

Metamorphosis

WRITTEN and PHOTOS BY Janice Brooks

Have you ever thought about what it would be like to live another person's life just for one day? Can you imagine waking up one morning and you are smack-dab in the middle of the eighteenth century? Talk about a metamorphosis! I was pondering these thoughts at the fateful moment I met the vivacious actress and author Karen Kondazian. After a bit of preamble chick-chatting, we discussed living our dreams and most of all; we captured each other's heart with shared emotions about the power of the written word.

Karen's career began at age eight when she was chosen to be one of the infamous children on Art Linkletter's "Kids Say the Darndest Things." The opportunity to miss school during tapings was all it took for Karen to abandon her life's goal of becoming a spy and focus on acting.

She completed her B.A. at San Francisco State College, and Karen then continued her schooling at The University of Vienna and The London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts.

Karen's first professional acting work was in the award winning off-Broadway production of *The Trojan Women*.

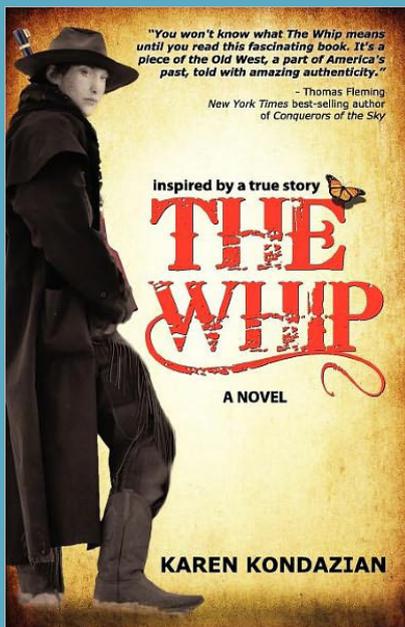
Her theater career has included starring opposite Ed Harris (be still my heart) in *Sweet Bird of Youth*, Stacy Keach in *Hamlet*, and Richard Chamberlain in *Richard II*.

She won the Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Actress in *The Rose Tattoo*, (in which her work as actor and producer so impressed Tennessee Williams that they became friends and he gave her carte blanche to produce any of his work in his lifetime).

Karen has starred in over 50 television shows and films including, *James Dean* with James Franco, *Yes Giorgio* with Luciano Pavarotti, *NYPD Blue*, *Frasier*, and as a series regular in CBS's *Shannon*.

Six years ago Karen experienced her own personal metamorphosis. While grieving the loss of her mother, she channeled her grief into researching and writing about the history of a legendary she-roe that she had been intrigued and captivated by since her childhood. She put her pencil to a yellow legal pad, while walking the floors in her home, to pen the story of one of America's most colorful woman of the Wild West.





Twenty-seven drafts later, her newest book *The Whip*, was published by Hansen Publishing. *The Whip* is a historical novel inspired by the true story of the legendary stagecoach driver, or whip, Charley Parkhurst. Known as "One-Eyed Charley," "Six-Horse Charley," and "Parkie" to his closest friends, Charley Darkey Parkhurst was really, an extraordinary woman named Charlotte.

As a young woman in Rhode Island, Charlotte fell in love with a runaway slave and had

his child. The brutal destruction of her family drove her to California, dressed as a man, to track the killer. In a time when women had few vocations to choose from (wife, school teacher or prostitute), Charlotte bound her breasts firmly with strips of cloth, dressed in men's clothing, and hit the open road and never looked back.

Charley became a renowned stagecoach driver for Wells Fargo, she killed a famous outlaw, had a secret love affair, and was the first woman to vote in America in 1868 — for General Grant (as a man!).

She was a woman who not only lived in a man's world—she mastered it. She could drink whiskey, chew tobacco and drive a team of six horses better than any man in her day. She became a legend as a celebrated California stagecoach driver who began driving stagecoaches from Sacramento to San Francisco during the 1849 California Gold Rush.

She died of cancer of the tongue from too many cigars and too much chewing tobacco, and not until she was being prepared for her burial, was her true gender discovered, along with the fact that she had borne a child.

The Whip is more than a gritty Western novel. It is a dramatic story about love, fierce courage, and a woman on her own: truly, Karen Kondazian has weaved a rousing tale that even a modern-day Renaissance woman can be inspired by. *The Whip* will have you roped-and-tied to the arm chair reading until the last page. And, I guarantee you'll feel a metamorphosis of the heart when you are done. 



Janice Brooks is a maverick and explorer, a woman who celebrates the unusual and unorthodox. Her avocation as a social entrepreneur, keynote speaker, executive coach, freelance writer, poet and storyteller all reflect her creative genius.



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