

# Stephen Book Remembers Carlin

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George Carlin's long time acting coach speaks at his memorial

In 1985, George decided he wanted to do films and felt it was time to become as good an actor as he was a comic.

He joined my acting class and for two years attended every Tuesday night. I also became his private coach for the next fifteen years helping him prepare his movie roles.

Being a great comic, he already had the natural instinct for creating funny characters and knowing how to give them their own voice. However, it immediately became clear to everyone in the class that George was absolutely committed to learning a technique for acting and completely uninterested in being the class clown or star. He was in a new world and fearlessly accepted the challenge of not going for the laugh.

Then he was offered *Outrageous Fortune* with Bette Midler and Shelley Long. He would play a down-on-his-heels con man passing himself off as an Indian to fleece tourists out west. We worked for days outside of class in a collaborative relationship that was brand new to him. From this we developed a process that we would use over and over again for the subsequent movies.

George discovered that if he could improvise in character he knew he had it and could bring him to life.

One day I drove up to the house for a session and he was waiting outside the gate in character. He immediately started treating me like a tourist, as he improvised a whole sales pitch to get me to buy the entire Pacific Palisades... and a horse. He was so funny in his seriousness that I couldn't hold up my end of this unexpected improv and I just caved.

I was embarrassed that I couldn't keep up. I was hysterical at what he was doing. I was proud I taught it to him and I was aware that George Carlin is an actor.

I would soon get another chance to keep up with him. Like typical George, he raised the stakes. For the next project we decided to go for a walk in my neighborhood in Beachwood Canyon with him in character. We would encounter strangers and I would start a conversation and George joined in, in character!

Imagine that. He got so good people had no idea they were talking to George Carlin. One time, he is an old drunk cowboy scout, another, he is a lonely gay man. To this day my neighbor wants to set him up with her brother, Doug.

George was proudest of two roles, neither of which was a comedy: *Prince of Tides* with Barbra Streisand where he played her gay neighbor. His work was so good in that that I always thought if he had only one additional scene he would have gotten a supporting actor Oscar nomination. The second role was in the mini series, *Streets of Laredo*, his absolute best work as an actor.

The NY Times said the film had a "wonderful collection of characters, major and minor, with good guys and nasty varmints. Stealing nearly every scene is George Carlin."

I will miss working with my friend, George Carlin, the actor.

I'll leave you with one of my favorite moments I had with George and it has nothing to do with acting.

I was at Cedars Hospital for a procedure, an endoscopy, the one where they put the scope down your throat and take pictures.

I'm in the pre & post op room, laying on the gurney with the IV hooked up. I'm a little groggy and nervous, waiting to be wheeled in for the procedure.

Then I hear, "HEY STEPHEN!" I look up and it's George. He's being wheeled out from a procedure.

They place him next to me and we chat for a while. They come for me and wheel me down the length of the long hallway to the procedure room. As I'm being wheeled through the doors, George calls out from the other end of the room, "Stephen, Make sure they wash the instruments! I just had a COLONOSCOPY!!!"

I'm going to miss my friend. I am proud of the work we did together and I feel privileged to have known him.