



## Karen Zambella Cragolin

May 19, 1949 - January 22, 2022

Karen Marie Cragolin died peacefully at her home on January 22, 2022, surrounded by loved ones.

The only daughter of John Zambella and Corrine Fenney, Karen was born on May 19th, 1949 in Boston, MA. She graduated from Notre Dame High School in Hingham, MA, and completed her university studies at Georgian Court in Lakewood, NJ, where she earned her BA in English and Theology.

In 1973, Karen married Bob Cragolin, and they were happily married for 48 years. They met on an elevator while working in the same building, a chance encounter led to a beautiful life.

Karen earned her JD degree at The New England School of Law in Boston in 1974. That same year, Karen and her husband moved to NYC, where she worked at Prentice Hall as the editor of their tax newsletter. Karen also worked as a private consultant for Segal and Gale.

In 1976, Karen and Bob moved to Athens, Greece. Her daughter, Nikki Josephine Cragolin, was born July 26, 1978. Being overseas allowed Karen and her family to travel extensively throughout Europe and parts of the Middle East.

Moving to Washington, DC in 1980, Karen worked as an in-house lawyer for the American Arab Affairs Council, in addition to editing their quarterly magazine. Karen was a member of both the NY and DC Bar Associations. In 1983, Karen and her family relocated to Dubai, UAE. Working in tandem with the US Embassy, Karen created and developed the Dubai Business Council,

a chamber of commerce, working with US companies in the region.

During that time in the Middle East, it was groundbreaking for a woman to be in a leadership role of that ilk. The organization still exists to today, and is as vibrant and relevant today as it was then.

In 1986, Karen, Bob and Nikki moved to Asheville. Karen made her mark as Executive Director of RiverLink, and served in that capacity for over 30 years. Initially founding RiverLink from her home, the nonprofit eventually moved to the Warehouse Studios building on Lyman Street, where Karen led the organization and oversaw its tremendous growth until health issues forced her to retire earlier than planned in 2016.

Countless river properties were acquired and preserved or restored under Karen's leadership, including those that became heavily utilized public spaces such as Carrier Park and French Broad River Park. Many properties were purchased in need of revitalization and environmental cleanup in order to be repurposed for public use.

Among these notable acquisitions was the Edaco Junk Yard, now the future home of Karen Cragolin Park, named in her honor by RiverLink. Karen also was integral in orchestrating the plans for the Wilma Dykeman Greenway, and spearheaded the development of the River Arts District.

In 1992, Karen was appointed as a founding member on the board of the NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund, which resulted in funding numerous water and environmental related projects in WNC.

Karen was recognized with numerous honors and awards throughout her esteemed career – the Athena Award, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Economic Development Award, the Asheville Citizen-Times 20 Most Influential Women in WNC, the Land of the Sky Economic Development Award, the Garden Club of America's Award for Conservation Improvement, and the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, which is the highest honor bestowed upon civilians in NC.

After retirement, Karen kept a busy schedule, serving on numerous boards and advisory councils. She served the Self Help Credit Union, Planned

Parenthood South Atlantic, Green Opportunities, the Downtown Design Review Committee, and the Town of Biltmore Forest's Planning and Zoning. Karen adored spending time with her grandson, her family, her friends, and entertaining in her garden. Karen was a founding member of GNO and Bocce Club.

The family wishes to extend their sincerest gratitude to Karen's longtime friend and private nurse, Wendy Collins. Appreciation also goes out to Pete Lynch and Star Conway of CarePartners Home Health, the Hospice Team at Four Seasons, Krista Eubanks, Lynn Mitchell, and TJ Jackson for their care and compassion during Karen's illnesses.

Karen is survived by her husband, Bob Cagnolin, her daughter, Nikki Harris, her son in law, Adam Harris, and her grandson, Noah Robert Harris.

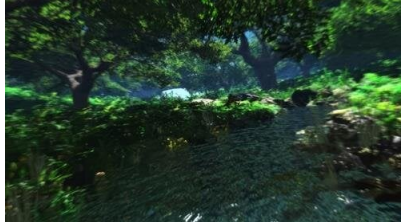
In lieu of flowers, the family asks that you consider a donation to RiverLink's Karen Cagnolin Park. Gifts can be sent to 170 Lyman Street, Asheville, NC, 28801, with checks payable to RiverLink.

Due to public health concerns around COVID, the family will hold a private memorial service with streaming capabilities in the coming weeks. Please check Morris Funeral Home's website for service details. RiverLink also has announced plans to host a public celebration of Karen's life in early summer 2022.

# Tribute Wall



“ *Morris Funeral & Cremation Care created a Tribute Video in memory of Karen Zambella Cragnolin*



---

**Morris Funeral Home** - March 08, 2022 at 09:06 AM



“ *Karen Zambella Cragnolin*

---

October 07, 2023 at 11:15 AM



“ *Truly wish we had a chance to know each other. Due to a medical condition my youngest daughter Marilyn took a DNA test and discovered that you and I have the same dad. I grew up in Brookline, the oldest of five believing that like my dad, Ed Collins that raised us , thought I was 50% Irish but I am not, He was not my real father and having just found this out I wonder who actually knew the truth all these years as they are all deceased. Would love to know about Karen's daughter and grandson. I have two grandchildren and two daughters. Life is very strange and keeps you hopping. Blessings to all. She lived a wonderful life.*

