William Wallace Carson
Journey Home
William Wallace Carson: Journey Home

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Introduction
I never really knew Wally Carson. Certainly I worked closely with him for over a year and I had seen him in the University Libraries, on campus and around Boulder for many years. But I really didn’t know him. I learnt much more about Wally after his death from meeting and talking with his family and many friends. What I learnt about Wally explained many things about him which I had noticed but not noticed. Wally was, like all of us but even more so, an incredibly complex person. Those who knew Wally, either in passing or as a close friend, felt that they had made a special friend known only to themselves. It is for this reason that I and many others have felt his loss more than we thought we would.

For me, Wally was always someone there -- someone to count on in times of need, someone to talk to about problems and concerns. Wally was always a very private person -- personal details about himself didn’t seem to matter in what we were doing. His was a calming presence that left room for emotions and yet time for reflection and contemplation.

Wally delighted in his job in Special Collections. He appeared to undergo a transformation after he began working in the Department. His sense of color, design and harmony showed in the successful exhibits he did. Wally enjoyed working with the people who used the Department and was invariably courteous and helpful. He took extra steps to find more information for the Department’s users and to get a better understanding of the collections we had, particularly the mountaineering collection. Wally clearly understood the goals and the purpose of the Department and excelled at promoting it. I think Wally saw his position in Special Collections as the epitome of his professional ambitions -- not in charge but partaking and playing a role in the interesting and exciting things that the Department does. Wally had many plans and ideas for what he could do in his job.

I realize now that I only knew one facet of Wally and his life. I am glad it was one he enjoyed, even if for too short a time, and that we shared it together.

Nora J. Quinlan

Wally Carson first took a painting class from me in 1981. Officially, that relationship lasted until 1987 when Wally earned his Master of Fine Arts Degree here at the University of Colorado. As with most good student/teacher relationships the order of “student and teacher” became interchangeable between Wally and myself. We were also good friends.

Wally and I lived on “common ground” as a shared passion rather than a simple metaphor. Wally loved the ground he walked on and the mountains he lived under and whatever fresh air he could breathe. We had both become landscape painters out of simple and natural momentum and our friendship was like that. But Wally wrote poetry also, and it was always about the Grand Canyon.

My earliest memory of the Grand Canyon was on a cross-country hitch-hike trip. The driver pulled off at every other overlook and returned to his car as quickly as his instamatic camera fired. I gave up my ride to gain a better experience of the canyon but the whole experience became mine, the beauty and the indifference.

Just possibly, Wally Carson and that driver with his instamatic represented the breadth of human character. The driver knew the Canyon as a consumer. It was sufficient to him. Wally experienced it as a life-long lover and that is sufficient also, or would have been.

Wally established a tradition of returning every year to hike in the Grand Canyon during his time off work. Wally was as methodical as anyone I have ever known and never wasted anything, so each trip was planned in detail except for trail to trail connections that were not known to exist. Wally was a supremely (and serenely) confident human being and he relished the challenges he set. He called the Canyon “home.” He would say “I’m going home.” It was the orifice and sinew of the earth he loved. His stories were wonderful. Now I wish I had listened more intently and could remember them all. What I do remember is that those stories proved the value of life.

Happy trails, Wally.

Chuck Forsman
A letter from Wally

Since 1973, Wally made an annual pilgrimage to the Grand Canyon.

This is a letter he wrote before leaving on his last trip in June 1990.
I am going away for awhile . . . I am going to go far far away . . . far away to a very different sense of place . . . far away to a very different sense of time . . . I am going to go on a pilgrimage . . . on a journey . . . an adventure . . . an expedition . . . into and thru some of the most remote backcountry wilderness areas of western Grand Canyon . . . In yet another sense, a sense which is to me most true, most genuine and most meaningful, I am going home . . . I am going home . . .

On June 15th I fly to Salt Lake City, take a bus to near Saint George, Utah, hitchhike thru Zion National Park to Fredonia, Arizona to somewhere along the Toroweap Valley road in the remote Arizona Strip country. Then I start walking . . . there are no vehicles . . . the twenty or so miles to the head of Cottonwood Canyon, a tributary canyon to the Tuckup Canyon, itself one of many remote side canyons on the north side of the Colorado River . . . out there . . . out there . . . out there . . . pure wilderness . . . I will be in ecstasy . . .

