



KAREN: Tragic RICHARD: Survivor

EXCLUSIVE

Richard Carpenter's own story of the superstar sister he couldn't save . .

My tragic Karen



SUPERSMILES: "It was her eyes," says Richard. "Karen always had great eyes. Sparkling and full of life. But they had lost their sparkle and all their life . . . all the energy had gone."

HER unique bell-like voice created hit after hit. Karen Carpenter, with her brother, pianist/arranger Richard, were the world's most successful pop duo in the early Seventies. The Carpenters' easy-listening style was known as "soft rock" and their record albums sold in their tens

of millions. But Karen's life came to a sudden, tragic end in 1983 when, at 32, she died of a heart attack after winning a ten-year battle against the sinister disease, anorexia nervosa. Now, after years of silence, Richard talks movingly of the sister he still misses . . .

ONLY once during an entire afternoon spent talking about his sister did Richard Carpenter show the anger he still feels about his sister's death.

"You know, some days I just think what a waste the whole thing was. Then, aware that his feelings are showing, he says: 'You know it doesn't go away—the anger. Anger and more anger—it's there every day.'"

Sometimes the feelings turn to longing and I have pipe dreams about her. I can hear her sing songs . . . songs she never recorded. And it just opens the hell out of me.

It is a short emotional outburst because the rest of the time he tells Karen's story in rather cold, measured tones of a man deliberately disconnected from his feelings in the

seven years since her death Richard could have made a second career out of talking about her. But he has chosen to avoid the subject.

Only now with the making of the television film of her life story and another Hollywood film coming out has he chosen to talk fully about his life with Karen.

Her sudden death after years of suffering from anorexia nervosa stunned a world who had believed the Carpenters were the cleanest-clean pop group the world had ever seen.

In the Hollywood film of her life, Karen is played by a Barbie doll. The film involves razor blades and self-mutilation.

He mutters: "I didn't know about the razor blades. I don't want to hear any more. I know I wouldn't like it if I saw it. That's why I've tried to have it banned."

Other film, seen here on New Year's Eve, had Richard's blessing but he wasn't entirely happy with it.

"Today am I happy that I did that. It saved me from a lot of guilt when she died. I am only unhappy that it didn't have any effect."

And they spent too much time trying to blame my mother. They wanted the story to fit into the neat psychological niche that was all the mother's fault.

But it wasn't. None of us knew why Karen got anorexia. We are talking in the living room of his Los Angeles home. The house he once shared with Karen. The bedroom that was once hers is now occupied by his baby daughter.

His wife and two children sit in the kitchen watching the TV while we talk.

He adds: "The plain fact is that I never really believed Karen was getting better even when the doctors said she was."

"And two weeks before she died I sat down with Karen and told her that . . ."

"I was her eyes, Karen always had great eyes. Sparkling and full of life. But they had lost their sparkle and all their life."

All the nervous energy had gone. She needed to lie down by about 11 at night. I know how ill she was even though she wasn't admitting it to herself.

I remember saying to her: "It's not that I don't believe in you. It's just that I love you so much."

She was so sick and she just didn't realize. And then I started to feel bad. I felt as if maybe I had been over-reacting. Like I hadn't

been fair to her. So I backed out . . . I know I should have forced her to go and see a doctor but I backed off. She was saying: 'Look, I trust me . . . so I did.'"

"Of course, two weeks later . . . she was dead."

But I'm happy she called that meeting because I got to say my piece and that helped a lot when she actually died.

Karen's battle with anorexia lasted for ten years. And ironically she died as a result of her recovery.

A HEART attack brought on by her heart's inability to cope with the extra strain of the extra calories.

The couple—whose nicknames for each other were KC and RC—continued to be close to the end.

But Karen's refusal to eat properly was a source of continual conflict between the two of them.

"Sometimes I'd try the heart-to-heart approach. Sometimes the bullying way and sometimes I'd be at my wit's end and just about at her. You look like hell and you're killing yourself."

Her obsession with her weight centred around her hips. The inching them was the up-and-down shape.

And Karen had the typical hour-glass figure. You know, broad shoulders, thin waist and hips.

"I used to say to her: 'It's the way you're built.'"

"You can drop all the weight you want and you'll still have broad shoulders and a waist and hips."

"When she got really thin she started wearing layers of clothes to cover up the fact she got so thin. It was crazy."

"Then she'd have this list of excuses when it came to why she didn't want to eat."

"I would try to persuade her to eat something fattening and she'd say she'd never tried that anyway. She'd only ever eat

shades or maybe a bit of white fish."

The last time the two of them ever saw each other was for a meal just three days before Karen died.

"We had a meal with a friend. We had a nice time. Karen was in a good mood."

Then I talked to her the day before she died. She was going to buy a new video recorder and she was asking my advice on the phone about which one to buy."

THAT night she collapsed and died in the bedroom of her parents' house.

Richard goes upstairs suddenly and returns holding a small gold plaque with an inscription.

"Karen gave me this," he says simply but proudly.

The inscription on the plaque says: "THERE CAN'T BE A KC WITHOUT AN RC."

He sits starting at the plaque, as if he's reading it for the first time and he sort of smiles to himself.

A study that reminds you that loneliness is such a bad affair . . ."

Richard today: Antique cars are now his great love. Picture: EDDIE SANDERSON

It is the first time he has gone into the details of that meeting with his sister and he tells the story as if it is a confession he is breaking.

As if he is somehow betraying her memory.

