

Doug and Carla: An Urban Legend

Douglas A. Kerr

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My first wife, Bobbie, died in late 1997 of complications following heart bypass surgery. We had been married 37 years. It was a very dark day for me.

Toward the end of 1998, my good friends and neighbors Bibi and Claude, aided and abetted by some other friends in common, begin arranging for me to go to some dinner parties and the like where it always turned out there would be an unattached widow or divorcée, and some new single ladies began unexpectedly showing up at our little Episcopal church. But nothing in that scheme clicked.

I knew Carla Singer from church, where she was Junior Warden (essentially, vice-president of the congregation), but I only knew her in that context. I knew she worked for the vice president of marketing of a large professional association, and traveled a lot in connection with conventions and expositions they put on. She was a bright, gorgeous redhead with a stunning figure and a very winning personality.

In February, 1999, Carla's husband, considerably older than she, died of chronic pulmonary illness from which he had suffered from some while.

Our church had recently engaged a brilliant young graduate music student at Southern Methodist University as our music director, and in early March of 1999 he announced at church one Sunday that he would that evening be giving his final recital to complete his masters' program in music performance (percussion). He invited all in the congregation to attend.

I suggested to Bibi and Claude that we should go together, and offered to drive. A little later, they asked me if it would be all right if Carla rode with us, as she also wanted to attend. I said that would be fine.

We all got together at Bibi and Claude's house (just a few doors from mine) and drove up to SMU. I sat with Carla. During the ride and during the recital I came to realize that this was an extraordinarily bright and well informed woman, with a great skill with the language and a wonderful, sophisticated sense of humor. (This event later came to be identified as "Date zero".)

Following the recital we returned to Claude and Bibi's home for coffee, after which Carla left for home. She lived in a far corner of Dallas County, and worked at the opposite corner, a tough commute, and she felt she needed to get to bed at a reasonable hour.

Claude offered to see her to her car, and as soon as they left, Bibi said to me. "Well, are you interested?". I said, "Well, yes". Bibi said, "Then what are you doing in here?"

So I joined Claude and Carla at the curb and wished Carla good night before she headed home.

Claude and Bibi were leaving the following morning (Monday) for a two-week vacation in Spain. I would be looking after their house and feeding their cats. (Bibi always looked after my house and fed my dog when I was away.)

About the middle of the next morning, I was surprised to receive a phone call from Carla. "Bibi told me that you were going to take care of her cats while she and Claude were away", she said, "and mentioned that you were a little absent-minded, so she asked me to call you to make sure you didn't forget to do it."

"Oh, thanks", I said, "but it is under control. In fact, I just got back from her house, and the cats are fine."

We chatted a bit about how nice the recital was and how talented our young musician friend was. Then I asked Carla if she would like to have dinner with me some time. She said yes she would like to, but her week was very busy with work, and suggested we do it that coming Friday. She would be serving that evening as a lay minister at The Stations of the Cross at church (Lent had just begun), and asked if I wanted to join her there. I said, sure.

I had never attended that event before (too Roman to suit me, I had always thought), but it seemed like a good thing to do this time!

We met at church and I really enjoyed the event, which was very calming. There were only a few from the small congregation there.

When it was finished, we went to a nearby European-motif restaurant, and had a lovely dinner. The session included the "exchanging of resumes" that often happens on a first date in our situation. I learned that Carla was part Cherokee Indian ("the most civilized of the 'Five Civilized Tribes'"), had worked at almost every imaginable job, had been married four times previously (the first time at age 14), had taught herself to read at age 4, and had read almost everything ever published. We closed the restaurant.

We made another date for the immediately-following Sunday, when we saw a nice movie, had a great steak dinner, and finished up with some quiet time here at World Headquarters.

We couldn't get together again until the following Friday, owing to Carla's difficult work and commuting schedule, but talked every day by phone and communicated by email.

On Friday, again we met at church for The Stations of the Cross, and then went to a rather quaint little Mexican restaurant nearby. The interior was painted bright green and there were garish murals on all the walls.

A little while into the dinner, I said, "Now that I have brought you to what is obviously the most romantic spot in all of Dallas, I have a simple question for you. Will you marry me?"

Carla was rather taken aback, and said later that her entire life flashed before her eyes, as is said to happen when one falls out of an airplane. She stammered, "Well—well—well, I can't say no."

Like an attorney on the attack, I said, "Is that a yes?" "Yes", Carla said. It was the best close of my life.

I pulled out of my pocket a one carat cubic zirconia ring I had bought that afternoon at Wal-Mart, just to be ready, and put it on Carla's finger. "Don't worry", I said, "it's only cubic zirconia, just a placeholder. I think a girl should pick out her own real engagement ring."

Just then, the waitress appeared, and said, "Didn't you like your food, Señorita? You have eaten almost none of it." (I had of course managed to eat all of mine.)

"Oh, no", said Carla. "It's just that this gentleman just asked me to marry him, and it threw me off." The waitress shrieked for joy and rushed off. Soon the entire kitchen and dining room staff were gathered around our table, congratulating us.

When we left, we headed right to Bibi and Claude's house. They were due to come back from vacation very early the next morning. We left a note:

1. The cats are fine, and took their medicine with no trouble.
2. There is a big package from an auto parts house for Claude, which I put in the garage.
3. All the mail is on the kitchen table.
4. Carla and I are going to get married.

The next morning, we called the Rector of our church (a good personal friend of both of us) to give him the news. He was stunned. "Doug", he stammered, "that's—that's great news, but isn't a little soon for Carla?" "Evidently not", I said. "She said yes."

We were married at our little Episcopal church on June 12, 1999—the first day that was clear on both our travel calendars.

The rest is history.