. FONDE: WAS MY DOCTOR MY DOCTOR FOR MANY YEARS. SHE WAS A OUTSTANDING DOCTOR, AND A OUTSTANDING PERSON. I'M SO SORRY TO HEAR SHE HAS PASSED. DON RING.

DON RING - March 05, 2015 at 05:34 PM

LM

“ To Joel Thurtell and family concerning the loss of Dr. Karen Fonde. Joel: I am saddened to hear of the death of your lovely wife, Karen. Please accept my sincere condolences to you and to your family in this sad time.

Louis Mleczko
President Newspaper Guild of Detroit, Retired

Louis Mleczko - March 05, 2015 at 04:13 PM

DE

“ Dr. Fonde was a wonderful doctor to me for many years. I'm so sorry to hear of her passing. My thoughts and prayers to you, her family. Debbie

Debbie - March 05, 2015 at 12:24 PM

NW

Joel; My Mom was Ann Weber. . . a resident with Karen for years at Crystal Creek. . . my Mom also passed away from Alzheimers on November 22, 2014. . . I wish I would have had the privilege of knowing Karen in earlier years as she was so clearly a remarkable women as well as a well respected physician and educator. . . my family will never forget u and Patty. . . our thoughts and prayers r with u and ur family at this time. . . it's comforting to know that perhaps both Karen and my Mom are residents once again . . . only in a much better place!????

Nancy Weber - March 05, 2015 at 07:59 PM

RM

I had Dr. Fonde as my primary physician for several years at the U. of M. Family Practice in Ypsilanti. She was a wonderful caring doctor who was easy to talk to and always knowledgeable on the latest treatments. I was dismayed when she mysteriously left the practice--only now do I understand what was happening. My sincere condolences to her husband and sons. Sincerely, Rita McMahon March 9 at 4:00 P.M.

Rita McMahon - March 09, 2015 at 02:56 PM



“ *Fall Fantasia* was purchased for the family of Dr. Karen R. Fonde.



March 05, 2015 at 11:55 AM



“ *Arrive in Style* was purchased for the family of Dr. Karen R. Fonde.



March 05, 2015 at 11:41 AM

KS

“ I met Karen when she was a first-year medical student enrolled in my section of the medical interviewing course. She stood out from the first day as both an older student among the group of 22-year-olds with lots of prior life experience upon which to further build as well as someone who was very bright and motivated and a skilled communicator. Then as she continued through medical school and chose to pursue a residency in family medicine and ultimately a position on our faculty I knew her as a learner, colleague and most importantly a friend. She was always remarkably calm amidst the chaos of patient care, teaching or in her role as an assistant residency director. We worked hard on tackling and solving lots of educational issues and also shared many pleasant times and laughs during our frequent interactions. She was a joy and a treasure to know and work with for more than 25 years and I know she is sorely missed by Joel and Adam and Abe and the rest of her family. While it was sad to learn of Karen's passing earlier this week it also led many of us who knew her in the Department of Family Medicine through her roles as student, resident, and faculty colleague to reflect on the many wonderful memories we had of our times together.

Kent Sheets - March 05, 2015 at 10:09 AM

JM

“ Dr. Fonde was my primary care physician for many years. I remember finding out I was pregnant with my third child and felt frightened. A few days after my appointment I received a handwritten note with lots of encouragement. She will be missed.

Jennet Malone - March 04, 2015 at 02:35 PM

LE

“ Dear Joel, Adam, and Abe,
Remembering Karen and thinking of you all with love.
Leilani Wong (Kathy and Bin's daughter)

Leilani - March 04, 2015 at 08:37 AM

HB

“ I first really met Karen when, her Brother Mark and I in summer of 1970 took a road trip to Colorado. Karen was living with friends in Boulder Co. Karen was working most of the time we stayed with her. However we did do a hike, up Hallets Peak trail. As a Fonde she achieved so much. Not only in intellect, but in her love of others. Karen my love and tears go out too your family and friends. Joel your wonderful soul mate is now in peace. God is with all. I will see you soon my friend.

him bowditch - March 03, 2015 at 11:52 AM



“ Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Dr. Karen R. Fonde.



March 03, 2015 at 11:28 AM



“ Fruit Abounds was purchased for the family of Dr. Karen R. Fonde.



March 03, 2015 at 11:15 AM

YR

“ Your friends at RiverPoint purchased the Pink Pot pourri Bouquet for the family of Dr. Karen R. Fonde.



Your friends at RiverPoint - March 03, 2015 at 10:28 AM

CH

“ I had the pleasure of knowing Karen for over a decade. She was an amazing woman, easily capable of juggling many many tasks to successful outcome. I was aware of some of her accomplishments and was wowed! I recently learned of even more of her endeavors and involvements and was even more wowed. I do not know how she did it.

Chris - March 03, 2015 at 09:27 AM

JK

“ This beautiful, brilliant woman will be missed by countless friends, neighbors, patients, and co-workers. She will live in the memory of all who knew her and her spirit will live on in her beloved Joel and Adam and Abe. May God help you find your way through the pain of loss, and give you peace in the days to come. May memories of Karen's goodness, her kindness, her generosity, her love, and her laughter sustain you.

Javan

Javan Kienzle - March 03, 2015 at 07:10 AM

KO

Joel, Adam and Abe -- I wish I'd known Karen better in life, but just reading about her accomplishments gives me great insight into the wonderful woman, wife and mom that I know she was. I know these warm memories will give you great comfort in the coming days.

-- Kathy O'Gorman

Kathy O'Gorman - March 03, 2015 at 12:21 PM

LA

Dear Joel and family, my heartfelt wishes for your comfort in this difficult time. I didn't know Karen well, but I remember her as an intelligent, warm and gentle person, who loved her family dearly. She led a remarkable life and truly made a difference in the world, and not many people can say that. Thinking of you. With love, Laura Potts and family

Laura - March 03, 2015 at 04:01 PM

DS

With Mark as my best buddy at a very early age, and hanging with him all the time, I often came in contact with Karen--4 to 5 years older than me--significant when you are only 8 or 9 years old. But, she was always so kind to me--we never got the typical big sister treatment. And so modest! What a resume! I feel privileged to have known Karen! God Bless!

dave skala - March 03, 2015 at 06:15 PM

GW

So sorry to hear the news. My thoughts are with you Joel, and your boys.

Gillian Woodrooffe - March 05, 2015 at 08:19 AM