

A Eulogy for Pat Carr

By Mary Allen

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I met Patty, as she was known back then, in 8th grade in first period gym class. We were sitting cross-legged on the floor in alphabetical order. Her last name being Carr & mine, Cook, I started talking to the 'new girl' in front of me and found out she and her family had recently moved from Oklahoma City to Houston because her father had gotten a promotion with Gulf Oil. I learned that she was the oldest of 3 children, had 2 younger brothers, Kim & Sam, and had been born in Shawnee, OK, a small town southeast of Okla City. I don't really know much about her life in Oklahoma, except that she attended Putnan Schools, and her family was a member of St David's Episcopal Church. And, it was in Oklahoma that her parents met and became friends with a young priest named Courtland Moore--the same Courtland Moore who is with us today and who became such a mainstay in Pat's life.

We quickly became friends in the gym there at Spring Woods Jr. High, and I introduced her to my other friend, Mary Rushing, who I had met in 6th grade orchestra. And so it was—Mary, Mary & Pat throughout the rest of 8th grade and high school. And although we are all very different people, and our lives took us in entirely different directions, the bonds of friendship formed there have endured and deepened for over 50 years.

Pat was always the artistic one of the bunch

In HS she was active in the French club and journalism, and it was while working on the school newspaper, The Regit (tiger spelled backwards), that she discovered her talent and passion for photography. I remember how proud she was when her father bought her a Leica camera that she treasured throughout her life--and oh, what beautiful pictures she took with it. She had a wonderful eye for color and composition.

When I think of high school and Pat, one story always comes to mind. My senior year my mother bought a 1960 Ford Falcon from a great-aunt, who literally only drove it to church on Sundays. It was a stripped down car, with no radio, no air conditioning, bench seats and a 3 speed manual shift on the column, and it had a very touchy clutch. One day Pat decided she wanted to learn to drive it; so off we went to the parking lot of Fair Haven Methodist Church where we spent the next couple of hours, jumping and jerking and stalling all over the lot before finally giving up because our sides were hurting so much from laughing Wow, we had so much fun that day. Now in Pat's defense, I have to say that a few years later, when all of us were choosing stick shifts to obtain better gas mileage, she bought a small Nissan and had no trouble at all conquering the art of smooth shifting.

And while I'm thinking of it, I want to commit on Pat's laugh. She had a great sense of humor—somewhat quirky, always playful and sometimes, corny, which I always attributed to her Oklahoma roots—my apologies to her fellow Okies. She had one of those great, infectious laughs that started deep in the belly as a chuckle and just erupted into a wonderful guffaw. It is one of the things about her that I will miss the most.

Following graduation, Pat continued her interest in photography into college, attending The University of Texas in Austin and graduating with a BS degree in Radio, Television and Film with minors in Photojournalism and French. While there, she became a resident assistant in the dorm where she met another lifelong friend, Wanda King. In fact, Wanda was one of the people at her bedside when she died.

In the meantime, Mary & I attended Southwestern University just up I-35 from Austin in Georgetown, TX, but we kept in touch. I can remember visiting her on campus a few times, but mainly we got together in Houston over holidays and summer breaks. We loved to meet at a local coffee shop and drain their pots by sitting for hours catching up and sharing stories. Mary married after our junior year, but after Pat and I graduated, we moved back to Houston and shared an apartment for 6 months in the Almeda Genoa area.

Pat had gotten a job at Houston Jewelry and Distributing in downtown Houston behind the photography counter, and I was starting a job in the Clear Lake area south of town. My most vivid memory while in the apartment is of our Friday night happy hours sharing sangria wine and chili con queso with another lifelong friend, Lyn Gordon-Winkler.

Lyn & I started work at the Johnson Space Center on the same day in August 1973. She was from Pennsylvania and planned to have a small wedding the following April at her aunt's house in Maryland. She had decided to make her wedding dress, but as the time drew nearer, she began to panic that she wasn't going to get it finished. As she relayed her concerns to us one night, Pat immediately volunteered to help. She was an excellent seamstress, a skill her mother had taught her. I remember Pat helped sew the dress and spent hours meticulously hand-sewing on yards of pink ribbon that adorned the bodice & skirt. She loved doing things like this for her friends. Nothing gave her more pleasure than seeing a need and taking care of it if she could. Sometimes with gestures like sitting with a friend while a loved one was in surgery or giving small gifts that she knew someone needed or would appreciate. I bet many of us have experienced these little gifts of kindness that Pat so loved to give.

