

Interview With Karen Strassman | The Hero's Journey

[Armand Alvarez](#) October 9, 2018

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Sometimes, we put too much pressure on ourselves when we think we have to do something in a certain way to please someone else. When we do that, we start to blame others for asking too much, or for expecting us to behave the way they consider is the right one. But it's not about them, it's always about us and what we think about ourselves. We all have a limitless potential to shine the way we want to.

Karen Strassman, the multitalented artist who can be seen as Dr. Slotnick on AMC's series "Preacher" says:

"I was told all the reasons I could never succeed as an actress – not pretty enough, tall enough, thin enough, old enough, young enough, busty enough, connected enough. And here I am doing what I love because I kept listening to that tug in my heartstrings to do it anyway because I kept stepping forward onto my own path like a scavenger hunt, a treasure hunt, not giving up... I faced each obstacle and let it push me to grow, learn, and transform into what it would take to be what my heart was nudging me to dare to be... maybe that's the hero's journey."

Introduction

- **Please introduce yourself briefly. Who, in your own words, is Karen Strassman?**

I'm a human creature bushwhacking my way through this mystery of life like everyone else. I get to make my living doing what I love as an actor, voice-actor, and a dialect and acting coach. I'm passionate about storytelling as a way to dive back into our own humanity.

- **What was your conscious path to becoming interested in the entertainment industry?**

I dreamed of being an actress ever since I was old enough to remember. It was kind of a random thing because I had never met anyone who was an actor. It felt like an inaccessible, intangible dream that my parents probably kept hoping I would grow out of but never did. When I was 13, I was cast in the role of Helen Keller in a beautiful production of "The Miracle Worker." I couldn't wait to get to the theatre after school for rehearsals, and I never wanted to leave. I blindfolded myself for hours on end and would spend any extra time trying to find my way around the theatre or my home like that, imagining what it was like to be blind and deaf. The whole experience was magical, and it was then that I irreversibly fell in love with acting, storytelling, and the empathetic nature of this art. However, at that time I didn't think I was pretty enough or talented enough to pursue acting as a career, so I pursued studies in psychology. It wasn't until I moved to France at 20 years old that I realized my passion could become a career, and I've been making my living doing what I love ever since.





Photography by Paul Smith

Entertainment Industry

- **Doing voice acting and TV/film acting must be a quite different process. What are the differences and similarities and how do those disciplines enhance each other?**

Well, a voiceover artist's job is to create a whole reality only through the voice. And in voiceover, more often than not, you are usually completely alone in the booth (unless you are doing a group record for original animation). The director, the engineer, and maybe some of the clients will be on the other side of the glass, and you have to simply imagine all of the other characters interacting with you. You have to imagine **everything**, really; the location, the temperature, the atmosphere, the situation, etc... and you have to make your character and its world come to life out of thin air. It really demands the spirit of a child, the richness of a child's imagination, and freedom to be playful to make this possible.

Working for TV and film is magical in a very different way. You are on a beautifully created set or at a real location, looking in the eyes of your fellow actors, and completely immersed in the atmosphere and the physical world of the project. And you get to play off of your fellow actors, which is so deeply enlivening. But there are also many more elements to juggle because of this, like making sure you are standing in just the right place for the camera, not blocking your partner's light, picking up a fork at the same time that you did in a previous take, having to memorize new pages of dialogue at the very last minute, possibly hours of waiting for your scene, and then having to be completely on as soon as you are finally called on set, no matter what state you are in. And still, no matter what, create a moment that feels spontaneous, wonderfully human, real, and yes, magical.

But both these disciplines are about using your imagination and sense of play to dive into the porthole of another reality and make it come to life in a way that is deeply human, spontaneous, and relatable.

- **When you do a character, either voice acting or TV/film acting, how do you create a personality while still keeping your authenticity?**

By coming from the inside out and following the sparks in my heart, which lead me both in drama and comedy.



Karen Strassman as Dr. Slotnick on AMC's series Preacher | Photography copyright Preacher

Acting

- **Does your experience as a voice actor helped you to get a specific role as a TV/film actor you really wanted? If so, please elaborate.**

I think my ability to work with my voice has helped me make some TV and film performances even more interesting. For example, When I auditioned for Dr. Slotnick in “Preacher,” the character description was just for an impassioned scientist. They didn’t say anything about adding an accent, but because I’ve done so many characters with accents in cartoons and video games, I just had an instinct to try the character with a German accent. And that’s what ended up landing me the role. In the end, it is what really helped create the character itself.

