

Cordelia Ross
1985-August 19, 2025
Compiled from reports



Dr. Cordelia Ross, a Central Texas caver and instructor at an Austin area college prep school, died on August 19, 2025 after an illness. She was 40.

A member of the Underground Texas Grotto, Cordelia arrived at St. Stephen's Episcopal School three years ago, in 2022. She joined the faculty full-time as an English instructor and as a caving coach with Charlton Perry and the Devil's Canyon Adventure Program.

Cordelia grew up in New Mexico and earned an undergraduate degree in English from Dartmouth College and her Ph.D. from the University of California, Davis.

Combined with her formal education and caving experience, Perry described Cordelia as "a unicorn," who not only coached caving but was also trained in technical cave search and rescue. Cordelia studied medieval literature at UC Davis and was thrilled that she could merge her passions, having written her dissertation on the role of caves and medieval English literature.

Additionally, Cordelia was an instructor with the National Cave Rescue Commission (NCRC), teaching first responders how to rescue people in caves. She completed instructor training from NCRC, a commission of the National Speleological Society, in June 2021. Cordelia had moved to the San Antonio area and later developed cancer.

At her death, she was surrounded by family and loved ones. Cordelia leaves behind her husband, Wayne Morris, and their 14-month-old daughter, Viola, among many other family members.

The Westlake area school said in a statement, "Our St. Stephen's community celebrated with joy Cordelia's marriage to Wayne - and her pregnancy. We marveled at her ability to navigate the cobblestone walkways in high heels. We also journeyed with Cordelia through her cancer diagnosis, Viola's emergency birth, and Cordelia's 14-month battle with the disease.

"Many of us have been heartbroken by her diagnosis and its impact on her young family," the statement continued. "Though she was at St. Stephen's only a short time, Cordelia's impact on our community is deeply felt."

Perry added, "Cordelia expressed to me her great love and appreciation for our school and community. She described working at St. Stephen's as her 'dream job' and confided that she

never felt more supported and appreciated professionally in her adult life. She was very proud to be a faculty member of St. Stephen's, a member of the English Department and the head coach of the caving team."

In her second year at St. Stephen's, Cordelia delivered a very moving chapel talk about her commitment to service through search and rescue. St. Stephens has a long history of supporting caving and conservation. Cordelia felt it was important that St. Stephen's students see adults on campus who are committed to the life of service expected of students.

Dr. Patricia Seiser recalled working with her in NCRC Level One instruction. "Cordie was a petite, soft spoken woman. During an in-cave exercise, she was frustrated that she wasn't getting the team's attention when she was the designated leader. I talked to her about being the mouse that roared, to use her loud voice to get everyone's attention and then drop it back to her normal soft tones to keep their attention," she said. "The next iteration, she yelled out and got everyone's attention - partly out of shock as she was never that loud and partly out of the realization that she was not angry, just being a leader."

The result? Her team listened to her instruction and did well in the exercise.

"It was a thing of beauty. She'll always live on in my memories as the mouse that roared, the perfect example of an iron hand hidden in the velvet glove. Cordie Ross gone far, far too soon." Services for Cordelia are pending.

Cordelia Ross - Photos



Cordelia Ross underground at a scenic waterfall



Cordelia Ross with Val Hildreth-Werker at the International Congress of Speleology in Australia, 2013



Cordelia Ross relaxing



Cordelia Ross on a climb [Facebook profile]



Cordelia Ross