



*A Good Word for Carol Pelt*

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I will always remember Carol Pelt wearing a red hat. I know the style was a relatively new fashion for her, and one necessitated by misfortune, but there was something ironically right about it.

It was not a fashion statement, and though Carol was beautiful, she wasn't either. She was always about doing the right thing for the right reason. It didn't matter what everyone else was doing – who else was wearing a hat, or not, or why. There wasn't a pretentious bone in her practical, no non-sense body. She was a simple gal from Georgia. She had not “outgrow her raisin’,” as that term is used. An affectionate, life-long bond with her sister, Linda – all those banana muffins and conversations on the big, back porch, is proof of that. But she had grown beyond the bounds of cultural and religious stereotypes and strictures, far beyond the limitations and obligations of a world that too many have yet to glimpse. Diversity and inclusion were her passions and because of the way she lived that passion, we are a little closer to that world becoming a reality for all.

Carol didn't like people telling her what to think or how. When Ron came home from an Air Force course on racial diversity and sensitivity training, and began telling his Georgia girl

about all he had learned and how different it was from some of the prejudices they had been raised with, he says, well... Carol got there before he did!

In a college summer she moved to Yellowstone National Park to work and explore, and that westward expansion opened her eyes. She came home and her mother frowned on a movie she went to see... it was the last summer Carol spent at home!

One of her kids said she was “pridefully plain,” but that can’t be a bad thing because it just meant she loved people and animals and experiences, not things. The hat was ironically flamboyant! It was a paradoxical symbol of all that was beautiful about her. She wasn’t loud and gregarious, taken to large crowds, but she was always surrounded by important people: friends and family. And children.

She was a creature of habit. And she had good habits. She was habitually thoughtful and kind and caring, and she always told the truth but not in a cruel way. She was prone to order the same item from the menu at the restaurants she knew, and she make the best blackberry cobbler, with made-from-scratch crust her family regularly put in your mouths. And it didn’t matter how much the fish entre cost, or the décor of the establishment... Carol was going to put catchup on it! She was determined to work hard and well, and the countless stiches she has put into dozens of t-shirt quilts and prayer shawls and other projects speak not just of her sewing habit, but of her consistent faith. When she sewed she was “in the zone.” You could see it on her face – that outward expression of the kind of prayers she offered from her hands to someone else’s heart.

She liked plain clothes and catchup on her seafood... but she was Ron’s hardest and best art critic (and her eye was always right), and she was an avowed fan of classical music and good

literature and movies. She did not suffer fools and this included the three men in her house when they laughed at some raucous, silly comedy. “So stupid...” she would say, with a little loving condescension in her voice! But when she laughed... Carol always cried. There was nothing on the surface with Carol. No pretention, no callous insensitivity, no frivolity. What Carol Pelt did, like laugh, came out of the depth of her heart!

Years ago a boy from Georgia was going through the cafeteria line with a college friend, and the prettiest girl he'd ever seen offered him a choice of broccoli or asparagus behind a calico dress and a cautious smile. He asked her out, and she accepted, though only on the condition that they “not make a habit of it!” He fell in love with those brown eyes that turned green when she got mad at him.

They were the eyes that raised Ron's two children, eyes that saw what her mind knew and her heart always believe, that children ought to be given the support and freedom and love to “be who they are.” And they were the eyes that welcomed a new son into the family. A son she learned to call “my sweet Mike,” but not before giving an Italian Catholic boy from New York the careful scrutiny that is the privilege of the eyes of every good, southern mother.

Those brown eyes were the light that opened into the soul that tethered Ron to this good earth. She was his anchor, and he was her sail. They stitched a life together through the joys and serendipities that lifted them and the realities and commitments that kept them grounded. Forty-seven years ago she said “let's not make a habit of it”... and they did not. Because marriage is not a habit. It is a lifetime of love, acted in intentional, thoughtful, deliberate ways.

She wore that hat because she had to, but like everything else that came her way, the ups and downs, the dreams and realities, what she did because she had to do, she did thoughtfully and with intention... and that habit made her beautiful.