

# They questioned her right to be there. She didn't.

In math class and on the School Board, Karen Ricklefs broke norms and glass ceilings

BY MATTHEW STOLLE  
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In 1970, Karen Ricklefs attended her first meeting of the Rochester School Board as the lone woman member. Being new to the board, she had intended to be quiet. She wanted to listen and learn.

But a topic arose that Ricklefs was well versed in, so she spoke up. After the meeting, two male board members took her aside. They told her that women had occasionally served on the board, but “we’ve always considered her to be a decorative member,” Ricklefs recalled them saying.

Ricklefs didn’t bat an eye.

“I don’t think anyone who voted for me expected me to be a decorative member,” she told the men.

Today, in our grievance-filled, digitally connected age, comments like that would ignite howls of indignation on social media. But looking back on the incident 50 years later, Ricklefs, 84, doesn’t betray the slightest hint of umbrage.

“Maybe that’s how I disarmed some of the guys who would make inappropriate comments,” she said. “I’d laugh. And that’s not what they expected.”

In fact, after serving on the board for six months, the same two male board members again approached her and complimented her on her “great questions.”

“We learn a lot,” they told her. “You are just like one of the boys.”

Such conversations might seem inconceivable today, but for women entering the job market and attempting to forge identities outside the home in the 1960s and ’70s, such experiences were commonplace.

Olmsted County Commissioner and former state Sen. Sheila Kiscaden notes that around the time that

Ricklefs left the School Board in the mid-1970s, Sen. Nancy Brataas, of Rochester, was elected as the first woman to the state Senate in her own right. And when she got there, there were no restrooms for women.

Ricklefs’ election to the School Board occurred when the women’s rights movement was just gathering steam. She was a little ahead of the movement, Kiscaden said.

“Generally, women or anybody who’s in the minority have to figure out what the dominant culture will accept and won’t accept. The dominant culture was white male, and she was breaking into that culture,” she said.

Listening to Ricklefs’ stories today is to be reminded how different the culture was not that long ago. She belonged to a group of women in Rochester in the ’70s, ’80s and ’90s who were insisting on their right to carve career paths and forge identities independent of their husbands.

At Iowa State University, Ricklefs was the only woman in a math class of 42 guys. The head of the math department, a tall, intimidating man by the name of Dr. Hinrichson, had questioned her decision to become a math major. Math was Ricklefs’ favorite subject.

“What makes you think you are smart enough to be a math major?” he asked her.

Hinrichson picked on her every day in class. One day, he gave the class a complex math assignment that included two problems. It took Ricklefs all weekend and both sides of seven pages to complete. In class, the professor asked if anyone had completed the problems. Ricklefs said she had.

“Oh, you didn’t, either,” he said in disbelief.

The professor asked her to put her answers on



Photos by Ken Klotzbach / klotzbach@postbulletin.com

Karen Ricklefs, seen here in her Rochester home, was a trailblazer, challenging expectations in a male-dominated world and becoming the first woman School Board president in decades.



A framed photograph of Karen Ricklefs in 1970 when she served as Rochester School Board president.

the board. Ricklefs began writing on blackboards that encircled the room. As she worked, she began erasing work when she ran out of space. Finally, the professor demanded the answers. She gave them, and she was right.

Weeks later, the professor hired her to work in the math office.

### ‘MADAM PRESIDENT’

Her instinct for bucking convention flared when she and her husband, Merlin, reviewed their

wedding vows with the pastor. Back then, women were supposed to pledge to “love, honor and obey” their husbands. But when the pastor got to the “obey” part, Ricklefs said the vows would have to change.

“I’m not going to obey anyone,” she recalled telling the pastor.

Ricklefs said her marriage to Merlin has worked over the decades because it’s a partnership, each supporting the other in their endeavors.

“People don’t realize that they really should marry their best friend,” she said. “That’s what lasts. We still have fun together.”

Ricklefs decided to run for School Board on her way to the hospital to induce labor. A Post Bulletin reporter learned about the circumstance, and the story ran under a five-column headline. It was invaluable publicity for a first-time candidate running against three men.

Ricklefs won by one vote. Later, she became the first female board president since Amelia Witherstine from 1915 to 1921.

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# Still waiting on furniture? Don’t shoot the messenger

BY ANNE HALLIWELL  
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New mattress on backorder? You’re not alone.

