

# Carla Rose

## 1944-2005

Carla, my wife and best friend for 35 years, died Saturday morning December 24. She will be with me forever.

Carla was warm, giving, intelligent, and incredibly talented. Before we met she worked in ceramics; one of her pieces is in the collection of legendary potter Yamamoto Masao, who is officially designated a Living Cultural Treasure in Japan. She was a film editor and animator for Boston channels 5 and 56, and we fell in love while jointly producing a short for John Hancock Insurance. When I later opened an advertising sound studio she became studio manager, but it was her own acting talent that got her cast in commercials for Howard Johnson Motels, Prince Spaghetti, and countless regional and local clients. She turned to writing, had an award-winning column in *Portable Computing Magazine*, and published 32 books about computers and digital graphics. Along the way she also served on the local Library Board, taught in an art college, and developed a clown character. There may have been things Carla couldn't do, but she was successful at anything she *wanted* to do.

That includes having friends and a good family. Our sons have made their own places in the world, are respected in their careers, and yet remain very close and loyal to us. She built a circle of loving friends, locally, through a uniquely supportive online community, and in correspondence with readers around the world—her books have been translated into more than a dozen languages (including Korean, Greek, Farsi, and some I can't identify). Busy as she was, she was capable of dropping everything to help a friend... or, sometimes, a stranger.

Unfortunately, her last five years were marred by serious medical problems. She had damaged her spine during a high school athletic accident (did I mention she'd also been an athlete?) and it was never properly treated. The condition worsened to the point that, after falling off a step ladder in late 2000, she needed serious back surgery. It took two separate operations, about eighteen hours each, to remove a shattered vertebra and add internal hardware supporting her back. The operations were successful and we had a couple of good years to travel and enjoy life. But at one hospitalization she picked up a rare infection, a "super-bug" resistant to normal treatment. The bug found a safe haven next to some of the hardware, where drugs and body defenses couldn't reach it; by a year ago it was causing almost constant pain. Her doctors eventually found a medical cocktail to control the pain without seriously dulling her intellect, but the bug had weakened some bones as well. By the end of last summer she could actually feel screws pulling loose when she moved the wrong way. The doctors confined her to a wheelchair and considered the next step: she'd need an operation to take out the hardware temporarily, while an advanced antibiotic would defeat the infection.

The story isn't all bad. That operation was late November, and Carla immediately felt better. Much of her spine had healed while the hardware was in place, and she was able to walk just 48 hours later. Except for occasional fatigue and depression, expected after any surgery, she began to feel really good. We went out a couple of times; she had no trouble dealing with a giant supermarket, supporting herself occasionally just by leaning on the shopping cart. Last Monday she said she'd stopped most of all her pain medication, and expected to be totally free of it within a week. She also said she'd accompany me to our health club the next day, and walk their track while I swam. This would have been exactly four weeks after the surgery.

This past Monday night we were lying in bed, planning things we could do after her incision healed and she was off antibiotics. She was going to come with me on my next working trip to Los Angeles, just to rubber-neck and take studio tours. While we were talking, she had a spasm and her whole body seized up. Her heart had stopped.

Emergency personnel responded quickly, and had her beating and

breathing before they reached the emergency room. The closest facility was, fortunately, BWH—one of the most respected among the dozens of famous hospitals in Boston. They got her stable and admitted to their cardiac care unit. They also determined that the problem wasn't related to the surgery or infection, and there hadn't been a blood clot. She was in a coma, which can be normal after such a shock, but her body responded to stimuli and their scans said there was no bleeding in the brain.

Doctors like to wait 48 to 72 hours after this kind of event before they decide whether higher brain functions will come back, or if oxygen starvation had permanently damaged them. We could only wait and pray.

Yesterday we got the news. After extensive testing, neurologists determined that the damage to her cerebral cortex was too extensive: Carla would never again be able to think, feel, want, or even move voluntarily. She would be in a persistent vegetative state. Our older son Joshua (a paramedic), his wife (a nurse), and I had no choice: Carla had told me, and put in writing, that she didn't want to be kept alive artificially under such circumstances. At 4:30 Friday afternoon, doctors removed the breathing tube and cut off all medications except painkillers.

Carla was a fighter. She continued to breathe, and her heart continued to beat, without medical support. Doctors said she might remain that way for days. We stayed with her until about midnight, saying our good-byes. At 3:30 AM Carla's body gave up. After 61 years, it was finally at peace.

I am told Carla was unconscious within a few seconds of Monday's spasm. She never felt any pain. The woman we knew died in her own bed, next to me, Monday night. Her last thoughts were happy and optimistic. And, warm and giving person that she was, her last unconscious act was to have her body continue for a few days, so we'd have time to reconcile ourselves to the loss.

Actually, I'll never really lose her. Not only were we in love; for almost 20 years—ever since she convinced me to start working from the house instead of downtown—we've been constant companions. We shared an office and talked about everything. We knew each other so well that her presence will never leave my memory. I'll miss her unique take on things, and wicked sense of humor... but maybe there's still enough memory of her to keep me from making too many mistakes. There's certainly enough for me to keep loving.

There might even be more than that. Over the years we had seen events that could possibly only be explained by ESP: times we'd communicate complex messages over hundreds of miles, or draw scenes of what the other had just been dreaming. We occasionally shared each others' heads. If her soul is still floating around, maybe we'll still be able to.

And of course, she lives in our children. And in our first grandchild, due this winter. And in her books, and drawings, and pottery... So my biggest emotion now is gratitude, both for having known her for 35 years, and for the few weeks of hope and relief she was given at the end.

Carla didn't like ceremony. She wanted to be cremated and scattered at sea. We will have a very small family get-together, then cast her ashes into Cape Cod Bay. If you want to do something in her memory, please make a donation to a local cat shelter. Or send one to Angel Memorial Animal Hospital, 350 South Huntington Ave, Boston MA 02130 ([www.mspca.org](http://www.mspca.org)).

If you're reading this, you were probably her friend or mine. Thanks.

— Jay Rose, Christmas Eve, 2005