

An Interview With Camilla Rose

In to our midst has come **Camilla Rose**. One rarely encounters a person who has packed the experiences of 3 – 4 lifetimes into just her single span of years, so when such a person appears, you know if you're lucky you'll probably hear a pretty good tale. So pause and listen to a most wondrous, and most human, story. Camilla has recently come to Portland, has joined PFS and volunteers on the Concert Committee. Here's a portion of the story that she was generous enough to share with me.

Vision

Vision plays a big part in Camilla's story, both external and internal vision, as you will discover. She was born with a constricted field of vision, which of course wasn't recognized by her as other than normal. The lack of peripheral vision meant hand-eye activities like sports and things at a distance were difficult-to-impossible. So she dealt with it unknowingly. For example, unable to view the sheet music and conductor at the same time, she ended up memorizing the music to enable her to watch the conductor, from high school through college. She was fitted with glasses in the 8th grade; yet, it wasn't until age 30 that her lack of peripheral vision was identified. That revelation must have put a lot of pieces of life in a new perspective.

December 2012, while traveling she discovered herself in Flagstaff, Arizona and was preparing to record a CD and become a resident. While walking into a store she collapsed and woke up in the hospital to discover a near complete loss of sight. Responding to that life-altering event, she elected to move to Portland based on access to Casey Eye Clinic, the reputation of Portland's mass transit system and its strong music scene. A new chapter in her life is beginning.

Born to Entertain

Born in Santa Rosa, California on a chicken ranch, in the early 60's her family relocated to Southern California where they spent a lot of time on her Grandpa Kern's chicken ranch - yes more chickens. As a teenager in Silicon Valley, she spent her summers working for her maternal grandfather who was a sign painter in the West Coast's largest carnival that ran all the west coast midways at county fairs. Grandpa Burke was a multi-talented man who operated numerous businesses in his life, even a speakeasy, and excelled at painting which included everything from midway canvas posters, to fun houses and carousel horses. Working the carry life had to teach lessons in how to entertain the public as well as the lessons of the range of human behavior.

Camilla recounts her childhood achievements in a staccato pace and with obvious delight. She began singing music in kindergarten and started performing magic shows in the 2nd grade. In the 4rd grade, she began playing trumpet followed by trombone, French Horn, Baritone and Tuba. In the 7th grade, she was teaching art to elementary students. In the 8th grade she took up the String Bass and within 6 months was teaching adults' using the Suzuki String Method. She was actively involved in an endless list of organizations and events associated with music and music-related activities.

She lived life as an adventure, to be lived with passion, which continued during post-high school life attending college, working full time, promoting/organizing and entertaining. As before, the list of achievements is staggering. Two years of college studying music, toil for money, back to school to gain degrees in Social Work and Music Therapy, concurrently developing programs serving those with physical & mental disabilities and others in need. In the meantime, she developed a 135-agency coalition to obtain housing and food for the homeless. Then created a public education program reaching 12,000 children in a one-week Annual Fire Prevention and Earthquake Safety education event, utilizing Juvenile Court School teenagers, many of whom were members of street gangs, to present the lessons using a variety of performing arts on multiple stages.

After a few years of developing Social Service Agency programs, Camilla created an Entertainment & Education company, which provided entertainers, musicians, games, team-building activities, and entertainment to corporate clients, and public schools with programs on mandated topics that could both entertain and teach. Among all this creative output, she furthered her own range by becoming a certified professional clown, building on her magic skills.

The results from creating the countywide education program brought her to the attention of the City of San Jose. Camilla became the first and youngest Event Manager for the new San Jose Convention Center engaged in managing 300 diverse events a year.

Camilla discovered that the school districts she grew up in had lacked music programs for 20 years. She decided to leave the City of San Jose and set up music programs for the San Jose & Sunnyvale California Public School Districts. The music programs she developed and instructed were reaching as many as 1,500 students weekly. She taught Band, Choir, Orchestra, Music Theory as well as the musical instruction on 14 different instruments.

