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Now speaking of favorite things I want to introduce our next guest, Karen Hudson. Karen is a 25 year veteran of the Hollywood Film and Television industry where she worked as a costumer. Karen's claim to fame is that her name appears on the pilot and every episode of the very famous and ground breaking Hillstreet Blues. She had developed many onscreen characters and considers herself to be a social psychologist. In this show and the next few moments Karen is going to share her story. So Karen welcome to the show.

Karen: Thank you Linnaea, I am excited to be here.

Linnaea: Sorry to keep you waiting I had to tell my cat story to my listeners but I am thrilled to have you with us.

Karen: That is great, I loved that cat story.

Linnaea: Now for those of you listening in I have known Karen for many years. She is another fellow Toast Master, when I was just a governor Karen was one of the area governors that served under me and she was one of the best. There are like 12 or 13 area governors, Karen walks her talk. She is a woman that lives with integrity, she does what she says she is going to do and she, my success as a district governor was a large part to the contribution that Karen made so I owe much to Karen and I am very eager for her to share with us her story. So Karen please tell us your story.

Karen: Okay, thank you Linnaea for that wonderful comment. I love that and we did have fun at that year we did the Toast Master thing together. That was a great time. I learned a lot too. Well I grew up in a one room country school in the prairie of Kansas and by golly it is a long way from that one room school to the set of Hillstreet Blues.

Linnaea: Yes.

Karen: Yeah. The story is not about the 1400 mile highway between Kansas and California, it is about the bumpy curvy road that I took to achieve my success in Hollywood because I am dyslexic and when I was choosing a career path I had to look honestly at what I could and could not do.

Linnaea: Yeah.

Karen: Kept my eyes open for an opportunity to use my shortcomings as assets.

Linnaea: I like that.

Karen: Yeah, as a little girl it kind of revealed itself early on because as a little girl I loved my paper dolls and my favorite one was Lana Turner. Now who would have guessed I would be dressing stars like Lana Turner. Anyway, the paper doll book had the paper doll on the outside and you cut that out and that was cardboard and then you colored the paper dolls inside, the clothes inside and cut them out and put them on the paper doll but I didn't like to do that. I wanted to do my own so I threw away the inside pages and made my own clothes. I did the drawings and colored them and put them on the paper doll.

Linnaea: I love that.

Karen: Yeah that was an early indication of what I might do and then in first grade the teacher decided that I couldn't read and that I didn't understand what she was saying so she moved me to the front of the room and so that didn't work so she suggested that my parents take me to get some eyeglasses and apparently that didn't do a whole lot of good because my grade card said that my parents should help me practice reading all summer long during the vacation because I was way behind the other kids.

Linnaea: Yeah.

Karen: And I know that was true, that was something that I kind of had to hide when I stood up to read in the reading class I would count the number of pages and then go forward to where I would be reading and practice my page so I could see what it was. The summers were great because no reading, well my parents didn't help me a whole lot with my reading but no math, no tests but I did love 4-H and my Grandma helped me, my Grandma Bo helped me learn to sew and by the time I was 8 I was wearing clothes that I made so that started really early. In junior high I started yarning and in my junior year of high school I started debating and entered forensics contests. A year later my girlfriend said to me you know you used to scare me to death when we were debating because you would only write down a few words and then I was totally surprised that you would get up and you would be a very effective speaker and I told her...

Linnaea: Yeah and you are an effective speaker today too.

Karen: I told her that the notes were not what made me good because under that kind of pressure I couldn't possibly have read the notes so I just spoke from what I knew and I didn't do any research either about the debate questions because I could remember everything that I have heard, that I heard the other debate people say. So my high school time taught me that I loved public speaking. Now that is kind of unusual but I do love it.

Linnaea: Yes you are a minority.

Karen: Yeah really. Well I did find out that my Grandfather; my Dad's father was an orator in the early part of the 20th century. So I think it was kind of in my genes.