As I mentioned, Pat and I only shared an apartment for 6 months. By the end of our lease, she had gotten a great job as a professional photographer for KHTV, Channel 39, one of the UHF stations in Houston, which was located in the southwest part of town, and the commute just got too expensive for both of us. So she moved into an

apartment on Westheimer, and I moved to Clear Lake. She enjoyed her work at the station. It gave her a chance to use her talent and creativity and through it, she met a lot of the local celebrities and some national figures who visited the station.

But the pay was not great and after a few years, she left to try her hand at outside sales and advertising. Neither was a good fit, and it wasn't long before she returned to photography, this time as a staff photographer for the University of Texas Dental School in Houston. Again, the pay was low and to make a little extra for Christmas, she took a part-time job at Foley's department store behind the cosmetic counter and was so successful that they ask her to stay on after the holidays. Eventually, she left the dental school and went to work full time where she set new sales records for Elizabeth Arden. She knew, however, that just like photography, cosmetic sales was not going to give her the level of financial security she wanted, so she decided to go back to school and become a paralegal.

She graduated in March 1983, and subsequently went to work for Mayor, Day & Caldwell in downtown Houston. After a year, she was anxious for a change and accepted a job with Hughes & Luce in Dallas. I remember very well helping her pack to move. She was very excited to be out of Houston, in a new city, and starting a new career.

In 1986, Pat was hired by the prestigious firm of Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld and thoroughly enjoyed her work there. The paralegal field appealed to her orderly and analytical mind. She was there 5 years before they downsized her division. After that she worked as a contract paralegal for about 8 years before joining the firm of DeHay & Elliston, a leading asbestos defense firm in 2000. This was perhaps her most successful and challenging job. Again, she was successful at discovery and litigation preparation, but she was also extremely proficient at database management and became the firm's system administrator and liaison with LexisNexis, a national legal data search software.

In December 2001, at the height of her career, she was diagnosed with kidney cancer and underwent the removal of a kidney during the Christmas holidays followed by 3 months of grueling chemotherapy before finally conquering this insidious disease. She returned to work part-time after chemo and continued at DeHay & Elliston in a part-time capacity until 2006. Although she was cancer free, that incident changed her life forever as she never was able, mentally or physically, to return to the stress and demands of a challenging fulltime paralegal position. Instead she worked a series of part-time jobs including 3 years as secretary for St. Thomas Episcopal Church and as a teaching assistant for an elementary after-school program. She particularly enjoyed working with the children, and she was able to use her artistic and creative abilities. I remember a game that she developed to help the children learn and keep track of the

medal count by country at the Beijing summer Olympics in 2008. It was extremely clever and the children and the other teachers loved it.

For the last 3-4 years, she worked seasonally for One Exchange, a health insurance clearinghouse, where she was extremely proficient at evaluating customer service calls for quality assurance. She told me she was like the wise sage of the group, being a little older with a lot more work experience than many of her fellow workers. She loved being a mentor and from everything I can tell, the members appreciated her taking on this role. She seems to have found a niche with this company, and I remember how touched she was when several managers visited her in the hospital last year.

That summarizes some of the things Pat did in her life, particularly her livelihood, but now I want to talk about 'who' she was.

Pat was a woman who loved beauty, color, & grace.

She had a keen eye for color. Just a few weeks ago, she called and told me that she had decided that Mary & I should wear green for our attendant's dresses (at 65, we decided attendants was a better word than bridesmaids). Anyway, I asked what shade of green and she said, 'grass green'. I said, "like Kelly green?" and she said, "no, that's too bright." So I said, "more like sage or moss?" and she said, "No, those are too gray." So I said, "lime or fern? – too yellow"; "mint or celery?-- too light". I'm sorry we never got the chance to look for dresses in the exact shade of grass that she had in mind, but I'm sure she saw it vividly in her mind's eye, and it would have been beautiful.

1. She loved flowers. No matter how small the space, she always filled her balcony with pots of colorful flowers. She particularly loved pansies and violas because that's what her mother planted around the big tree in their front yard. Petunias and irises were also favorites. I remember at the condo complex where she lived the longest, she even strung twine along the iron railing on the balcony so that morning glories would grow, and she could enjoy them as she left for work each morning. And if you were able to visit that complex today in the spring, you would see irises blooming that she planted along a fence in the back where she walked her dogs.