- **How does it feel to portray the character of Dr. Slotnick, a role that holds the future of mankind at her fingertips on AMC’s series “Preacher?”**

This quirky, obsessive, scientific genius was so much fun to explore. Honestly, just being a part of this exciting comic book world that was brought completely and entirely to life by so much brilliant talent was such a high. It was one of those experiences you never want to end, like being on a ride at an amusement park. When it stops, all you want to do is run back in line so you can get on it again.

- **What fascinates you most of Dr. Slotnick and what is the most significant impact she had on you as a person during the process of studying this character?**

Well, Dr. Slotnick is a freakishly brilliant, driven, genius German scientist. Though I’m not terribly adept when it comes to science and don’t work for an organization to help create a new Messiah, like Louis, I have always been passionately obsessed with my work. I am a stubborn perfectionist to a fault, am sometimes quite overzealous about things I am into, and have certainly tried very hard to please certain authority figures in my life. It was fun to just be that obsessed control freak out in the open and not have to hide it and

pretend to be normal. I think in general, acting gives us permission to let those more human parts of ourselves run loose for a while, and let down the charade we all play of being “normal” in everyday life. None of us are really as normal as we keep trying to appear. Being actors, we get to let our quirky hair down under the guise of “acting.”

- **What was your most memorable moment during the filming of “Preacher” with such a fantastic cast?**

I really enjoyed the first day when I got to set and we all gathered for a run through and blocking my first scene. Nobody knew me and they had no idea what I was going to do for the character since there was a very little indication in the script about who this doctor was. When I first opened my mouth during the first rehearsal and people on set heard my German accent, it was really fun to register their surprise and delight at what I had chosen to do, especially because I hold this brilliant cast and crew in such high esteem. As an artist, it’s always exciting to feel that you have surprised people. It’s so enlivening to experience surprises in life, and even more exciting to be able to surprise others.

- **You will be seen as Barbara Dowels in the upcoming horror thriller “The Onania Club.” What is the message behind the film’s plot?**

At this time, I am sworn to secrecy on this project. But I will say that this film will “hold a mirror up to nature” (as Shakespeare would say) in a most disturbingly accurate way...

- **A voice actor embodies different characters through voice paired with emotions. What kind of technical skills do you use to make it as real as possible?**

It's actually really simple, I just have a pact with myself to really "go there." To really visit that emotion and experience in myself. Whether I'm a little girl chipmunk trying to keep up with and impress her brother chipmunk, an absent-minded grandmother who has lost her magic hat, a dragon after revenge, or a robot who wants to be human, my job is to really go there instead of just doing "a voice" or phoning it in a hollow or predictable way. If I really go there, the character will automatically come to life, actually taking me over, making the performance so human and spontaneous that the audience it's being pulled in and enthralled.



Karen Strassman as Dr. Slotnick on AMC's series Preacher | Photography copyright Preacher

Personal

- **What does inspire you most as a person of having the possibility in your professional life to become different characters?**

What inspires me the most is what terrifies me the most. It's being out of control and letting the experience have a life of its own. Like when a character just takes you over or pulls something so real and human out of you. This inspires and thrills me. This and the experience of deep empathy for a new experience of the human condition that you inevitably end up experiencing through it.

Good Soul

- **Do you support any charitable organization you want to mention? If so, please do.**

My all-time favorite charity is The Covenant House –

<https://covenanthousecalifornia.org> – they can literally change the life and destiny of a homeless youth, it's an amazing organization. I also love charities like CARE, Partners in Health, and PETA.

Close Up

- **The spirit of The Hedonist Magazine is “The Essence of a Joyful Living.” How does joy during the creation process affect your own experience, and in consequence the final manifestation of your actions?**

I find that joy is what helps me connect to my heart, where the real intelligence is. I find when I'm acting, if I'm having a good time, then the work will come to life. If I'm stressing, taking myself too seriously or putting a harsh pressure on myself, my work is never any good. I also think there is a more subtle version of “joy,” which has its seed in gratitude. Any time I'm coming from a sensation of gratitude, it brings me strain into my heart, where real life abides and everyday magic can occur.

- **When you hear: “You can be, do and have anything you want,” Words by Abraham Hicks. What is your take on such a statement?**

I think I am proof of that. I was told all the reasons I could never succeed as an actress – not pretty enough, tall enough, thin enough, old enough, young enough, busty enough, connected enough. And here I am doing what I love because I kept listening to that tug in my heartstrings to do it anyway because I kept stepping forward onto my own path like a scavenger hunt, a treasure hunt, not giving up... I faced each obstacle and let it push me to grow, learn, and transform into what it would take to be what my heart was nudging me to dare to be...maybe that's the hero's journey.

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