Furniture Superstore owner Jim Sather said business has been “through the roof, nationally, for every furniture store” since shops reopened last spring. Sather said the spending boom, he said. And as customers spent more time at home, they noticed improvements to be made, local furniture store owners said.

The supply issues caused by COVID demand and a reduced workforce aren’t limited to couches — delivery dates for home appliances were pushed further and further back starting in the fall of 2020. Now, a foam shortage is causing similar problems for mattress and furniture sellers. In early spring,

storms in Texas shut down several plants that manufacture foam for cushioning, Sather said, meaning manufacturers’ supplies were cut.

“Things are improving, but it’s certainly challenging,” he said.

Ashley Furniture manager Randy Mortlend agreed that material shortages coupled with increased demand have been the norm since the start of the pandemic, though he couldn’t pinpoint any specific item or category that’s continually sold out.

Josh Meyer, owner of Rochester’s Slumberland Furniture, said he’s seen increased demand for “nice mattresses, recliners, a lot of lift chairs.”

“It’s just more of everything,” he said.

### DON’T SHOOT THE MESSENGER

Backorder times are improving, Mortlend said — a wait time of two to three months for sold-out is normal now, instead of half a year or so.

“It’s starting to flow a little better,” he said.

However, some customers still see longer waits — though that’s hardly the furniture stores’ fault.

Mortlend said Ashley Furniture has prepped its customers for a wait of one to three months, at least, but stores are at the mercy of manufacturers, who might suddenly announce longer wait times.

Before shutdowns began, delivery estimates were fairly accurate. Now, they’re susceptible to change at a moment’s notice.

“It all depends on how the salesperson talked to them in the first place,” he said. “If they said, ‘Oh, it looks like your piece could be in in three weeks,’ then it gets pushed back for some reason, then they’re a little upset.”

Meyer agreed that his staff relays manufacturers’ ship dates to customers, but has had to call them back to add two or more months to previous



Ken Klotzbach / klotzbach@postbulletin.com

Josh Meyer, Slumberland Furniture store owner, fits a chair into a display setting in his Rochester showroom recently. Furniture supply shortages have meant delays in customer orders.

estimates. Lead times can go anywhere from “a few weeks to six to nine months on some products,” Sather said. Furniture Superstore did and does sell some furniture from the showroom floor, he said, which creates some

flexibility. However, the warehouse had to cut back on floor sales early in the pandemic, “or our store would be empty.” Nowadays, the store is easing back into offering the “immediate gratification” of those sales again.

Sather said as long as his staff is careful not to overpromise and underdeliver, customers are generally all right with the long wait times.

“Most people have been really awesome,” he said. “Ninety-nine percent of people are super understanding.”

# Finding compassion in an unlikely place

**“T**ime for a tick check.”

Lately, my husband, Justin, has heard me express this directive a couple times a day. We have two dogs, Maeve and Finn, and the four of us enjoy taking long hikes through tall grasses and woods. Since ticks tend to like the same sorts of environments, regular scans are a requirement in our household. We don't want any humans or canines to be bitten by those mysterious little parasitic arachnids.

A couple days ago, I found one in my hair, and yesterday, I had one on my leg. I guess I'm a kind of tick magnet. Thankfully, as long as I find them right away, they aren't able to do any damage. But I will admit that having multiple tick experiences



## HOLY EVERYTHING

Emily Carson

within a short period of time has me feeling extra conscientious (and even a bit paranoid). More than once, I've felt certain there was a tiny creature crawling on my leg, only to discover it was just my imagination.

Since tick checks will continue to be part of life at the Stoll/Carson house throughout the months ahead, I wanted to find a way

to approach the task feeling empowered instead of fearful. As I began to imagine a way to reframe my relationship with ticks, I pondered whether perhaps the spelling of the word might lend itself to a useful acronym.

Then one afternoon while hiking through more tall grasses, an idea crawled right into my mind: “t.i.c.k.” could stand for “Time to Increase Compassion and Knowledge.” With this acronym in mind, the daily physical searches for actual ticks could also become opportunities to cultivate good mental habits.

Compassion is a willingness to look at oneself and all of life with love and openness. Compassion is warm regard and respect we can consciously choose to extend to other people.

Author Brené Brown writes, “Compassion is not a virtue — it is a commitment. It's not something we have or don't have — it's something we choose to practice.”