One of her favorite places was the Dallas Arboretum. She was fascinated by the kaleidoscope of colors and textures and how the pallet changed with the seasons. She especially enjoyed Dallas Blooms when the tulips and pansies were magnificent, and she has many beautiful photographs of her visits there. Unfortunately, for the last few years, Pat didn't have the physical endurance for the extensive walking that a visit to the Arboretum requires. Recognizing this, one of the cookie bakers, Cindy Graham, invited the group to her house for a girls' get-away that included a trip to Dallas Blooms where we had great fun pushing Pat in a wheelchair so that she wouldn't miss out on the beautiful flowers. We did this for a couple of years until

Cindy retired and moved from Dallas. Just a few months ago, Pat and Hal had the opportunity to go together and share her last visit to her favorite garden.

2. Pat loved dogs. Not too long after she moved into her apartment on Westheimer in Houston, she decided to get a puppy and chose a beautiful buff cocker spaniel she named, Sugar. Oh, how she loved that dog! It just about broke Pat's heart when Sugar died 12 years later. She had her buried in a pet cemetery and bought a beautiful headstone for her grave.

Her second dog was another buff cocker, named Josie, who she bred and kept one of the puppies, named Kate. Pat became active in the Dallas cocker spaniel club, and it was there that she met her good friends Virginia and Jack Gilbert. In 2004, she added a third dog to the pack—this time a rescued miniature schnauzer, named Susie. But sadly, as we all have experienced, she lost them one by one and after Susie died, she decided to take a break from owning a dog. I think we all knew that wouldn't last long and sure enough, right after she was diagnosed with colon cancer, as she drove home from a doctor's appointment, she stopped by Collin County animal shelter. As she described it, it was love at first sight with a beguiling Chihuahua/terrier mix that she named Wesley.

What a blessing he was to her and just what she needed to keep her mind off of her illness. She never failed to tell me in our phone conversations what Wesley had done to amuse or comfort her. He was usually sitting close by her side or agitating for her to throw his KONG, a hard plastic pear-shaped toy that he would retrieve for hours if your arm could hold out that long. What a joy he was for her, and I'm so very glad that he's found a loving home with Pat's friend, Pam Fetzer who has a 2 year old granddaughter who calls him, Wessie-Poo.

Pam was Pat's housekeeper who turned into a very good friend, helping her deal with her illness and keeping her apartment organized and a welcome retreat to come home to. But the biggest help was in keeping Wesley when she had to check into the hospital for four days every other week for chemo. It was a great comfort to Pat knowing that Wesley was happy and well cared for.

3. Pat loved dancing. I think it was the just the thing to combine her love of beautiful clothes, shoes, make-up & glamorous hair-dos, and graceful movement. For a time she took ballroom dancing lessons and joined a dance club that met on Saturday nights. Something many of you may not know about Pat is that she actually competed in the Texas State Fair ballroom dancing competition one year. She invited me up for the weekend, and we had a great time at the fair, riding the Ferris wheel, eating cotton candy and acting like kids again. It was a very special treat for

me because I got to watch her and her dance partner (who was one of her dance teachers) twirl gracefully around the stage. She looked beautiful in a sapphire blue dress, and I could tell she was having a ball. They didn't win any ribbons, but she got a big boost of confidence by just doing it, and I was very proud of her that night. Most recently, we all knew not to call Pat on Monday nights for that was what she called, her 'holy grail of dancing' night. She never missed Dancing with the Stars. I even think she scheduled her chemo to start on Tuesdays so she would be home on Monday nights to watch 'her show'.

4. Pat also enjoyed scrapbooking, beadworking, and as many of you know, cookie baking. You've probably heard about our annual cookie bake where 8 longtime friends gather at our friend, Lyn's, home in Fredericksburg for a weekend of sharing stories, laughing, drinking champagne and doing some serious cookie baking. What you may not know is that it was Pat who started this tradition. During the holidays, Pat always enjoyed picking up the small holiday cookie books that you find at the check-out counter—ones from Pillsbury or Taste of Home. In 1980, she called me and told me about a great idea she had seen for a brunch that included a boiled-egg/bacon casserole served with a fresh fruit salad, croissants, and an assortment of cookies and desserts, and she thought it'd be a great idea to host a Christmas Sunday brunch for our Clear Lake friends. At the time, I was single and living in a house in Webster, TX where we could have the brunch, so I said, "sounds great to me!"

