

Memories of Carrie Galbraith [aka Ethyl Ketone]

We met at the Academy of Art in the late 80's while we were both students there. At the time she was an Illustration major, while I was in Fine Arts. There was some overlap between the departments with classes that brought illustration majors to the Sutter Street building, where I spent most of my waking hours in the painting studios.

Meeting her as a casual acquaintance in the hallways and a few art openings and parties thrown by mutual friends, I took an instant liking to her. With an intelligent air of enthusiasm for interesting things, this was a way cool individual!

I didn't really get to know her until Fall semester of 1989, when she became a double major of both illustration and fine arts. That's when she set up studio space next to mine on the 3rd floor.

I had been staking out the corner wall by the window for the past 3 semesters, where I spent most of my time, working on large experimental paintings. Sharing laughs, ideas, and tapes on the community boombox, with other painters.

Carrie set up tables between the two windows, and quickly became one of the few who was there late at night, like I was. She wasn't a painter, and invested most of her energy printmaking, particularly enthused by Howard Munson's fine book arts class held on the same floor. She'd be constructing paper based works, while I pushed oil on canvas.

The building closed at midnight by then, and we took advantage of it, and bonded over the experience while becoming acquainted.

A first big influence was her bringing **Robyn Hitchcock** tapes in. And while I had heard him before, I never paid much attention, until her tapes of *I Often Dream of Trains*, and *Invisible Hitchcock* turned me into a lifelong fan! He quickly became my favorite songwriter, flavoring my SF days with his albums as foreground music.

One thing we quickly discovered was that we both liked the occasional **Guinness Extra Stout!** So one of us would fetch a couple of bottles from the convenience

store next door. It became a ritual. An observation of the signature of Arthur Guinness from the label on the back of the bottle looks like it says “*Arth Guimef*”, which we called “*Guim*” for short. This catchy in-joke reference lasted between us for years.

Occasionally we’d meet for a *Guim* at the darkly ornate Scottish pub **Edinburgh Castle**, located nearby in the Tenderloin district. The place reflected her Scottish heritage and sense of eccentricity...with its jukebox of genuine old Irish and Scottish jigs on 45’s, jousting poles, foley mugs, old Scottish military illustrations, live bagpipes, fish ’n chips, and more Scottish memorabilia. ...and a parrot named Winston! I had enjoyed going there before, but she was one to visit there with who helped bring out the elements. [a year or so later, she influenced the Cacophony meetings to be held there]

Okay,...on **the San Francisco Cacophony Society**.

My story begins during my first semester at the Academy in September of 1987. An exciting new turn for this young Minnesota transplant — in a new college, new people, new classes, in the urban buzz of downtown San Francisco with all of its craziness of diverse people with the constant sound of scraping, humming ring and dings of the Powell Street cable cars.

On my way to class, paging through the free papers on the rack by the gallery, I pick up one with an irresistibly eye-catching psychedelic illustration on pink paper. [September 1987 issue] of *Rough Draft* — of **The San Francisco Cacophony Society**. [you all know about it enough]

I thought, now this is an interesting group, and wanted to attend one of their events. Being a shy introvert in my early 20s, I never got the nerve to go. Usually with my nose to the artmaking grindstone instead.

Flash forward to fall of ’89, after I had collected a number of *Rough Drafts*. Late September in the studio one night, I began telling Carrie about it, and of this cool looking event called “**The Atomic Café**” was coming up, thrown by characters named **Ethyl Ketone**, **J. Spaulding** and **Zymbot**, et al.

While speaking, Carrie is laughing and flustered...eventually able to gasp out “*I am Ethyl Ketone!*”

!!! Now that was a memorable “*Aha!*” moment, and now I knew that I’d finally

attend my first Cacophony event.

The Atomic Café

October 7, 1989. I was to bicycle to the meeting place, but my friend Karlin stopped by, also interested in going, so she drove us there. There, being the baseball field in Golden Gate park at 7th near Lincoln.

I'll let my first attempt at a comic strip tell the story of the event:

https://dean-gustafson.com/autobiographical/ATOMIC_CAFE-8pg.pdf

One of the memorable moments with Carrie was when we were all sneaking out from the atomic cafe after it was over, through the brush [a few at a time to not appear as a conspicuous group] was of her turning to me in the dim light on the edge of a hill hiding from park patrol cars, whispering enthusiastically, saying *"Dean, isn't this great?! This is Life!"*

It was life changing to become involved from then on! A big new set of unique activities, lifelong friends, and new connections.

Back to the weekdays at the Academy, we mused on the dreamlike extraordinariness of it all. And she gave me a Cacophony nom de plume of **Svensk Runestone**. Based on my interest in Viking art, and the fact that I write my sketchbook journal using a runic alphabet.

She impressed with her backwards writing! And she appreciated my equally obsessed rune writing.