Linnaea: Wow. Now we have 30 seconds until the commercial and I wanted to put something in before we get in there. When you were talking about doing the paper dolls and cutting out creating clothes for them, that speaks so profoundly to one of the tips of success that I suggest people do is yield to the natural abilities and if possible find a vocation that capitalizes on them and there that is exactly what you did and what happened to you.

Karen: Yeah.

Linnaea: We will hear more about that when we get back from break.

Karen: Okie dokie.

-BREAK-

Linnaea: Hi there. Welcome back. Right before break we were listening to the story of Karen Hudson 25 year veteran of Hollywood and how her adversity of having dyslexia had a surprise happy ending for her in her career. We are going to hear more about that. Karen please continue.

Karen: Okay, well the first 2 years that I was in college or the first 2 semesters I was in college I declared a major in theatre but I realized that most theatre majors who go into teaching which is what I figured I would do taught English and I knew that I didn't want to inflict my shortcomings on these high school students so I can't tell a verb from a noun and I still can't but it doesn't make all that much difference because we don't spell with nouns and verbs or draw either. So anyway I figured that I needed to choose something else and in fact I had 2 babies and stayed out of school for about 6 years and then when I went back I was really really honest with myself and you know really looked at what I could and could not do. The word dyslexia didn't come up, it wasn't widely known until about the second year I was in college and I quickly identified myself with that, I said wow I do that, oh that's me and so my eyes don't track across the page and fall down to the next page, I can't tell the difference between b's and d's and before the letter th words like there, them, those and so forth I don't know, I can't see the difference in them. So it is really hard for me to read and I had to be really honest with that.

Linnaea: That is how I hear.

Karen: Yeah, yeah yeah, but what I did was is I looked at the things that I could and could not do and decided that when I was in school all of the projects that I had that were very successful had artwork in them so I decided to declare myself as an art major and that seemed to be a good thing and didn't know exactly what that would mean but I figured there was something in there that I could do and so I, you know another thing that I wanted to tell you this for sure but when I drive even, and I have been driving since I was 12 because I was on a farm and we got a, well we could drive because we had to drive, I had to drive tractors and the truck and stuff like that so I started driving when I was 12 but I would look at those signs and I wouldn't be able to identify exactly what they said and make quick decisions about what action I should take. So I have always always forgiven myself for that and what I do is I pat myself on the back and say that is okay, I know that that is a small mistake and you can correct it because I just go on to the next stop and turn around and redo it but I think that it is really important for me to be easy on myself about these short comings. I have to be good to myself about it.

Linnaea: Yes.

Karen: So when I went there to art school at Wichita State in Wichita Kansas one of my first teachers said to me well I realized that I wasn't up to standard for most art majors because I haven't had any drawing classes and the teacher came over and looked at my drawing and he said compare to the fellow sitting next to you, you aren't very good, maybe you should go back home and have another baby.

Linnaea: Get my gun.

Karen: I said well you know, think about that, that was in the 60s and the women's revolution was just starting to happen you know so that wasn't a big surprise that he would have that attitude, anyways that was the day that I knew I was going to graduate from college. He didn't discourage me at all. He made me mad, he made me mad.

Linnaea: Yes.

Karen: Anyway a couple of years later then I was going across the music department to pick up my husband after his opera class and the opera director said hi, do you sew and I said yes, and he said well I have a designer who can't sew a stick, do you think you can put together an 18th century opera, and I

thought about it, I thought about it and I remembered a [35:11:4] George Washington pattern in the Halloween costume section of the pattern book and I said yeah I can do that, you know, so that is what I did and that year was the production was a success and next year the director left and then the designer went away to Yale and so the new director asked me if I would design and I said oh sure I will do it and he said well we are going to do Marriage of Figaro and Figaro was played by a fellow student Samuel Ramey who is now become an internationally known opera star so I visit him in New York and he used to visit me on the set here in Hollywood when he would come out here. So it is kind of a fun trade there. Anyways he said about 2 or 3 weeks later he said I thought you designed last year and I said no I didn't and he said well I like what you are doing so go on keep doing it, and so that was the beginning of my career when at the end of that production that that is what I could do, what I wanted to do and what I was good at and it fit all of the things that I could and could not do and I knew that my logic and determination even though I didn't know quite what I was doing will carry my through so at this point...

