

MARCIA CARLISLE, TEACHER AND ACTIVIST (1946-2005)

The Academy community was saddened by the death last fall of history instructor Marcia Carlisle. After many years of living and working with a debilitating disease, she passed away, quietly and peacefully on Tuesday, October 18, at Concord Hospice, surrounded by her friends and family. She had been writing recommendations for her students only three days earlier.

Carlisle became a member of the Academy's history department in 1989 and was known for her devotion to classroom teaching. She was a founder and a director of the Exeter Humanities Institute, a weeklong residential summer program that introduces high school teachers from all over the country to the Harkness philosophy.

For the past several years she had organized the school's Martin Luther King Day activities. In that role she brought dozens of speakers and performers to the Academy and helped shape the Academy community's understanding of diversity.

Additionally, she served as adviser to the Student Council, and was a voice for student points of view at many faculty meetings. The current adviser to the student council, instructor of mathematics Jeffrey Ibbotson, spoke about Carlisle at a meeting of Student Council following her death. His words paint an accurate picture of this devoted teacher.

"Marcia Carlisle was the chief (and often sole) adviser to Student Council for 13 years. She did so out of an abiding belief in the rights of students. She was always one to challenge authority, whether vested in a single individual or institutional in form, and she challenged all of us to respect the rights of the underprivileged and silent minorities in our midst. She had a ferocious commitment to justice and was always willing to follow this cause to wherever it led her. As great as her expectations were for others, she expected no less of herself. She lived a truly authentic life—she thought carefully about everything and lived in accord with her principles. She was ruthlessly honest and lived life 'close to the bone.' Her courage was legendary—both in regard to her principles and with respect to the devastating disease that eventually claimed her life.

"But there was more to Marcia than just her quest for justice. When I was a new assistant adviser to Student Council she showed me every kindness and was always willing to take some of her (swiftly vanishing) time to answer whatever questions I had. She cared for the student members of each Executive Board and constantly inquired after their health. In embodying such kindness, she showed the compassion that lay within her 'moral toughness.' She was one of a kind. When she heard of last year's Student Council victory in getting the attendance policy changed, she greeted me in

the hallway with an upraised fist and the words 'Power to the people!' She was truly a friend to students and the best kind of role model for the compassion and moral strength needed to make government of any kind work. We will all miss her greatly."

Speaking at an assembly just after her death, Acting Principal Thomas Hassan said,

"Ms. Carlisle and I came to the Academy in the same year, and I have been privileged to collaborate with her since then. I worked closely with her on the Academy's efforts to make our campus more accessible for people of all abilities. She was a real champion of these efforts.

"She knew firsthand how hard it was to get around the Exeter campus when one is disabled, and she wanted to educate our community about many issues around disabilities. She was also someone with an unparalleled sense of equity and justice. Ms. Carlisle was a woman who possessed tremendous intellect, compassion and energy. Despite her debilitating and degenerative illness over the years, she was determined and remained independent until the end."



History instructor Marcia Carlisle "lived a truly authentic life," says her colleague Jeff Ibbotson.

In requesting a moment of silence at that Assembly, Lawrence Smith, chair of the history department and a close friend of Carlisle's, urged students to "remember this strong teacher, this strong woman, and to think about and take away with you some of her belief that education is a privilege, and should not be wasted. Think about and take away an understanding of the advantages and the opportunities around you. Think about and take away some of her strength, and the lesson how, when life seems unfair to you and provides some adversity, you can fight it, thrive on it, overcome it, stare it down, become a stronger person because of it and not let it beat you. Think about and take away with you some of the spirit of Marcia Carlisle."

Carlisle received her B.A. from the University of North Dakota, an M.A. and M.S. from Indiana University and her Ph.D. from Rutgers University. She was a recipient of the Brown Family Faculty Fund Award and the Rupert Radford '15 Faculty Fellowship Award. She lived in Wheelwright and Lamont halls.

This year's Martin Luther King Day celebration was dedicated to Carlisle's memory in recognition of her commitment to justice and equality. A celebration of her life, work and many friendships took place on January 15 in the Academy Library.