

NEWS

OBITUARY

Elizabeth Ridgway

Elizabeth Ridgway, who for seven years served as director of the Educational Outreach Division at the Library of Congress – which makes the Library’s vast assets available and understandable to teachers and students across the nation – died Dec. 23 at George Washington University Hospital of injuries stemming from a fall. She was 41.

A church service will be held at Washington’s Capitol Hill Presbyterian Church, 201 4th Street, S.E., on Saturday, Jan. 8, at 11:30 a.m. It will be followed by a memorial reception with members of her family in room LJ 119 of the Library’s Thomas Jefferson Building, from 1 to 4 p.m.

“Elizabeth Ridgway was a pioneering humanistic educator of the Internet Age,” said Librarian of Congress James H. Billington. “She was admired and beloved by colleagues at all levels of the Library – and by many local librarians and K-12 teachers all over America. She instructed and inspired them in the new art of teaching through primary sources.

“Her technique helped teachers to stimulate very young students to interact with online versions of the Library’s most important, one-of-a-kind human documents of American history and culture. She was herself a master teacher who worked with many Members of Congress to create lesson plans and training programs for utilizing the Library’s nearly 16 million free, multi-medial documents to motivate students to learn. We will deeply miss her infectious enthusiasm and selfless dedication.”

Her family and colleagues at the Library have established the Elizabeth Ridgway Education Fund, which will further her longtime work with teachers using the Library’s vast resources. Those interested in contributing



to the fund will find a link to it on the Library’s fundraising website at <http://www.loc.gov/philanthropy/giving/step1.php>.

Ridgway’s parents, Nanette and George Ridgway, and her brothers Paul and Philip, who traveled to Washington from Chicago and San Francisco to be with her following the Dec. 16 accident, authorized the donation of her organs, expected to benefit as many as 100 people.

“Beth had made her wishes clear to be an organ donor,” said Philip. “One of the things that brings the most joy to our family is that she will be giving life to so many others.”

“We have always known that Beth has a large number of wonderful friends,” her mother and father wrote on a website that let them update well-wishers on Ridgway’s situation (www.caringbridge.org/visit/bridg/journal). “Until this past week we never imagined the true magnitude of this friendship network and how many people’s lives she has touched around the world.”

Ridgway was riding a horse she was interested in buying at the time of the accident; she broke her left arm when thrown

from the horse. Her riding instructor, who was with her, said she handled the fall “like a pro.” However, unbeknownst to Elizabeth, the instructor or the doctor who treated her arm fracture, she had also sustained trauma to the head, resulting in what was later diagnosed as a subdural hematoma – bleeding inside the skull. Friends, checking on Ridgway the day after the fall, found her unconscious on the floor of her Washington, D.C., residence and arranged for her emergency transport to the hospital. She did not regain consciousness prior to her death.

During the week she was in the hospital following her injury she was visited by hundreds of friends and colleagues from the Library of Congress – including the Librarian, Dr. Billington – and fellow congregants of Capitol Hill Presbyterian Church.

The hospital’s front-desk attendant told Philip, “I have worked here 18 years and never seen any person receive more visitors. It is as though the president is here.”

In addition to her equestrian pursuits – Ridgway had been an avid horsewoman for several

years – Ridgway was a travel buff, visiting Switzerland, Germany (where she had relatives on her father’s side), Australia, Qatar, Peru, Ireland, Mexico, Argentina and Uganda in recent years; a fitness enthusiast, including running in the Baltimore Marathon in October; and an active member of the sorority Delta Gamma. She was devoted to her niece and nephews Sarah, Ben and Jack.

Born in Lake Forest, Ill., Ridgway attended local schools, exhibiting an early interest in history and politics. In 1987 she entered DePauw University, majoring in political science and receiving a bachelor’s degree. She later attended a graduate program in elementary education at Marymount University, receiving her master’s degree in 1994.

Later that year, she began teaching in the Arlington County, Va., public schools, work she did for nearly seven years prior to joining the Library of Congress, where she initially served for two years as its teacher-in-residence. At Arlington, she taught U.S. history and civics, worked on staff development and taught graduate-level university courses in curriculum design and technology integration.

Ridgway built and since 2005 directed the Library’s national educational outreach program, Teaching with Primary Sources. Each year, the program provides professional development in the use of primary-source materials – actual historical, literary, musical or other items found within the Library’s collections and digitized – to more than 12,000 educators throughout the nation.

During her tenure with the Library, she directed development based on primary sources; developed and led numerous conference presentations; represented the Library to outside educational organizations; and wrote articles for education journals.