

# Virtual Soapbox



## Kayta Barrows: A Remembrance Carole Parker\*

*Long-time costumer and SiW member Carolyn Kayta Barrows passed away on November 7, 2010 at age 61. Her articles for VC appeared in this column. A friend offers this fond remembrance.*

Kayta Barrows was first and foremost a teacher, and was able to correct you diplomatically. She also had a wicked sense of humor. Kayta's costumes were accurate to the last detail. Some of them were accurate, but had a humorous twist that would floor you. Other times, she'd get you with the



Kayta enjoyed creating and wearing fun costumes. Photo by Andrew Crockett, 2010.

details, such as her embroidery and hand work on any one garment.

Kayta's main focus was historical costuming, such as S.C.A., Ren Faire, Dickens, and Civil War. However, she also did some fantasy and media costumes.

You didn't get Kayta on stage very often, but when she did appear, she got the audience.

At one BayCon, the MC read the title of an entry, and you could hear the audience thinking "oh, yet *another* Doctor Who entry!" They were prepared to be bored. However, a knitted shambling scarf came out with Dr. Who as the scarf! The audience burst into laughter and had an even bigger roar when the MC announced "sometimes, the scarf wins!"

Another time at BayCon, Kayta appeared in a presentation titled *FyberPunk*. The gang name was *Ravels Without a Cause*, and the gang members were Kevin Roche as *Ripper*, Jennifer Tiftt as *Fringe*, Kayta as *Tatter*, and Shelley Monson as *Needles*. Another presentation that had the crowd. Kayta had been nervous about entering a masquerade with three master level costumers when she wasn't a journeyman yet. From the audience, you couldn't tell that.



According to long-time friend Marjorie Wilser, Kayta also had the "chops" required to create period correct historical costumes. Photo by Stephen Jacobson.

One costume that Kayta made never made it onto the masquerade stage, but anyone who has seen it remembers it vividly.

I was at a dance event in Oakland, CA. Live music was playing, and many of us were on the dance floor enjoying dancing.

All of a sudden, a scream came from the back of the hall. It was so loud that the musicians stopped playing. I, and several others, looked to see where the scream had come from, and started running back to the source. That kind of scream gets responders to come running. Before we could get to the source of the scream, we heard laughter. What the?

The other responders and I got to the source of the scream and laughter. The woman who made the noises was laughing herself silly to the point of tears. When we looked, we saw Kayta looking a little abashed. She was dressed in precise Revolutionary War Colonial done with a twist - cammo. Everything was correct, otherwise. The underskirt had a quilted Don't Tread on Me snake and motto right on front. The ruffles were there. The bodice was correct. The cap was correct with cammo lace edging. The shoes were even dyed cammo. Yes, all the way to the shoes!

You knew that the undergarments were correct, too, even though you didn't see them. Yep, we all had a good laugh. Kayta's explanation? "If Martha Washington had had cammo available, she would have worn it!"

[Editor's note: To learn the story behind this long-lost photo of Kayta's costume, see the "[Parting Shot](#)" item in Volume 8, Issue 2, page 52 of *VC*.]

Long-time friend, Marjorie Wilser, tells this tale about it.



"About 1993, I dropped by Tandy on San Carlos for costume parts. The lone employee, a girl who'd briefly dated my son, began enthusiastically telling me about her

new Civil War group, and how someone in the group had told her about a really outrageous Civil War ensemble someone had made. 'It was in camouflage,' she explained, 'and had *Don't Tread on Me* on the front.'

"She went into the whole fantastic description of a gown she had clearly not seen, but I immediately recognized her misplaced description as the RevWar outfit Kayta had made of camouflage cloth, complete with snake-quilted petticoat and shoes. I'd helped fit it, and was there when Kayta had worked on the shoes. I corrected the girl's misapprehension and went to my next stop: Kayta's house. The look on Kayta's face was priceless when I announced, 'Guess what? You're now an urban legend!'"

Others may remember the embroidered hall costumes, the dragon in the swimming pool, or the pride she had in her two beautiful daughters. I know that I am a better costumer and individual because of Kayta Barrows, and I will treasure the memories that I have of her. I will try to make some of them real by teaching others and sharing knowledge as much as I can - just like she did.

*Carole Parker is an amateur costumer and fabric experimenter with special interests in textiles, dyeing, and wearable art. Visit her [web site](#) for costuming tips.*

## A Few More of Kayta Barrows' Costumes Over the Years



"Kayta's character would have traveled in the Middle East and copied some tribal embroidery patterns on a proper 1923 dress." Scan by Marjorie Wilser, mid-1980s



Kayta as "Georg". "The outfit gave her freedom to march with the Landsknecht (German mercenary pikemen). I really love the expression!" Photo by Marjorie Wilser, 1995.



Kayta celebrated the fifth Harry Potter book as Miranda Goshawk, author of *The Standard Book of Spells, grades one thru seven*. Photo by John O'Halloran. 2003.



Kayta was a judge in the Historical Masquerade at Costume-Con 27. Photo by Andy Trembley, 2009.

*Carolyn Kayta Barrows July 20, 1949 – November 7, 2010*