Linnaea: I have a question. When you had those opportunities to sew and you said sure I will do it, you didn't have that level of confidence inside did you, I mean you kind of just, well you took a risk?

Karen: I knew I took a huge risk because I knew I could sew, I knew I could look at the pictures. When I designed these things of course I didn't do any historical research on it I just looked at other opera productions, you know professional opera productions and copied what they did and I did look at some art books and saw how the costumes looked, how they were designed, what the skirts looked like, and the necklines and so forth. Then I just did it because I knew that I could do it. Well what I called this and I called this all the way through my career, when the door opened I just walked through it.

Linnaea: I like that.

Karen: And every single time I was in over my head I didn't know what the heck I was doing but I just knew I could make it through.

Linnaea: I love that.

Karen: Yeah.

Linnaea: I love that.

Karen: Yeah so when I finished and went to graduate school I had 9 complete operas to my name and a lot of opera workshops and during that time [38:08:2] Barton from the University of Texas came to do a seminar on costume design and she looked at my portfolio and approved it and she said you have a lot to learn and I would like to see you study with Dr. Rinehart at the University of Texas. So I contacted him, we visited the university over the Christmas break, my husband was a teacher so we had a long Christmas break and he offered me a teaching assistant ship which paid money and allowed me to have him state tuition and so in August my family and I were off to Austin Texas.

Linnaea: Wow, geez, another door that you walked through.

Karen: A door, and I walked through it, yeah that was right, absolutely and so anyway I did graduate work and near the end of it my marriage failed and I went into Dr. Rinehart and I said my marriage is over I need a job and can you believe this, I know you do believe it, 2 days later the PBS station called

and asked for a recommendation for costume designer for the children show [39:22:7] and the door opened I just walked through it.

Linnaea: Wow.

Karen: When I came to Hollywood I had 84 half hour shows on PBS which made me pretty awesome for just starting out here.

Linnaea: Yeah.

Karen: And designing for television and film is really different then theatre and when I saw my work on the screen I said that is what I want to do and it once again what I could do. I liked the contemporary clothes that created identifiable characters, not fashion but costumes for characters.

Linnaea: Yes.

Karen: Well so I did that show and learned a lot about television and through the connections, because we always had guests directors and the actors were professional actors and through them I was able to make contact with Dorothy Jeakins who designed Sound of Music among many other notable productions and when I saw this opportunity I asked Dr. Rinehart my UT costume professor if I could use that for a thesis for my MFA and he said yes but you need to focus on her theatre work and so a door opened and I walked through it and I interviewed her 3 times and I interviewed quite a few other people who have worked with her and among them was the director John [41:04:0]. So the thing about that that fit me and what I could do is that I was not sitting in the library researching and reading out of books.

Linnaea: Yes.

Karen: So I interviewed people, I photographed her costumes from the Duchess of Malfi and [41:23:1] in theatre production and I wrote about her design theories and made the most complete list of her theatre and filmography that was available at that time and this kind of research was first time researched and it worked for me. When [41:45:2] ended then those same connections made it look like a good opportunity for me to move to Hollywood and work and so when that door opened I just loaded up my car and went off to California to work.

Linnaea: Wow.

Karen: My son, I turned in my thesis and my son and I loaded my Toyota Celica and we took off for California.

Linnaea: Geez.

Karen: We had, oh what a, I wouldn't do that today. I mean I had \$400 in my pocket and an Exxon credit card for gas and a place to stay in Hollywood, no job but I had those things but once again...

Linnaea: There was a door and you walked through it.

Karen: I walked through it and 10 days later I got a job as a set costumer on Lou Grant for MCM.

Linnaea: We are going to hear more about that.

Karen: Of course.

