



COMINGS AND GOINGS:

Celebrated With Favorite Books

BY BRIAN R. THOMPSON

Comings and goings—part of the dynamics of any organization. This past fall, the Elisabeth C. Miller Library welcomed Karen Preuss as its new manager, but said good-bye to Carol Orion as the Plant Answer Line (PAL) librarian. Fortunately, we will still have the best of both worlds, for Karen has announced “This is where I’ll retire,” and Carol promises to keep coming back as a volunteer “until I’m ancient.”



Karen arrives most recently from Alabama, but hails from New Jersey and grew up in a white birch grove under-planted with ferns and hostas. Her father “always liked to play around in the dirt,” and took her on field trips to the great public gardens in and near New York and Philadelphia, including the New York Botanical Garden, The Cloisters and Longwood Gardens.

Carol is moving to Camano Island,



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where she will start with a mostly fresh plant palette and escape the constrictions of a city lot. She adds, "I can't quite wrap my mind over things that grow large" yet, as the vertical scale of her landscaping will expand dramatically from what, until now, has been primarily groundcovers and dwarf plants. Both Karen and Carol are excited about their changes and new opportunities.

Their Top Five

To introduce these two dynamic women and celebrate their accomplishments, I recently asked both for their favorite books in the Miller Library collection. Although I limited them to five choices each, they share one favorite, "The American Horticultural Society A-Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants," edited by Christopher Brickell and Judith D. Zuk.

For Carol, this volume is a bible of garden plants. In answering PAL questions she used

it almost every day for basic information, such as how to spell a name, a quick overview of cultivation and propagation, likely pests and diseases—all very condensed but surprisingly comprehensive.

Karen particularly likes the style of A-Z, a user-friendly format that publisher Dorling Kindersley, or DK, brings to all its guides; the Encyclopedia is no exception—it is both easy and fun to use. The quality and selection of the photographs make them a tremendous learning tool and an effective reference, allowing the library visitor to say, "That's what I've got," with confidence.

Ideally, for Karen, one should look at A-Z side-by-side with "Flora: A Gardener's Encyclopedia" published by Timber Press with Sean Hogan as chief consultant. Of similar format, together they make a comprehensive information source. Looking up one of her favorite genera, *Dianthus*, she found many of the same highlights, but with nuances of detail



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that made both entries worth reading. Both encyclopedias strive for a middle ground that doesn't treat the reader as a raw beginner, but doesn't assume supreme knowledge either. If Latin names don't run off your tongue, you can still peruse these books and learn the Latin as you study.

Reflecting her past as a librarian with the nursery products business at Weyerhaeuser, Carol is partial to woody plants and, in particular, trees. So Michael Dirr's "Manual of Woody Landscape Plants" was a must for her list and a book she is buying for her new home. The manual is comprehensive, with detailed descriptions and the author's personal insights (and biases!) unavailable anywhere else. It is particularly effective for that so-important process of selecting a tree that will be with you for a long time. At her Seattle home, Carol avoided planting a particular maple since Dirr suggested it would probably die, because it needed more shade than she could provide, but he also provided guidance in finding something similar that would thrive.

Karen has always gardened wherever she has lived, even with pots on apartment balconies, and her favorite new book validates her thinking about gardening today. "Sharp Gardening" by Christopher Holliday focuses on tall, vertical and pointed plants and happily, these are the plants she's drawn to for her new garden in Seattle. Grasses, iris, and other grass-like plants—many bought at local plant sales last fall—give her new courtyard garden an architectural and modern feeling to contrast with the rounder, softer herbs and vegetables that will supply her kitchen.

Carol will be taking "Pirone's Tree Maintenance," the newest (seventh) edition by John Richard Hartman, to Camano. Where Dirr lists and describes, this volume describes care and handling. She appreciates the consolidated, practical information on how to grow trees, prune when necessary, and refrain from damaging them. Details include root structures, which trees are easy to transplant and which

are not. Construction and landscaping projects can kill trees, but Pirone's has ideas on how to achieve desirable ends without loss. In sum, it contains simply a little bit of everything about trees.

After 10 years as a children's librarian, it's not surprising that children's books would be near and dear to Karen's heart. She has contributed several new titles to the Miller Library's collection, but her favorite was already here: "The Gardener" by Sarah Stewart, with illustrations by Stewart's husband David Small. Very appropriate for an urban setting, this story follows a country girl forced by the Depression to live in the city where she both learns and teaches how the power of plants, even on a rooftop, can transform and give life. A delightful story made even better by the remarkable illustrations and their charming attention to detail.

Very detailed in its own way is the "2005 Pacific Northwest Plant Disease Management Handbook." While perhaps lacking in charm, this and its companion volumes on weeds and insects have been necessities for the PAL desk. All are pitched primarily to a professional audience, but "Disease Management" gets Carol's first nod, because it's the easiest to use of the three with its arrangement by plant genus, and is more accessible to the home gardener in scope. Co-published annually by the cooperative extensions of Washington, Oregon and Idaho, these are not likely titles for the home library, but fortunately all three volumes are also available on-line for occasional research.

While demonstrating divergent interests, our librarians come back together for two similar, final choices. Romantic dreams of owning a farm are fulfilled for Karen in "A Garlic Testament: Seasons on a Small New Mexico Farm" by Stanley G. Crawford. Set an hour north of her once former home in Santa Fe, this non-fiction work reads like a novel, as the author describes three decades of making a go of his small garlic crop. You

learn a lot about growing and selling garlic, but even more about a lifestyle that is deeply satisfying to read about but, as Karen admits, not realistic for her—especially the hard work.

For Carol, it was love at first reading for the writings of Michael Pollan. While all his books are favorites, her single choice would be "Second Nature: A Gardener's Education," the story of his introduction to gardening by his grandfather. Pollan's personal take on gardening—you have a responsibility for this tree you put in the ground!—changed Carol's feeling about her personal landscape: She now regards plants as "slow-moving pets." Like Crawford, Pollan's book reflects on how farming and gardening have always been an integral part of life, and he includes the history of his own plot of land back more than 250 years.

Please introduce yourself to Karen at the Miller Library, and, with luck, you'll catch Carol there, too. But you can really get to know them both by visiting their favorite books; stop by the Miller Library to get acquainted. ~

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