Four days just to get there . . . and then my twelve day hike starts . . . down down down into the depths of Grand Canyon. I'll take about two days, I hope, following Cottonwood and Tuckup to the Colorado River. Along the way I'll encounter several severe obstacle problems to solve like impassable dry falls, large rockslides, chutes and plunge pools. Although at some . . . and solo . . . I will be in ecstasy . . . . Then five days following the Colorado River west for some sixteen river miles to Lava Falls. For those places where I'll be pinched out by sheer cliffs, I will float the river on a flotation mattress . . . more risk . . . for the river is perilously cold, swift, and powerful. The weather will be clear skies, full sun and warm . . . that's a euphemism for hot. Then about three days at Lava Falls, the largest, most powerful and most feared rapids on the Colorado River. Then two days to scramble up and out the Lava Falls trail, which is nothing more than a steep and very active slide of volcanic rubble, to Toroweap Valley and the Strip country once again . . .

Because last summer's "little canyon adventure" down the remote North Bass route was so physically arduous, psychologically rigorous, and threaded with unnerving exposure, risk, and stress, I was thinking this past fall that I'd just plan a comparatively easy stroll into relatively known, accessible and safer Canyon backcountry. But no . . . thinking about it then . . . I knew that I wouldn't be satisfied or happy with the easier or safer beaten path. I knew that I actually wanted the physical and psychological challenge of going into the very heart, the very core, of the innermost depths of both the Canyon wilderness and of myself . . . that's just the kind of person I am . . . so . . . that's why Tuckup to Toroweap via the river this summer . . .

Once on the North Rim again, a second transcanyon hike, this one of about six days, will take me down the North Kaibab trail to the river, then along the Tonto trail to Granite Rapids, then out the Hermit trail to the south rim. In comparison to the Tuckup to Toroweap adventure, this hike will be a lark. Along the way, though, Horn Creek Canyon has an impassable dry falls preventing access to Horn Creek Rapids, one of the most powerful rapids along the entire river. I would love to camp right by those rapids . . . hmmm . . . I am going to try to find a way around or down those falls . . . another obstacle problem but in this case a rather daunting one . . . oh well . . .

But ultimately when I ask myself, Why? . . . Why do I go? Why do I do this? . . . I just smile . . . . . . . for in spite of a little physical arduousness, a little psychological rigor, and all associated risks and attendant perils, the emotional and aesthetic and spiritual rewards far outweigh any pains to get there. Exhilarating freedom and sheer ecstasy, ineffable beauty and romantic enchantment, awesome sublimity and aesthetic humility are just some feelings and experiences which come to mind. And it is for these very feelings that I go: it is for these very experiences that I do this . . . and have been doing every year since 1973. I am smiling now . . . for I am going on another pilgrimage . . . I am going home . . . I am going home . . . I am going home . . .

I'll be back in Boulder on July 9th . . .
Poems

Wally kept notebooks of his visits to the Grand Canyon in which he wrote of his travels, hikes, wanderings and impressions. He also made sketches and notations for future paintings. Among the writings are the notes from which he wrote his poems.

These are a short selection of the poems.
A hot summer sun blazes overhead
The inner canyon heats to a furnace
Stones on the Tonto shimmer and bake
Relentlessly this trail stretches on and on

No water, no shade, not even a mirage
There's no relief from the blasting heat
Cremation Canyon is a searing crucible
And this desert ass just plods on and on

Deep, deep in the canyon
I'm just sitting, just watching
Just watching the river flow
Swirls of emeralds, mirrors of jade
Just sitting, just watching
Just watching the river flow
Thoughts and river peacefully pass by
Just sitting, just watching
Just watching the river flow
A timeless peace, a silent harmony
Just sitting, just watching
Just watching the river flow
Timeless days follow peaceful nights
What is time? What is timelessness?
I just laugh and sip my tea
Nankoweap is a good place to spend some time

The sun rises in the east and sets in the west
The moon waxes and slowly wanes
While rocks sleep, the river flows
Nankoweap is a good place to spend some time