After over a year of pandemic living, many of us are relearning how to be humans who live in relationship with other humans. Lots of folks have been working from home or working under profound stress for over a year. Within that time, a multitude of national and global crises have occurred. As we all figure out how to live together in a new season, compassion is a helpful practice. It's a good time for compassion.

Knowledge is awareness of facts, truths or principles. Nobody knows everything there is to know about

existence. Similarly, nobody has a full understanding of the thoughts and motivations of other people. Humility helps us admit that none of us has access to perfect understanding. Instead, growing in awareness can be a lifelong adventure. It's a good time for knowledge.

Now that tick season is upon us and we'll all be taking time to do checks, maybe it's also “Time to Increase Compassion and Knowledge.” In every season, we benefit from a shared willingness to care and learn. May the months ahead be free of arachnid bites and full of compassion and knowledge!

“Holy Everything” is a weekly column by Emily Carson. She is a Lutheran pastor. Visit her website [emilyannecarson.com](http://emilyannecarson.com).

## Ricklefs

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It was such a novel situation that board members researched the proper title to call her. The board settled on “madam president.”

In 1973, Ricklefs again found herself the only woman in the room at an organizational meeting. Representatives from large and small school districts, townships, counties and cities were present. One of the men in the room, seeing her, declared one position filled.

“Oh, we have a woman, so at least we can have a secretary,” he said.

Ricklefs declined the invitation. She told the group that she had a policy of never being the secretary in an all-male organization, “because I give men

credit to be able to read and write and take notes.” She was later elected vice president.

Ricklefs was appointed to boards by both Gov. Wendell Anderson, a Democrat, and Gov. Al Quie, a Republican. But even as an elected official, she had to fight for her own identity.

The Rochester Post Bulletin of the '70s followed a convention of referring to women by their husbands' names. In news articles, she was “Mrs. Merlin Ricklefs.” She asked the paper to use her first name.

The paper declined to change its policy, but made an exception for Ricklefs and a handful of other female community leaders.

“It wasn't just for her to get the credit,” her husband said. “She didn't want me to get the blame.”

## Adult daughter upset by dad's dating

**D**ear Annie: I am 70 years old and have just relocated to the U.S. from overseas, after an unexpected divorce. It was my daughter's suggestion for me to move here. I've bought a house and am 5 miles from my daughter's house. This is the first time in years that I have lived close to her and my two grandchildren.

My daughter is still married, but she and her husband haven't lived together for seven years. She is currently furloughed from her job.

While I want to be here and be involved in their



## DEAR ANNIE

Annie Lane

lives. I also want a life of my own. Using a dating website, I met a woman. I wasn't sure whether to tell my daughter, but my daughter told me how she'd met a man on a dating site and they were planning to meet soon — so I figured I'd open up and tell her about my new friend.

Now my daughter

wants nothing to do with me anymore because she thinks I'm only thinking about myself. During the last three months, my daughter has only been in my house three times and for less than 10 minutes on each occasion. I'm told I only care about myself and she doesn't want anything else to do with me now. I'm partially reliant on her regarding the final part of my immigration here. If she withdraws from that, then I'm in trouble and may have to leave as a result.

— Dissed By Daughter

**Dear Dissed:** I don't know what your

daughter's problem is, but it's not you. Some unhappiness in her personal life is probably causing her to lash out so irrationally. Hopefully, she comes to her senses and apologizes. The immigration factor does complicate things. I'd recommend consulting with an immigration lawyer to see what other options you might have so you don't have to rely on the whims of a petulant daughter. You didn't lug your whole life 2,000 miles to be her punching bag.

Send your questions for Annie Lane to [dearannie@creators.com](mailto:dearannie@creators.com).

**WANT TO PRINT YOUR CROSSWORD PUZZLES?**

Simply find the crossword puzzle in the e-paper and click on it. On the new screen that pops up, select the print option on the top menu. Members can also use the snipping tool. For detailed instructions visit [postbulletin.news/crossword](http://postbulletin.news/crossword)

## PUZZLES | APRIL 24, 2021

### BRIDGE | KING FEATURES

South dealer. Both sides vulnerable.

**NORTH**  
♠ K 10 9  
♥ 8 6 2  
♦ K Q 3  
♣ 8 6 3 2

**WEST**  
♠ A Q 4 3  
♥ 9 7 5 4  
♦ 10 9 7  
♣ J 9

**EAST**  
♠ A 10 3  
♥ A J 8 6 5 4 2  
♦ Q 10 7

**SOUTH**  
♠ J 8 7 6 5 2  
♥ K Q J  
♦ —  
♣ A K 5 4

The bidding:  
South 1♣  
West Pass  
North 2♣  
East 3♦

Opening lead — ten of diamonds.

that West would eventually score two trump tricks and South would go down one.