Pat would come down on Friday night after work, and we'd start planning what cookies and desserts we'd serve to go with the rest of the menu. Saturday would be spent cooking and baking, talking and laughing and making sure the champagne was good enough for our guests. We'd have almost as much fun getting ready as we did at the actual brunch! We did this for several years, even after I married, but once it was discontinued, Pat and I decided to carry on the tradition of getting together to bake for the holidays. It was always as much about the camaraderie as it was about the cookies. We continued as often as we could over the next 30 years, even after she moved to Dallas, and my husband and I retired to Ruidoso NM in the mid-1990s. After a few years, Mary Rushing Martin joined the fun, and we met several times her home in the San Antonio area. In 2007, when my husband & I retired for a second time and settled in the Georgetown area, we expanded our group to include several friends who lived in the hill country, Dallas and even one in Colorado. The really endearing thing about it is that the friends who gather annually are the very same people we invited to that first brunch back in 1980.

Pat was the one who always wanted to do the pretty cookies. She had a shoebox filled with sprinkles, edible glitter, food coloring and nonpareils of all colors and shapes, that she had collected over the years. And she became known for her outstanding fudge. After trying several years to find the absolute best recipe, she discovered one that combined unsweetened chocolate, semi-sweet chocolate and German sweet chocolate into something fantastic. She would make a double batch every year to make sure we all had plenty to take to our families. I remember Mary telling me that her grandchildren didn't think it was Christmas until they received Pat's fudge.

We even have a cookbook with wonderful pictures to commemorate our cookie bakes. Pat always dreamed of putting one together, and after she was diagnosed with cancer this last time, we got in high gear and got it done. I think she cherished this book. It will always be very special to me because she loved it, and it's the perfect way to remember Pat and the fun times we had together. It's hard to imagine Cookie Bake without her, and it's going to be a very difficult time this year, but we can't disappoint Mary's grandchildren so we must carry on the tradition of Pat's fudge!

5. Pat loved her family. She had a very complicated relationship with her mom and dad and her brothers, Kim and Sam, but through it all, I know she cared deeply for them all. She was very proud of her Carr heritage from Virginia where her lineage can be traced to Dabney Carr, who married Thomas Jefferson's sister, Martha, and whose children spent a great deal of time at Monticello. She was also very proud of her connection to May Smith, who was her namesake and also the nurse here in Dallas who started what she called a 'baby camp' to give newborns the specialized care needed to survive and thrive. Her 'baby camp' paved the way for the outstanding institution that lives on today as the **Childrens' Medical Center of Dallas**. In the early 1920's, May took an infant who needed a loving family and placed the child with her sister and her husband in North Carolina. That child was Pat's mother, Barbara Carr, who followed in May's footsteps and became a nurse. I remember how proud Pat was when her mother was asked to play a key role in the 100th anniversary of the hospital's founding, and Pat accompanied her to the celebration.

She was very proud of her brother's successful careers, and I know she enjoyed many holiday get-togethers with the family and the times when her sister-in-laws, Mary & Heike, would visit her here in Dallas. Down through the years, she always made sure to tell me what was going on in the lives of her nieces and nephews: Kim's children: Will, Sarah & David and Will's wife, Cary and Sam's children: Madeleine and Thomas and Madeleine's fiancé Molly. I know she was thrilled when

Will and Cary made her a great-aunt with the arrival of their daughter, Emma 2 years ago, and most recently when they welcomed a second daughter, Scarlet.

6. Pat loved her church. She was baptized in the Episcopal Church at birth, and her faith was a dominant force in her life and helped her through many difficult times. In 2000, she was looking for a new church when she visited the Episcopal Church of the Transfiguration and was delighted to find that Father Moore, the same Father Moore she had known in Oklahoma, was filling in as an interim priest. I remember her calling to tell me that she had re-connected with a dear friend and knew that she had found her church home. I think finding Father Moore and finding the support and love of others like Sister Barb and the many friends she has made here, constituted a very positive turning point in Pat's life.