---

**Theresa Marye Rodrigues** - July 28, 2022 at 08:16 AM

LZ

“ *My hearts are with you all. May Karen Rest In Peace.*

*Lisa Zambella*

---

**Lisa Zambella** - May 30, 2022 at 11:19 PM

GR

“ *Dear Family of Karen Cragolin,  
On behalf of the St. Eugene Church  
Bereavement Ministry, I would like to express  
my condolences for the loss of your loved  
one, Karen. Please know that our Ministry will  
be praying for your family during this time of sadness. Be in touch  
with us if there is anything we can do to help your family.*



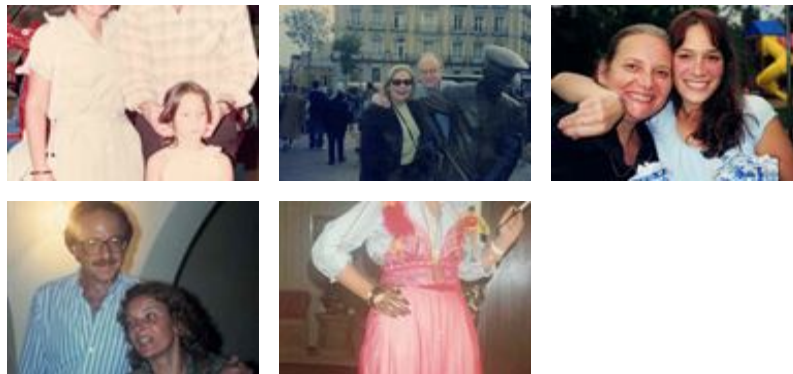
*Blessings,  
Ginny Raviotta  
St. Eugene Church Bereavement Ministry*

---

**Ginny Raviotta** - March 12, 2022 at 12:21 PM



“ *147 files added to the album Life Tributes*



---

**Morris Funeral Home** - March 07, 2022 at 03:55 PM

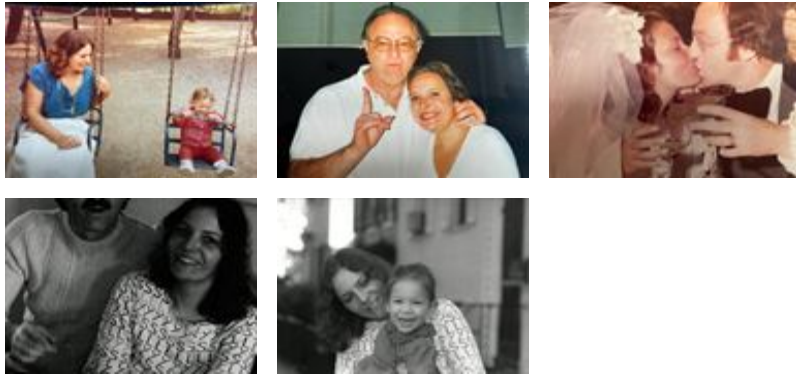


“ Karen was part of a quartet of close friends that attended classes and worked and studied together in law school at Boston. Although I have not seen her in fifty years, I remember her radiant smile, her quick wit, her keen intelligence and her gracious kindness. I can see that her daughter has a lot of her wonderful smile. Your work is over, rest In peace, dear friend. John Johnson

John Johnson - March 05, 2022 at 07:11 AM



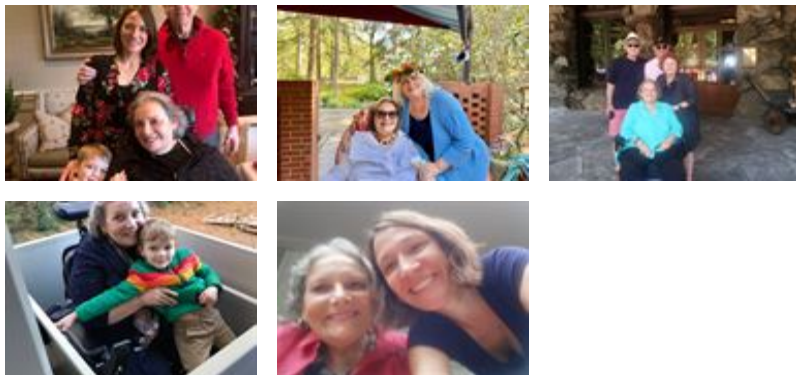
“ 11 files added to the album LifeTributes



Morris Funeral Home - March 03, 2022 at 02:58 PM



“ 71 files added to the album LifeTributes



Morris Funeral Home - March 03, 2022 at 12:09 PM

HM

“ Dearest Bob, Nikki, Adam and Noah,  
My heart aches for you but I know you will bask in the light of all Karen's life accomplishments and love for all of you. She was my cousin, my idol and friend. I followed her to NDA. I always loved and admired all her accomplishments. I cherished that fact that she was my cousin.  
I will keep you all in my thoughts and prayers.  
Love,  
Honor Marie

---

Honor Marie - January 26, 2022 at 05:25 PM

HM

“ Honor Marie lit a candle in memory of Karen  
Zambella Cragolin



---

Honor Marie - January 26, 2022 at 05:20 PM

LR

*Karen will be missed dearly.*

---

Linda Reigle - January 28, 2022 at 05:54 PM

HW

*What wonderful memories, for me especially the early days when we ran together in Boston and then different places like Washington DC and ultimately to Ashville. Karen was a major force that will continue on through her hard work and intelligence in leading important issues and a wonderful family - we miss her already but will never forget. God Bless Bob, Nikki, Adam and Noah as well as all the friends and family that have surrounded her wonderful lifetime. Always in our Hearts.  
Karen, Howard and Samantha.*

---

Howard Woolf - March 16, 2022 at 04:21 PM