With outstretched wings I am aloft in the canyon
I am the raven, the raven of Grand Canyon

With feathered fingers I play on winds of the canyon
I am the raven, the raven of Grand Canyon

With cawks of glee I dive into bottomless chasms
I am the raven, the raven of Grand Canyon

With uplifting joy I rise to dizzying heights
I am the raven, the raven of Grand Canyon

On wings of free spirit I soar over the canyon
I am the raven, the raven of Grand Canyon

In unfeathered freedom I am boundless joy
I am the raven, the raven of Grand Canyon
Precipitous cliffs drop away into emptiness
ToroweapToroweap

A gaping void, a yawning chasm, stuns my senses
ToroweapToroweap

A river appears so far below, its roaring thunder drowns in silence
ToroweapToroweap

Ravens dive in this abyss and disappear out of sight
ToroweapToroweap

I try to say just one word and only gasp at thin air
ToroweapToroweap

At the brink of sheer disbelief I can only gape in awe
ToroweapToroweap
ToroweapToroweap

Under starry skies in celestial haze
And with full moon on the rise
Hindu Amphitheater is suffused in unearthly light

What is dream? What is reality?
Why this, this interfusion
Of the subtle and sublime?

Answer this and I'll follow you for life

Engulfing stillness
Deafening silence
A wild burro brays
Hermit Rapids roars thru the night
And in the creek a chorus of frogs
The rising moon floods the inner gorge
Canyon serenity envelopes all

This night . . . is my last night
In the canyon . . . by my river
But no sigh . . . and no regret
For here . . . I make my home
For here . . . I am . . . at home
Obituary

Wally was very methodical and meticulous in many ways. He had his affairs in order and had written his obituary leaving the place, cause and date to be filled in after death.
William Wallace Carson of 933 Portland Place, Boulder died August 4, 1990 in a climbing accident in Rocky Mountain National Park. He was 42.

He was born June 19, 1948, in Indianapolis, Indiana, the son of Paul Thomas and Mary Frances Hurt.

He came to Boulder from St. Clair, Michigan and was a library staffperson in Norlin Library, University of Colorado Libraries, Boulder.

In 1970 Mr. Carson graduated from DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana with a Bachelor of Arts degree in physics. He later served as a First Lieutenant and Naval Flight Officer in the United States Marine Corps.

In 1987 Mr. Carson graduated summa cum laude from the University of Colorado at Boulder with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in studio arts. He had a one-person exhibition of his paintings, "Images of Celestial Light," in the University Memorial Center Fine Arts Gallery.

He was an artist and a poet, and he loved the Grand Canyon. Since 1973 he made annual pilgrimages to Grand Canyon and went on long treks through the backcountry wilderness.

Mr. Carson was a lifetime member of Journey to the East, and the Company of Walkers. He was a member of Friends of the Libraries, Rare Books Associates, and Grand Canyon Natural History Association.

He is survived by his parents of St. Clair, Michigan; two brothers, James Hurt of Kettering, Ohio, and David Hurt of Fort Collins, Colorado; one sister, Patricia Eppley of Port Huron, Michigan; and many good friends. Two brothers preceded him in death.

No services will be held. The remains will be cremated by Howe Mortuary in Boulder. The cremains will be scattered in Grand Canyon by a friend.
Checklist

A listing of Wally’s works at the University Libraries, University of Colorado at Boulder.
### William Wallace Carson: Journey Home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Media</th>
<th>H x L x W&quot;</th>
<th>Designees</th>
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<td>S 87</td>
<td>Oil on canvas</td>
<td>60 x 60</td>
<td>Honors Department</td>
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<td>1989</td>
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<td>Suzanne Larsen</td>
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<td>Acrylic on canvas</td>
<td>48 x 24</td>
<td>David Kohl</td>
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<td>1989</td>
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<td>39.5 x 39.5</td>
<td>Suzanne Larson</td>
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<td>Southwest Moonrise</td>
<td>[84]</td>
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<td>36 x 48</td>
<td>John Dziadecki</td>
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<td>Vishnu Schist, Grand Canyon</td>
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<td>Jonathan Machen</td>
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