

# Safe in the City with Peter Karl

*Peter Karl has earned numerous Emmy's and other awards for his work first, as an investigative reporter during his tenure at Channels 7 & 5 in the 70's and 80's and then with his company, Karl Productions, which he started with partner, Dave Beedy, in 1991. As a television reporter, he had an impeccable skill for uncovering political corruption, police crimes and consumer fraud cases. Some of the high profile cases he brought to the public eye include: Operation Greylord (judicial corruption), Throw Away Children (foster child abuse) and Jobs-for-Sex (involving former Cook County Board President, George Dunne.)*

*Peter continues to utilize these talents today through numerous projects at Karl Productions and most recently on the evening news again, doing "Cold Case" segments for NBC5. Karl's passion for helping society has never waned, as evidenced by his work on Crime Watch, a weekly daytime television show about community policing in Chicago which his company produces and Peter hosts. Both Karl and Beedy are extremely proud of their work on Crime Watch which has gained national attention.*

*Karl grew up in Detroit and worked in television in Michigan until a news director from WLS saw this, "dem's 'n 'do's kind of a character", as he self-describes, and offered him a job within five minutes of being interviewed. That was almost thirty years ago. He attributes his love for journalism to always having, "an interest in learning about people and telling stories".*

*What you most likely don't know about Peter is that he loves sailing, rides a Harley and has a wardrobe of Krocs (those lightweight rubber clogs with holes all over them) which he wears around the office. "I'll wear dress shoes if I have to", grouses Karl, "but the only shoes I like to wear are bike boots, golf shoes and these", he said pointing to the hot pink Krocs on his feet, which are really "fuchsia" according to him.*

*We found Peter to be a man of great humility, passion and candor. It was truly an honor to sit down and talk with him about his impressive career, personal views and what we can do about crime in our communities.*

**CWM** In your wildest dreams, did ever you think you'd be sitting here, surrounded by all these awards in this beautiful office?

**PK** Never...never. I've had a dream life. I am probably the most fortunate



Getting a leg up on the news at Karl Productions.

Cover Story Photos by Lee Balgemann

person in the world that I don't know if I've ever gone to work a single day, where I dreaded it. I mean, there are times you go to work and you're tired, hung over or you want to go and play golf instead, but in my adult life I have been so blessed. I just enjoy what I do. When I was a reporter, it was 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. And with the business when we started out, it was the same way. It's been a great ride. I feel I've lived three lives.

**CWM** Why, "three lives"?

**PK** Well, your young life, when you're nuts. Then my second life where I had to answer to television people and my life now, where I answer to my partner on this business. It's a real family oriented business that does a lot of work. We've had our ups and our downs and it's been a great run.

**CWM** Through the years your focus veered toward the criminal side of public issues. How did you that come about?

**PK** I don't know how it happened. As an investigative reporter, some people have always called me a "frustrated cop". Actually, when I was a reporter, I did do a lot of stories on the police

department.

**CWM** Positive or negative?

**PK** Negative...and positive. There were negative stories on brutality and different things like that. But it always ended up that no matter where you are, there are bad people in life. And there are bad cops and there are tons more good cops. And when I did negative stories on the bad cops, the good cops wanted to get rid of the bad cops. They stick up for each other, its part of their culture. When you have a police officer that's beating up people, other guys don't want to work with that person. All it does is put them in harm's way as well.

One thing about all the stories I did, was that I always gave people the opportunity to tell me I was wrong. If they could prove I was wrong, the story would go away. I pretty much knew they wouldn't be able to prove us wrong, but if they could, it would go away. I was sued for 360 million dollars as a reporter over the course of my career and never lost. That was because we always gave people the opportunity to respond and if I was wrong, I would change what was wrong. When you do this kind of stuff, there are facts that are there and they are nothing more than information - it's a fact and people get in trouble when they try to make the fact more than what the fact is. We can only report on what you know, what you found out.

People today, make big mistakes by overextending the facts or by trying to make the facts say what they want them to say instead of what they really say. When you report, you report what you find, not what you think you find or what you want to find. It's that simple. I had a motto when I was a reporter, 'it's not because I'm so smart, it's because they're so stupid.' That carried me through my entire career. I would sit back and shake my head sometimes at what people would do.

And you know, you have, "Oh, Sh\_t!" stories - when you tell the yarn [the story] and someone says... 'oh, SH\_T!'. Those are the best stories. I've always found that stories follow 3 paths: sex, greed and ego. So its money, sex or somebody's ego that gets in the way of what people do all the time. It just never ceases to amaze me, still to this day.

**CWM** That's exactly one of the

questions we wanted to ask, 'what has your work taught you about human nature', which you just answered. Do you want to ad anything to that?

**PK** I think the world is full of good hard working people that want nothing more than to provide for their families, give education to their children and if they're fortunate enough, take a vacation every now and then. What drives me crazy today is, when you think about this craziness that's going on in the world. Bombing, killing innocent people...one of these days, people are going to say, 'enough is enough!' And I



Crime Watch airs weekly on Channel 5 every Thursday morning at 11:30 a.m.

just can't imagine that they don't get tired of this terrorist B.S. That's the only thing that scares me

today - to see this kind of hate in the world and fighting that's been going on for years [between numerous cultures and countries], why? And it seems like its getting worse. We go about our daily lives, we look for a job, we look for a client, or an interview, whatever. That's what we do, but we don't kill people. That's what I don't understand. It's the only thing that blows my mind, that hate.

**CWM** What do you think you learned in working so closely with the police?

**PK** Police, to me, are amazing - there's a gun fight and they run toward the bullets. Ya know? And if they run away from it, they get fired. Their job is to go catch the bad guy; someone is shooting a gun at you, and they're running toward the gun! Most people are ducking for cover. And the other thing is when you stop and think about it, the police department in the city of Chicago is probably the biggest single entity of all of government. And what's amazing to me is how many people it takes in the background to put one police officer on the street. Whether it's a mechanic, a person behind the computer who deploys, a person sitting there inputting their hours - everything, from healthcare to psychological care - all the things it takes to keep one cop on the street to run towards bullets. Their desire and passion to be the police, is amazing. It's a different culture - like firemen, they run into the smoke. That's what they do and it's a whole different world. I admire police-

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Happy in Harley regalia...