One particular incident stands out in my mind. Not long after Pat recovered from kidney cancer, she rented a small 3 bedroom house in Richardson. After turning it into a home for herself and her 2 cockers, Josie & Kate, she asked Sister Barb to conduct a house blessing. I had never heard of anything like this, but it turned out to be one of the most touching events in my life. Pat, Mary & I gathered with a small group of Pat's friends from church and work and went through the house as Sister Barb blessed each room and asked the Lord to watch over Pat and all who entered there. It was very memorable, and I know it meant a great deal to Pat.

Her faith and the support of her church family helped her through her first battle with cancer and a few years ago, in coming to terms with her mother's death, and it has been instrumental in how she was able to cope and go on with her life after receiving the diagnosis of terminal stage 4 colon cancer. I know she found great comfort in her conversations with her Stephen minister, Penny Bonneau.

I know, too, that she thoroughly enjoyed and looked forward to her monthly lunch get-togethers with her 'church lady friends'. She was a member of 2 groups here: the Merry Magdelenes (I love that name) and the St. Theresa Guild. The Magdelenes had a tradition of celebrating members whose birthdays were in that month by presenting them with the tackiest card they could find. Now that would be right up Pat's alley. I can just see her laughing over the card and sharing it with her friends.

I also know she looked forward to meeting with the St. Theresa group, in part because her friend, Maggie Shearer was a member. Maggie was the one who helped Pat move from her 3 bedroom house to her current 2 bedroom apartment. Now we all loved Pat, but we also know she was a pack-rat and when she moved, she had way too much stuff for a small apartment. Maggie was extremely helpful in de-cluttering and helping Pat let go of things so that she could decorate and turn

the apartment into the home she wanted. I know she was grateful and truly appreciated Maggie's friendship.

7. I've talked a lot about friendship and friends that meant so very much to Pat. I started by saying that I had known Pat for over 50 years, but it's not the length of a friendship that's important, it's the depth. We told each other everything--our secrets, our fears and our deepest thoughts. I know of Pat's struggle with depression, her weight and feelings of rejection, being misunderstood & unappreciated. But I also witnessed a significant change in her in the last few years. She developed a much more positive outlook, she became more content, less cynical, less critical & more appreciative. She dropped a lot of the defensive tactics that kept her on-guard to push back against those she thought had slighted or injured her. I commented on it once to her and she just said that she was trying to emulate her good friends, but I think it was more than that. I think she finally decided to forgive and let go of the emotional baggage she had carried for years.

The best illustration of this change is in the way she handled her most recent diagnosis of cancer versus the first one. This time, she didn't see herself as a victim. Instead she faced it with grace, courage, & strength that would stand as a great example for all of us. She was going to fight it tooth & nail and with every fiber of her being, but she was not going to let it stop her from doing what she wanted to accomplish in the time she had left: She had a bucket list and she was not going to be deterred from seeing the whooping cranes in Rockport, hiking a mountain trail in Colorado, and traveling with her dear friend, Pam Fetzer and her granddaughter, Riley, to marvel at the Atlanta Aquarium.

And it was not going to stop her from falling in love, planning a wedding, and envisioning a beautiful future with a wonderful man named Hal Bybee. Hal was a true Godsend to Pat. She told me that she had prayed to God for a companion to help her through her darkest hours, and God answered her prayers.

They met when he was referred from the church to help her with a printer problem, and after helping her pick out a new one, he asked her to lunch to celebrate Chinese New Year's. From there, love blossomed. And although their love affair was short, it wasn't the length that matter, but again, the depth. Pat told me she was so comfortable with him that she felt she had known him all her life. They could talk about anything. He was just the companion and support she needed, and although I can't speak for him, I'm sure she filled some void in his life as well. Today, would have been their wedding day and oh how I wish I was delivering a toast to the happy couple instead of this eulogy. We can only dream of what might have been.

I'm very sorry they never got to live the rest of the dream, but I'm so very thankful that she knew this man and this level of commitment.

One thing I'm sure of is that Pat died a very happy woman--content with her life and surrounded by the love of her friends, her family & Hal. When she asked me to deliver the eulogy, she said she hoped people would see value and importance in her life. I know how important Pat Carr was to my life, and I'm very grateful I had a chance to tell her before she died. And as far as value, I think it shows in the number of people here today to celebrate her life and in the many lives and hearts she touched. Rest in peace, my dear friend, knowing that you were loved and valued by many, and that you will be greatly missed by us all.