Linnaea: When we get back from break.

-BREAK-

Linnaea: Hi, wow this show is almost over. These shows are too short. We have been listening to Karen Hudson and we are about to hear about her entry into the Hillstreet Blues era of her life and Karen when you get there tell us real briefly about Hillstreet Blues, there are many who may not be familiar with that show because that was in the 70s wasn't it or the early 80s?

Karen: No it was in the 80s, from 80-87.

Linnaea: Okay.

Karen: Yeah, Hillstreet Blues was, I landmarked show because it had a large cast, no star actors and NBC said to us you can't have a show without a star that is not going to work and then because it had a big cast they were kind of objecting to how much it cost but everyone loved it and after we just swept the Emmy award then they decided that they liked us and actually the show is the top shows and the medical shows that you see today are really have been, have grown out of that format that we made and Steven Bochco...

Linnaea: I remember that being a ground breaking hit series.

Karen: If you look at any of the television history books and I do this all the time, I go right to the index or to the table of contents and look and Hillstreet Blues always has pictures and a paragraph or two or a page about Hillstreet and the landmark of what it was in the history.

Linnaea: Oh wow.

Karen: Steven Bochco was really interesting to work for because as he said in his book he really understood that his mind was much bigger by using the minds of everyone else that he worked with and he was very good at listening.

Linnaea: Oh my god.

Karen: To you and sometimes I remember 2 or 3 times I said if you add this line in here I can get such and such and I think it will make it a lot clearer and he bought those ideas and it was just really exciting. I saw a lot of my input pop up, no places that you would notice but I saw it in there coming up in the story.

Linnaea: What a smart man.

Karen: Yeah to use all of us because he had some really talented people on the show.

Linnaea: What was some of the most memorable moments of working in Hollywood on a TV show as successful as Hillstreet Blues, what was that like?

Karen: Oh I just remember some moments when it was just absolutely pure incredible writing and acting. I found early in the time a book, when we were doing research, I found a book that was a photo essay on Fort Apache in the Bronx and they had, I saw story lines come out of that, one of the story lines was, so

anyways I took it into Steven and showed it to him and he said oh my gosh this is exactly the way I want Hillstreet to look, these photographs, black and white photographs. So he bought I think 17 copies and gave it to everyone on the design type people in the production and said this is the way I want it to look. So the painters copied it and the set designers and so forth but anyway in this one photograph and it was only a photograph it had a door that was open to the apartment because their neighbors had complained about a terrible smell and there was a big bloated up figure lying on the bed covered up with the sheet and so in that day, and this is kind of makes my hair gray, I look at the videos, I look at the episodes and I realized there were no cell phones and the people smoked on camera and in one place Bates the female cop was handling a little kid who had been hurt without any gloves and you know because of AIDS now the police never touch anyone without gloves. So I did a period show you know, I am not that old but I did a period show, but at any rate Renko and Hill came into this scene and Hill said I will go down and call in the office and get some help out here for us so you stay here with the body and Renko sat in the open window and they had the curtains blowing in so you could tell that it was open to make it so that they could even stand the smell and at that point then he made amends with his dead father and I just through what a brilliant piece of writing just came out of that one photograph.

Linnaea: Wow, isn't that, I am going to have to look up that show. I am imagining they have them on DVDs or they are available somewhere.

Karen: Uhuh yeah, they do but it is kind of hard getting a hold of them right now. I think that the 2 first seasons are out on pretty accessible but otherwise it is pretty hard to get the fullest and I don't have the fullest I need to get the fullest.

Linnaea: Geez, yes absolutely any funny moments?

Karen: Any funny moments? Uh yeah, one time the Brillo's ex wife was played actually by Steven Bochco's wife and she was the actress and at one point we had this one guy who came in and he was a perpetrator, you know he kept getting arrested and you would see him in the squad room often and at one point she was supposed to walk into the squad room and he was supposed to flash her, well so the main costumer on the show said okay we are going to pull a trick on her, so we dressed him in a what do you call it, in long underwear that was nude, we died it nude color and then he put hair on the pubic area and so her reaction to him flashing her was real.

