



Carlton Carl

September 20, 1945 - March 25, 2025

Carlton Carl passed away on March 25, 2025, in Austin.

Born on September 20, 1945, in Houston, Carlton was the younger of the two Carl Boys, born to Claudia Phyllis (Richardson) and Urbane Smith Carl. Both Carlton and his older brother Colin attended the Kincaid school and excelled academically, graduating at the top of their respective classes. By this early age, Carlton had already established his love of journalism and started a lifelong relationship with Molly Ivins, the future famed columnist who would be his trusted friend and collaborator for decades to come.

Carlton continued his education in New York City, earning a bachelor's degree at Columbia, then his master's from the university's prestigious journalism school. In 1968 he was awarded a Ford Foundation scholarship, serving first as an intern at the Texas Legislature, then in Democratic Governor Preston Smith's office. These jobs melded his passion for truth-telling and journalism with an appreciation of the necessity for political action specifically, capital "D" Democratic action and soon enough he found himself as Governor Smith's assistant press secretary, quickly ascending to the role of press secretary at the age of 26, the youngest such public servant in the country. He then worked on, and sometimes, ran campaigns for multiple legends in the party, including Price Daniel Jr., Bob Bullock, and a young drinking buddy in Austin by the name of Ann Richards.

In 1983, Carlton was offered an opportunity that pried him out of Texas and straight into the heart of American politics. As press secretary to close friend and U.S. House Representative John Bryant, a Dallas-area Democrat, Carlton began two decades of work in Washington, D.C.

In 1997, Carlton switched offices but not passions when he joined the Association of Trial Lawyers of America (ATLA, later known as the American Association for Justice). ATLA was a feared lobbying force in D.C., championing civil redress for workers and consumers. Carlton was vice president of communications, policy, and strategy. Among many victories in that position, Carlton was integral to the astonishing success of "Trial Lawyers Care," the association's initiative to offer pro bono legal services to the families of victims of the 9/11 attacks.

In 2004, Carlton was tipped off to a "town for sale" about thirty miles southeast of Austin. He had always presumed he would, at some juncture, return to the area. So, he thought, maybe he should buy this quaint little venue: Martindale. Studying the possibilities with his old friend Joe Pinnelli, a prominent residential contractor in Austin, he decided to go for broke, funded by the proceeds from the sale of his D.C. townhome. Three years later in 2007 he returned to Texas and embarked on a new career: small-town real estate owner. His newly refurbished home was adjacent to the downtown Martindale buildings he had been rehabilitating and stabilizing over the previous three years all with the help of Pinnelli, his nephew Daniel, and scores of craftspeople from the area. Over 18 years, his dream of revitalizing Martindale was realized, with Carlton the owner and principal of the town's renewal. He treasured the local history, championed the joyous celebration of American Independence every 4th of July, and supported as many local businesses and individuals as he could. Since Carlton could not imagine a town without a library, one of his longest standing tenants was the Martindale Library, which

he was proud to support.

Carlton had barely assumed his duties in Martindale before he was approached by his old friends at the Texas Observer, the state's longtime bastion of progressive and investigative journalism, about assuming the duties of CEO and Publisher of that magazine, which he'd read since childhood. He steered the ship at the Observer for about two years before transitioning in 2010 to a role on the board of the magazine's parent nonprofit, where he served until his death. He also assisted as an eagle-eyed proofreader of the Observer's print issues, up through the March/April 2025 edition.

Carlton loved art, history, books, museums, and the color purple (not the movie, but probably that too), and he shared these loves with his family and friends. But his favorite sports teams? He had none. He didn't even know who the teams were. He had heard of the Longhorns, and that was about it. Instead, he was a patriot, feminist, Democrat, journalist, bibliophile, philanthropist, entrepreneur, art enthusiast, history buff, and so much more. He was a staunch, steadfast, and generous supporter of his community and his family their interests, pursuits, and passions. He genuinely enjoyed and facilitated quality family time with his brother, his nieces and nephew, grandniece and grandnephews. He will be remembered for his unwavering commitment to his friends, his work for justice and progressive causes, and the positive influence he had on others. He will be greatly missed.

Carlton is survived by his nephew and nieces, Daniel (Coleen), Rebecca, Eleanor, and Elisabeth Carl, his grand-nephews and grand-niece, Amoni, Jude, Zev, Zia, Porter, Theodore and Emet, and his sister-in-law, Glenda Carl. He is also survived by the multitude of close friends across the country and the good folks of Martindale, with whom he has shared the last 18 years, breathing new life into a community that had been very much asleep for the

previous quarter-century.

Carlton was preceded in death by his parents, Urbane and Claudia Carl, and his brother Colin (CJ) Carl.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Texas Observer or the Martindale Library.

A celebration of his life and legacy will occur on May 17 in Martindale. Details forthcoming will be posted at BelieveinMartindale.com.

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

MAY 17.

Martindale - Exact location to follow

Details forthcoming will be posted at BelieveinMartindale.com