



# OBITUARY

**KAREN ROSALIND MITCHELL (nee RADOK)**

**9/4/54 – 7/1/09**

**by a group of her colleagues and friends**

It is with great sadness that we report on the passing of Karen due to a work related accident, in Kalgoorlie, at the age of 54.

Karen was a wonderful person. She had a unique, vibrant personality and was the kindest person you would ever hope to meet. For example, she told this story one day to a colleague at Dandenong Pathology. As everyone knew Karen loved shopping. In the early 90s she had discovered a boutique clothing shop in Glen Iris. After a couple of visits she befriended the owner and on a later visit found out the business was in jeopardy. Karen then proceeded to buy so many clothes that she quickly had a wardrobe of clothes that she would never ever wear. When she noticed that the person she was telling the story to had his mouth opened in amazement Karen quickly exclaimed *'But she was my friend. I didn't want to her to lose her business!'*

Karen was born on the 9<sup>th</sup> April, 1954. Her brother Kim says she was a happy and inquisitive child and at times was quite mischievous. In her early years Karen was passionate about horses. At about six years of age her parents bought her a Shetland pony called 'Cobber'. Later on in life she owned a horse called Rajah. When she could longer look after him, Karen made sure, of course, that he went to a good home.

Karen attended Tintern Girls School in East Ringwood and she proved herself to be academically bright as well as being good at several sports. After completing secondary school Karen was accepted into the medical science course at RMIT which was then located in the city. She studied part time while working in genetics at Melbourne University and the muscle pathology unit at the Children's Hospital run by Xenia Dennett. She finished her degree by majoring in histology and in 1980 accepted a position in the Histology Department of Dandenong Hospital. Karen quickly became integrated into the Dandenong Pathology 'family' and became a very enthusiastic member of the Histology Department. Dandenong Pathology was one of the first public pathology facilities to be regionalised accepting work from a variety of sources as well as the in-house specimens.

Karen was a passionate histologist. She liked the aspect of histology being an art as well as a science and was very meticulous in anything she did or prepared. Her interest in QC began when she became involved with the RCPA – QAP in Anatomical Pathology. This program was run by John Maynard from the mid 80s to the mid 90s. Karen also became a NATA Accreditor and enjoyed going out to overview other histology laboratories mainly in Victoria. Karen presented quite a few papers for what was then the Histology branch of AIMLS and co-presented a paper in Malaysia and New Zealand with John Maynard in the mid 1980s.

In 1987 Karen accepted the scientist-in-charge position and proved to be a very competent administrator. She ran a very happy and productive department and always remained a hands-on scientist even though she was heavily involved in administrative duties. She was always very approachable to her staff and had their respect and loyalty. Even when she was boss Karen would never ever think that any job was beyond her. She often helped out in what we jokingly called '*Budgie jobs*' ie. tasks that even a dead budgie would find boring, for example, slide and block filing, specimen throw out etc. Karen had a great sense of humour and could always take a joke. At one laboratory meeting Karen stressed the importance of documentation and correctly labelling chemicals, stores and in fact "everything" in the laboratory. Upon her arrival in the laboratory the next day Karen joined the laughter with her colleagues as they discovered that the floor, taps, doors, telephone and indeed "everything" had been labelled.

When Immunohistochemistry became an important diagnostic tool Karen quickly developed Dandenong's IHC program and the department soon became very involved in the production of quality slides of an ever-increasing panel of antibodies.

In late 1996 Dandenong Pathology amalgamated with the pathology department at Monash Medical Centre to become Southern Cross Pathology. They moved to the Monash campus and Karen was no longer in charge but was now a Grade III Scientist. She accepted her new role with her usual professionalism.

In May 2000 Karen was appointed to the newly created position of Pathology Quality Systems Manager and was responsible for the setting up of the quality management system in the laboratories across all the Southern Health sites. Karen brought to this position the same dedication and commitment that she had with all aspects of her life, the benefit of which is still being felt at Southern Cross Pathology today.

Karen met her future husband David in 2001 and they were married in April, 2003. Towards the end of 2004 they both decided that they would very much like to go on an extended working holiday around Australia. After purchasing and renovating a caravan they set off for the North in January 2005. As her brother Kim says '*they saw more of Australia than most explorers*'. They kept in contact with close friends and often had many interesting experiences to tell.

Karen worked at many different jobs and places during her 4 year working holiday. Some of the different work she participated in was pear picking in Shepparton, boning at Dubbo meatworks, driving cane trucks in Queensland, cleaning in a caravan park in Airlie Beach and as a fireman on a locomotive hauling sugarcane. As many of the jobs were seasonal, when it was time to move on, Karen and David always looked at the periods between the jobs as a holiday never doubting that they would soon find more work to their liking. Karen loved the lifestyle saying that she had previously never had the opportunity to have as many holidays when and where she wanted as she did whilst she was on the road.

Karen and David returned to Victoria in Christmas 2007 visiting family and friends. They then headed west and arrived at Kalgoorlie in March 2008. Karen initially found work as a cleaner in the mines and then in early October, 2008 she obtained a job as a dump truck driver at the "superpit" open cut mine. In her last email Karen reported her job driving a dump truck was very enjoyable and she had made many friends.

All of Karen's friends will miss her very much. She, however, leaves us with many memories of what a beautiful person she was.

Karen is survived by her husband David, Mother Lottie, Brother Kim, Sister Monika and stepmother Dagmar.

The RCPA QAP Anatomical Pathology would like to extend our sincere condolences to family, relatives, and friends for the passing away of Karen Mitchell ne. Radok She was one of the "pioneers" of the Anat Path Program.