The common themes in the list of undertakings are creative zeal, the design of programs that teach => empower => then challenge the student to become a teacher, a leverage of effort to maximize reach and a promoter's recognition of the importance of entertainment.

In Camilla's early 20's, she also became an Entertainers' Entertainer: through referrals and connections she entertained visiting notables and their families who were performing in the Bay Area drawing on the skills of magic, singing and mostly imagination. Consequently she can name drop with the best, if required, dropping names like: The Rolling Stones, Clint Eastwood, Neal Young, BB King and so forth.

After the late great John Denver died in 1997, Camilla decided to help carry on John's music and spirit. From December 1997 – December 2009, Camilla performed John Denver Tribute Concerts across the world, which included performing seven times in Las Vegas as the John Denver Tribute Artist and several shows in England with John's guitar player. At one point he even had a George Burns look & sound alike partner. The show was the only John Denver & George Burns Tribute Show in the world and was called "Oh God! They're Back!"

Up to this point, all Camilla's life was lived in a man's body with the name Steve Kern. Even without a costume, Steve looked exactly like John Denver and seemed to share a sort

of parallel set of life experiences. Life contained fame, wealth, family, peer recognition, world travel – the highest of the highs.

Time of Change – Life's Greatest Adventure

But the time came at age 52 to go through the transformation into a woman's body. Camilla relates that “for a person to transition late in life is usually brought on by life or death event.” And as elevated as were the highs, the lows that led to that decision, and afterwards, brought new depths of agony. This transformation has meant the loss of many family, friends and colleagues. And, it's clear from her story that there have been, and are, times of isolation and loneliness that none of us would want to experience.

Now and To Come

Five pursuits form the core of Camilla's life: Music, Nature, Children, Spirituality and Friendships. In pursuit of serving these values she uses the tools of rigorous discipline, an entrepreneurial spirit and perspective, abilities at Music, Education, Events, Sales, Marketing and Community Development. With a smile and giggle, she adds “It's also important to have fun in life.”

Her outgoing nature and sense of justice draw her to prominence. Within only a few months in Portland, she was invited to be one of the representatives of the blind community to work with Legislators in Salem. And, more recently, was requested to perform at Portland City Hall, once again representing the Blind community for the American Disabilities Act (ADA) Celebration.

Camilla is the first transsexual in the history of the Western Music Association (WMA). And, is apparently the only professional trans musician in the world performing Cowboy and Western music concerts. While able to interact comfortably with diverse groups across the spectrum of all types, she's encountered individually dispensed abuse and discrimination all too often as a trans.

Vision has several aspects. A lack of eyesight seems to have heightened her in-sight and her view of a spiritual life. All too often “coincidences” lead to bigger things and connections with people entering and leaving one's life provide unexpected guidance. As she turned 40 some 15 years ago and was transforming her life, people began crossing her path that were the top figures in their fields of Music, Medicine, Mathematics and Science. Throughout her life events have seemed to place her in situations where she has become an advocate for a “group” she can speak for, or is a part of. “Frankly, it's sometimes tough being the point person for every new movement or cause.” Yet, Camilla has always considered herself a contract worker for God. She relates that, “Our deal is, He will take care of me and I'll do what He directs me to.”

Camilla's (aka Camilla Rose) plan is to pursue her musical career and build on her recently released CD “Songs From the Prairie.” Pursuit of the positive has always been and will continue to be an integral part of Camilla's life. Through her circumstances (more than choice) she represents: The Blind, The Trans, Women, The Western Music and Music Communities. She believes she has the responsibility to do so honorably, which is reflected in all aspects of her life. Camilla says, “People need hope and sometimes it's hard to find

stories of hope,” so she is dedicated to the principle that one person can make a positive difference in this world.

To learn more about Camilla, refer to her well-designed web page CamillaRoseLive.com and you can hear her new CD at soundcloud.com/camillaroselive. Camilla is a strong solo performer, writes a lot of her material and sings in a strong, clear voice. The CD is well worth a listen.