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RICHARD TODAY: Antique cars are now his great love. Picture: EDDIE SANDERSON

TOMORROW: Learning to live without her . .

EXCLUSIVE

RICHARD CARPENTER CONTINUES THE MOVING STORY OF HIS TRAGIC SISTER

How I learned to live without Karen



STAR Karen's talent has been irreplaceable

THERE'S an odd expression on Richard Carpenter's face as he sorts through his sister's old clothes.

"I gave away some of them but I couldn't bring myself to part with all of them.

"So I went through them all and kept the ones that were special... the ones that had connections..."

He keeps them in a warehouse 15 minutes' drive from his home in Los Angeles.

Flared trousers, pretty blouses, dresses she wore for album covers. The sort of ordinary things that become instantly tragic souvenirs when someone dies as suddenly and sadly as Karen Carpenter did in 1983.

The warehouse also contains the only real clue in Richard Carpenter's lifestyle to his wealth and former superstar status — his collection of classic cars.

Because the really shocking thing about this man is his ordinariness.

Although he is a millionaire, he looks and behaves like your average small-town American suburban man.

Instead of a lush mansion in Beverly Hills, he and his wife Mary and their two daughters live in a commuter suburb of Los Angeles.

INSTEAD of premieres and parties, he goes tepin bowling and stays at home to watch his favourite television programmes, *Dallas* and *LA Law*.

"I guess I'm not a terribly exciting person," says half of the duo that sold 50 million records worldwide.

He walks over to the grand piano which dominates the rather small sitting room.

He plays a few chords, deliberately stumbling over the keys. He is doing an impression of himself playing the piano when he was at the height of his drug addiction.

There was even something rather suburban about his addiction...

It was my mother's sleeping tablets that I became hooked on.

When it was really bad I couldn't play the piano properly.

By 1978 I knew I was in big trouble. Sometimes I couldn't even sign my name, my hand was shaking so much.

Even as he speaks about this traumatic

'There's nothing I'd rather do than make records with her'



by **CHRISTENA APPELYARD**

Woman's Editor

time in his life there is an astonishing degree of detachment.

It is only when the subject of Karen comes up that he displays any real sign of animation or passion.

"We didn't really fight very much but I suppose some of our biggest arguments were about women... my girlfriends.

"Not the fact that I had girlfriends but the fact that it was a particular girl... She'd say things like, 'She's not good enough for you... It was a case of sisterly love, I suppose."

One of the implications of the television



HOMELY Richard's quiet Los Angeles base... on unlikely setting for a millionaire

film of their life together, shown on New Year's Eve, is that because of the closeness of their relationship they inhibited each other sexually.

HE SHAKES his head: "I wouldn't say we inhibited each other, although I can see where you got that from the film.

"We were together a lot on the road and I suppose it's fair to say that there were times when it was a little hard to get some space of your own."

He is honest enough to admit that he didn't

approve of Karen's marriage to Tom Burris.

"It didn't surprise me when they broke up."

"He didn't even like music... he was a real estate agent."

People who knew Richard and Karen say there was more than a degree of hero worship on Karen's side and he doesn't deny this.

"I know she looked up to me," he says simply.

Today he earns his living from his solo career and by producing and arranging other artists.

And he has a new album, *Lovelines*, out now — a collection of previously unreleased songs recorded with Karen. It will be the last-ever Carpenters disc.

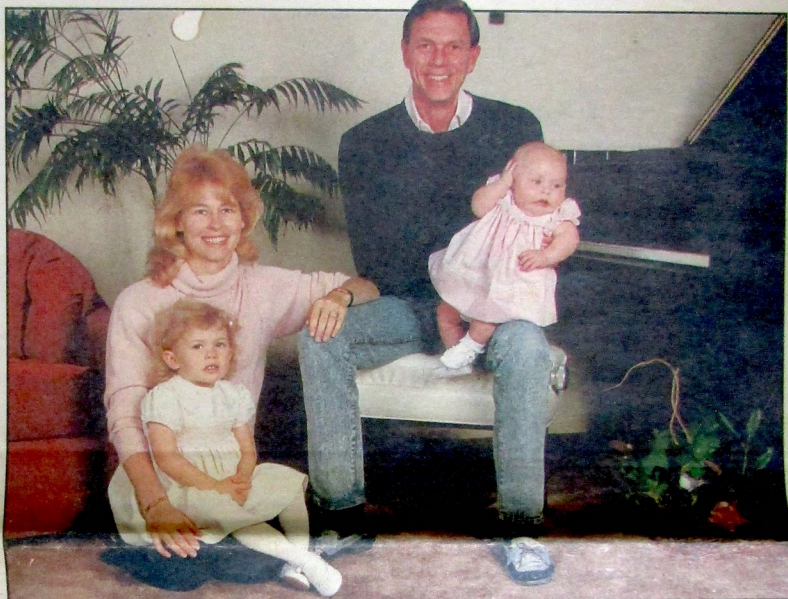
ASK him if he was a bit about Karen dying and finishing off his career as a superstar and he pauses for a moment...

"Not angry... I'd say disappointed. There's nothing I'd rather be doing than making records with Karen."

"You know, when she died I actually had people saying that I should find another Carpenter."

"They said you own the rights to the name... I said you've got to be kidding. Not for a split second would I have done that."

"There could never be another Karen."



TOGETHERNESS Richard takes it easy at home in a Los Angeles suburb with his wife Mary and their two daughters

Pictures: **EDDIE SANDERSON**

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