**But South did not give up.** He started by discarding one of his club losers on dummy's king of diamonds, then ruffed a diamond and led the king of hearts, losing to East's ace. East returned a low club, won by declarer with the king, after which South cashed the Q-J of hearts and ace of clubs. He then exited with a club to East's queen, producing this three-card ending:

North  
♠ K 10  
♣ 8

West  
♠ A Q 4  
♦ J 8 6

East  
♦ J 8 6

**SOUTH**  
♠ J 8 7  
♦ J 8 7

**East was forced** to return a diamond at this point, ruffed by South with the seven, and it didn't matter whether West played the four, the queen or the ace of spades on the trick. Whatever West did, he could not score more than one trump trick, and the contract was home.

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### JUMBLE | ARNOLD AND ARGIRION

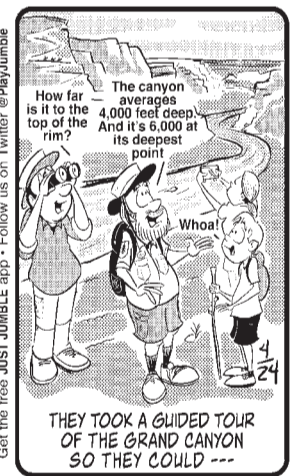
**JUMBLE** THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME  
By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek

Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

VONEW  
TIDOT  
GJLQIE  
ARNWRO

THE

Yesterdays' Jumbles: WIPER GLADE VERSUS NOBODY  
Answer: The story about Peter Pan being forever young — NEVER GROWS OLD



### CROSSWORD | THOMAS JOSEPH

**ACROSS**

- Learn completely
- Fight memento
- Statue setting
- Words of approximation
- Worked the fields
- Pro —
- Solitary sort
- Maliciousness
- Took in
- Craving
- Golfer's choice
- Lend a hand
- Colombia's neighbor
- Debate side
- Use taction
- Bruce Wayne's butler
- "Dragnet" grp.
- Scrub
- Very small
- Sea dogs
- Short pants
- In the past
- Like some kicks
- Some Eurasian deer
- Did a garden chore

**DOWN**

- Common street name
- Brass, for one
- Teatime treat
- Took to the garage
- At any time
- Carmine
- Tender spots
- Related to head cases
- Oregon city
- Wandered
- Site
- Took a nap
- Allude
- Kilauea, for one
- Implement
- Squashed circle
- Pollux's twin
- 28 Tricks
- Bitter
- Lion group
- Gave medicine to
- Horse feature
- Pasture grazer

### CRYPTOQUOTE | KING FEATURES

A XYDLB AAXR  
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

**4-24 CRYPTOQUOTE**

Z N Z E H X Q Y L X Z L D L S U C S  
E L P W L B S Z P C X G S H G E L  
Z H W G E S C J S , C J O C X G S  
A E L C S L E , S U C J W G W V X C E Z S Q .

— I V X Z V P L E D Z J A

**Yesterday's Cryptoquote:** EVERYONE CAN DO SIMPLE THINGS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE, AND EVERY LITTLE BIT REALLY DOES COUNT.  
— STELLA MCCARTNEY

### SUDOKU | UNIVERSAL FEATURES

4/24

		3		2 1				9
	7		8 5					2
		1				8		
	3 5							
			2 3 8					
					2 7			
	7				5			
	9		7 2		1			
5			4 9		7			

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

SOLUTION:  
7 3 5 1 2 8 6 9 4  
1 6 4 3 7 9 8 5 2  
9 8 2 6 4 5 1 3 7  
6 2 8 7 9 1 5 4 3  
3 5 9 2 8 4 7 1 6  
4 1 7 5 3 6 2 8 9  
8 7 6 9 5 3 4 2 1  
5 9 1 4 6 2 3 7 8  
2 4 3 8 1 7 9 6 5

Complete the grid so every row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9 inclusively.

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

1	2	3	4	5	6		7	8	9	10
11							12			
13							14			
15							16			
17							18			
			19	20				21		
	22	23					24			
25							26			
27			28				29	30	31	32
33							34			
35							36			
37							38			
39							40			

4-24