

Caryl

By Thomas H. Cromwell, M.D., 1990-1991 CSA President

At the risk of time dating Caryl, I must admit that I cut my political eye-teeth on Caryl Guth. As a neophyte in the political process, I stumbled into my first CSA House of Delegates meeting with scant knowledge of the politics of medicine and even less interest. But an introduction to Caryl Guth and a few others of that era ignited a small flame which flourished and endured over the next 20 years, culminating with the ASA Board of Directors and Administrative Council.

This will indeed be an unusual year for the CSA, as the recipient of the Distinguished Service Award is probably not well known to many and may indeed be a virtual stranger to some. But to those of you who did not have the distinct pleasure of knowing and working with Caryl, let me assure you she was a commanding presence for many years, not only in the halls of CSA but ASA as well. With a curious mix of statuesque beauty (not politically correct, I know—but true nevertheless), southern hospitality and a fierce interest in the politics of medicine and the specialty of anesthesiology, she served our interests well ... at a time when women were a distinct minority in medicine. She deserved and received respect in every sense of the word.

She was headmistress of the handbook, commander of the caucus. Year after year, she virtually memorized the hundreds of pages, reports, and cross-references of the ASA delegates handbook, the bible of the ASA political process. With the rest of us hopelessly mired in the arcane language and conflicting footnotes, Caryl would patiently walk us through the verbiage, explain the issues and tell us how to vote. And she was always right!

Her fierce protection of women's rights once got me into a bit of trouble and nearly torpedoed my budding political career. At an ASA reference committee a number of years ago, presided over by Dr. Betty Stephenson, destined to become ASA's first female president, I was dispatched by Caryl to monitor the caucus and "degenderize" each issue that came before the reference committee. I dutifully stepped to the microphone on a number of occasions and requested that "he" be changed to "he/she" as instructed by Caryl. After a few repetitions of this, Betty glared at me and announced, "Enough. We have more important things to do." It took considerable courage for me to ever step to the microphone again.

Caryl was, and continues to be, a dear friend to all of us and an enduring presence in CSA and ASA, if not physically, certainly in spirit—a marvelous, enduring spirit and concern that has nurtured us in the practice of anesthesiology. I am amazed this honor has not been bestowed upon her previously. Please join me in saluting Caryl Guth.