Linnaea: I love it.

Karen: It was real to her, it was very funny and those are the kind of inside jokes that happen on a set. I know a show that I did with Betty White, the boys all went over to the golf club and played golf and the lead actor was Fred Molina, Alfred Molina, and the locker next to his locker in the men's lounge had Hudson on it and so all of the lockers had the crew members names on it and mine showed up real often but those are inside jokes that people don't know.

Linnaea: Wow. Now through your connections I know that you had an opportunity to work with very famous people like Dolly Parton and you have a very meaningful story about Dolly I would like for you to share.

Karen: Yeah I worked on a show with her and we were shooting that up in Glendale and there were 2 girls who came and sat on the street for a long time for a couple of days and I would say hi to them and go

on and then I would come back and they would still be sitting there and everything and I noticed that Dolly spoke to them and if she had time she would stop and talk to them for a little bit and finally the second day I said doesn't this get boring sitting here on the curb all day long and this girl looked at me with just the greatest smile on her face and she said you know it is all worth it. She said when I was a little girl I was abused terribly terribly abused and she said one day I saw Dolly Parton on the TV and she looked like an angel to me and she said after that every time I was being abused I always closed my eyes and remembered that picture of Dolly Parton and she was my angel that saw me through all that abuse and she said I just had to come here and meet Dolly and tell her my story and talk with her because she has always been my saving angel.

Linnaea: Wow, and she did, she made her self available.

Karen: Yeah she did, she stood and talked to them and invited them in on the set and all kinds of things just made them really welcome and it was really amazing because the young woman had become a teacher and she was working with troubled children so she, amazing story and the fact is the story about that is that you never know when you are going to affect somebody in some way that you can't imagine. So that is one of the reasons why I think it is so important to have integrity in everything that you do.

Linnaea: Yes, and I know that you live by that, you live by that.

Karen: Yeah.

Linnaea: Now at this point in your life and looking back what are some things that you feel especially grateful having done or experienced? We have 3 minutes until we are done and leave us with some words of wisdom too.

Karen: Okay well when the door opened I walked through it and that is my big challenge 2 years to just get in there and do it. If it seems right if your head is telling you to get in there and do it by golly just listen to it and get in there and do it, because you will find a way to do it and one of the things that about the film industry is that it is very stressful but it is moment by moment and I was accustomed to flying by the seat of my pants anyways so that didn't bother me at all and I heard it is pretty well known that it is not the stress that hurts you it is how you handle the stress whether it hurts you or doesn't affect you.

Linnaea: Yes.

Karen: And stress has always been real exciting to me as a matter of fact that is the way I look at it and so you know all of those changes, sudden changes and I remember one time a guy showed up at 6 o'clock in the morning downtown on Skid Row and they had written him into the script over the weekend and forgot to tell me so I didn't have a costume for him. So we hashed together something. He was a pimp and I had some pimp clothes and we put something together you know but I don't mind those things, it is fun, it is exciting and every morning I would say to myself, I don't care what you throw at me I have the solution, I will overcome it and I will win and I would say that over and over to myself you know and when things got tough I would say that to myself and I just had to tell myself that everything would be okay and I just briefly did get the opportunity to go and have some therapy about my dyslexia and we discovered that it was my eyes that were the problem and I worked with the optometrist who is a major force in working with kids with that kind of problem and he answered most of the questions about what I had and he made me, I didn't visualize and he helped me to be able to visualize and actually improve what I did in my

work, it was pretty amazing, yeah. So now what I do is, I have been retired now for 10 years.

Linnaea: You have 15 seconds.

Karen: Okay, I started speaking career and my greatest asset is that I have the opportunity to help people to find a job because I work with them on their job search.

Linnaea: Karen you are an inspiration. Thank you for being on the show.

Karen: Thank you.

Linnaea: Thank you.

Karen: Thank you.