Sketchbooks

As artists/art students, we kept active sketchbooks. Mine may have had some decent sketches and image plan ideas in ink and pencil...but her sketchbooks were whole artworks unto themselves! Often poetically charged, with a mix of media....collaged items, rubber ink stamps, textures, lines, shades, washes, words, and more. No wonder she later went for a Masters in book arts!

When she had a show at the Academy gallery, the main feature were several of her sketchbooks the attendees could page through. Securely attached to the stand by cables, going through a hole drilled in the corner of each book, protected with grommets. Clever and interactive ! People would spend long stretches of time absorbing each page.

I have a memory of us walking down Sutter street to an Illustration exhibit, with her talking about art as how we live our lives and who we are, as much as what we create...or something like that paraphrased. I gained the idea of lifestyle is an art form, and that is reflected in what art objects we create. This was inspired thinking.

Another comment she'd make was in the studio, about seeing what I'd recently painted, or was currently working on. It'd be a compliment on how edible my oil paintings looked.

"Mmm, that one looks ready to eat!" to "that one looks like it isn't yet thoroughly baked yet, but I can tell that it's going to be delicious."

One day in the hallway of the Academy, I greeted her by bowing with hands together, old Asian ceremonial style, expounding something like: *"O great one, who has the magnificence surpassing that of a thousand galaxies"* [and other such extremely absurd praises]. She immediately got it, and we'd make bowing *"O great one..."* exchanges like this for years! [even the last few times I saw her]

Another thing we shared was appreciation for the films of **Andrei Tarkovsky**, who I'd recently discovered at the York theater, at her rave recommendation ... she was MUCH more obsessed with than I. Raving about the influence that *Stalker* had on her, and the association with Zone Trips.

I went through a phase of enjoying foreign cinema weekly just around the corner at the **York**, and **Castro** theater a mile or two away. Historic repertory movie palaces I was fortunate to access so readily. A fine feature of San Francisco living for a young art college student. Carrie was steeped in obscure eastern European films. I never attended with her, but would hear about it in the studio.

It was a big deal when Andrei Rublev was shown in its most complete state ever in the US that year. I went with Joe to the nearby **York** theater. We started to leave after the first half, thinking it was over, it's a lengthy one, rich with historic scope, with an intermission.

As the years progressed, there were more Cacophony events enjoyed thoroughly. I loved her poetry reading events in fitting spots around San Francisco, and midnight walk events.

I became increasingly involved, which expanded, and she was the catalyst. This includes meeting extraordinary friends of hers.

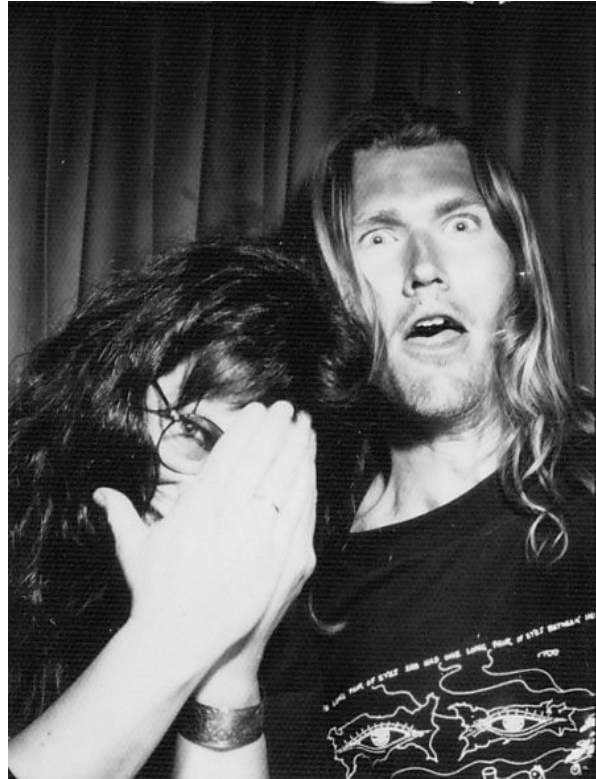
1990, a springtime memory

She suggested we go to the ocean to burn a few small items to purge them. I chose a sketchbook I didn't like. Her items were mysteriously wrapped in a veil. A sunny day. We climbed over some rocks beyond the cave at **Sutro Baths**, to a small sand clearing. I found some beached wooden beams to prop up the items above the water, then lit them on fire atop their makeshift platforms. Carrie had a video cam, and soon after starting to film our flaming alters, a wave crashes in and swept it all out to sea!

We had a hearty laugh over that. Then at the **Cliff House** we indulged in a tradition of hers— to get our pictures taken in the photo booth!



