

Carl A. Yirka passed away at his home in Strafford, Vermont on April 4, 2020, almost two years after being diagnosed with Neuroendocrine tumor (NET), a rare aggressive cancer. Carl was born on February 28, 1952 in Cleveland, Ohio, to Marijanka and Branko A. Yirka, Croatians who had recently arrived as refugees fleeing post-WWII Yugoslavia. Carl's father, who knew seven languages and had partially completed two PhDs, initially worked as a stock boy at American Greetings. Later, Branko taught at St. Joseph's Catholic High School where Carl attended and played on the varsity football team. He and his dad spent many hours commuting together and developed a strong bond. Carl also had a love of languages, and he left Cleveland and headed off to New York City to study at Columbia University where he majored in English and dreamed of becoming a Slavic language professor.

He took a detour when his beloved daughter, Julie, came into the world—he decided to go to library school at Case Western Reserve University, School of Library Science, following in the footsteps of his two sisters, Margaret (Gretica) and Manja. Carl chose law as his specialty and worked first at the Hamilton County Law Library in Cincinnati, Ohio, then in libraries at Northern Kentucky Law School and at Northwestern University School of Law, Evanston, Illinois. Carl and his first wife Valerie and their two children Julie and Adam moved to Bloomington, Indiana, where he attended law school. After obtaining his JD degree, Carl and family went back to New York City, where he passed his NY state bar and became Associate Director at New York Law School Library. Eventually he was offered the directorship of Vermont Law School's Julien and Virginia Cornell Library, where he served for almost thirty years.

At VLS, in addition to being chief administrator of the library and professor of legal research and comparative law, Carl was, from 1997 to 2005, project director of the VLS-Petrozavodsk State University Law-Faculty Partnership. He and his VLS colleagues were charged with developing a legal clinic, an environmental law center, and a law library at Petrozavodsk State University in Karelia, Russia. An accomplished traveler and fluent Russian speaker, Carl brought numerous students and professors safely back and forth between Russia and Vermont. He and his companions survived many Russian adventures, including a near sinking in the White Sea on the passenger ship, *Kapitan*

*Mityagin* while en route to the Solovki Island monastery, a story that he loved recalling with great embellishment for the family.

Carl received the American Association of Law Libraries Spectrum Article of the Year Award in 2008 for “The Yirka Question and Yirka’s Answer: What should law libraries stop doing in order to address higher priority initiatives?,” in which he urged law library directors to think creatively to support scholarship and other institutional goals.

In 2005, Carl became a Fulbright Scholar in Croatia, teaching U.S. Constitutional Law at the University of Rijeka Faculty of Law. Carl and his second wife Micki Colbeck spent time living in Rijeka, where he taught using the Socratic method which, unlike European styles of lecturing, centers on student engagement and discussions of ideas. Micki and Carl visited Croatia many times over their 22 years together, exploring the natural beauty and connecting with family.

Being a city boy at heart, Carl thought he would only spend a few years here, but Vermont became home for him. He and Micki settled into their old house, which sits atop a steep hill sloping down to the Ompomponoosuc River, eating meals on the back porch well into winter. They helped Julie raise her three children, Bridget, Isabella, and Kristov, who became the joys of their lives.

Carl was an intrepid biker, every day heading out on the back roads wearing his iconic lime-green Patagonia fleece, coming home splattered in mud. He was even more dedicated to collecting books, and their house listed somewhat towards the river from the weight of his home library. The joke was that Micki would give away boxes of books to the Strafford Library sale every year and he would buy back the ones he really wanted. This was their way of contributing.

Carl and Micki met at a contradance. They loved the dance and music community attending the Montpelier Capital City Grange dances on Saturday nights for many years. When back pain forced Carl to stop dancing, he became a daily pool runner at the Upper Valley Aquatic Center, where he made many wonderful friends.

Carl devoted much of his life to gathering and studying the stories of his family’s struggles through World War II and after. This meant learning as much as he could

about Eastern Europe, going back to before the Ottoman Empire. He was an insatiable student. A great sadness for him was being diagnosed with cancer the same month he retired from VLS, when he had hoped to finally write his family history. Last summer, between treatments, he made one final trip with Micki and his sister, Manja, to Croatia, his parent's beloved homeland.

Carl leaves behind his two children, Julie and Adam; his two children by marriage, Gabe (Candace) and Casey (Bryan); his two sisters, Margaret (Davor) and Manja (Jim); his wife, Micki; his two dogs, Luka and Annie; and two cats, Pushkin and Mookie. Beloved grandchildren Bridget, Isabella, and Kristov stayed by his side during this last stage. They carried him when he couldn't walk and encircled him with love when he needed a hug.

The family wishes to thank all the wonderful caregivers who treated him with such kindness and love: Dr. Ripple and his team at Norris Cotton Center; Dr. Cullinan and the Palliative Care team at DHMC; the folks at Hanover Terrace; the caregivers at Bayada Hospice; and all social workers everywhere who do so much good work behind the scenes. We are particularly grateful to our family physician, Adam Schwarz, who was always there for us doing whatever needed to be done, including disassembling a hospital bed and moving it to a sunny room. The Strafford community has brought us meals, built a wheelchair ramp, stayed with our dogs, read stories, and just sat quietly to hold Carl's hand. We are so grateful.

A memorial service will be held sometime later. Carl will be receiving a green burial on a lovely hillside surrounded by apple trees soon to be covered in wildflowers at Greenmount Cemetery in Montpelier, Vermont. In honor of Carl—read a book, love a book, give a book away. In the words of young Kristov: “Grandpa is a booker-man.”