*Musee Mechanique, with Carrie.
I'm holding cassettes of Robyn Hitchcock.*



Graduation time, I attended the ceremony at Masonic, cheering her and other mutual friends. [I had two more classes to go before my BFA]

I think she went to Poland that summer of 1990?

After her return, for several years through the 90's, we'd meet at Cacophony events, art exhibitions, and at every Robyn Hitchcock show! [I was rapidly a dedicated completist of his music, finding scores of unofficial live tapes to copy] And of course many memorable parties at the legendary 1907 Golden Gate! That next Halloween [1991?] at 1907, she was truly channeling the intensity of a barbaric Klingon!

By later in the 90's and into the 00's, she was briefly in LA for work, on the east coast for the Masters program, then Europe to teach.

The last Robyn show I recall seeing her at before leaving was summer of 1999, for the free show at **Open Mind Music** [record store on Divisadero], where he was signing copies of *Jewels for Sophia*. I recall, next in line, was her telling Robyn to make it out to Ethyl Ketone. He replies, "*Ethyl Ketone, how sinister*" She was tickled by that!

Flash to 2008, when I had to move from the San Anselmo house, devastated by divorce. She visited when my brother Brian was around, while I was looking for an affordable storage space. She immediately recommended her trusty storage rental service in **Cloverdale**, where her stuff was safe for years while in Europe, and so affordable that it's worth the distance. Perfect! So I set it all up in a timely manner, and off I went. A really helpful recommendation.

Lake Sonoma astronomy

I would continue to bring my large telescope to Lake Sonoma for epic astronomy nights, which I loved, and got there every other month on average. When Carrie was living in Sonoma county, she joined me a few times. We'd appreciate all of the various assortments of star asterisms, forming interesting compositions.

Artists in observational mode.

One night she brought family, which was great fun!

2009, good mutual friend Bruce McKay and I took her graphic design class at **CCSF**! Bruce was the one who instigated this good move, during a limbo period of unemployment. She was a natural teacher! We were amazed by her insight and knowledge set in motion.

[Half a year later I became an educator, which I never thought I'd ever have the capacity for, but I loved it!]

Everyone got busier over the next few years. Carrie living in a tough part of East Oakland. I saw her a few times a year, at Sebs parties, Winstons gallery exhibitions, and Robyn Hitchcock shows. I watched her place for a few days, but her totally insane cat would not let me sleep there, so I resorted to day visiting, feed cat, watch the place, it was in a rough section of town, under the BART tracks! But a large space for an artist.

2014 She had a rough stretch looking for work after the CCSF gig folded. I tried to get her into the Academy, but she unfortunately didn't fit their needs at that time, and that put her in a cynical mood. It must've been hard to be that highly qualified, but not what they needed.

Meanwhile, she was highly involved in the Cacophony book project with John and Kevin...which while a labor of love, she complained that it was a stressful process.

I rarely saw her over the past few years, but at the book release parties, and at Sebs parties in Oakland at his **House of Undying Fun**.

We had a really nice Robyn Hitchcock show in spring of 2015 at the **GAMH!** she gave Robyn a copy of the Cacophony book. A point of pride for her, and Mr. Law!

Brother Brian recovered from the double lung transplant! So when he visited, Seb generously threw a party in his honor! Carrie certainly made it, going back years with Bri, and always concerned with his challenged health.

The last few times I saw her was in 2016. At Ralph Reeds art show in Piedmont, and then at my 45rpm party in Oakland. [She brought a Bobby Darin 45.] That was a fun day! Though I was too preoccupied with activities to catch up.

Brian passed away in July of 2017, which was absolutely devastating. She wrote some fine words in his honor, on the funeral home tribute page.

Soon after, hearing the reports of her illness in 2017 sounded rough. I should have made more effort to visit, but declined with my increased disability to get around.

The hopes were around the success rate of liver transplants...with no idea of the magnitude of the problem involved.

And now, as John Law expressed in his exceptionally thoughtful tribute, it's unconceivable that she's gone. It's online here:

<https://johnwlaw.com/2018/01/25/carrie-galbraith-enters-the-zone-for-the-last-time-photos-and-links-to-follow/>

All of that incredible experience, character, knowledge and interests, wiped out....and much too young.

When her dear friend Amelia died tragically at 50 years old, she said *"Why is she gone while Dick Cheney is still alive?"*

I echo that sentiment.

I would hope she knew how much she influenced and improved the lives of others. From her students, to the difference she made for me over the years. Heck, there is a chance I would have never met several life changing friends, if

not for her warming me to Cacophony all those years ago.

Now it seems the most genuine form of tribute are the recording of these memories and impressions. There are more, but meanwhile this anecdotal summary brings her to life in my mind.

Thanks, dear Ethyl!

**- Svensk Runestone [Dean Gustafson], mostly written in 2021,
with fine tuning and additions made in June 2024**