



THE WAY IT'S MEANT TO BE

David & Karen Puckett... Professional Drivers

When you have reached a plateau in life, doing everything right to the best of your ability knowing that right around the corner awaits a more promising situation, many would suggest letting the chips fall where they may. Life has a funny way of working things out. When you keep pushing forward, you will notice everything comes back full circle. The second time around, having the knowledge from prior experience provides more leeway to revel in the sanctity of what brings you true happiness.

These two Legends have earned a combined total of 4 million safe miles, spanning over the last 25 years. Running as a husband and wife team since the early 90's, they have formed a healthy marriage, a strong, united work ethic and a powerful work presence by learning from one another; while also keeping their priorities in order. David and Karen Puckett call Missouri home, but live the majority of the year on the road. Having met as teenagers and married at 20, this couple have grown together as adults, established a successful trucking career, and wish to



continue their adventures until they are no longer able.

When the two initially took on the responsibilities of trucking, they found the silver lining and explored many of the beautiful sights our country has to offer. However, during times of change within any industry, the urgency to meet deadlines became more of a race to get from point A to point B. The ongoing chaos slowly dimmed the light that had sparked a new and exciting life for the married couple. Karen and David share their personal story as husband and wife, driving partners and best friends. We also discuss how they started their careers on a

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high note, stayed consistent and resilient through an evolving market, and are now back to enjoying what they do for a living. The way trucking is meant to be.

When I asked David and Karen to shed some light for other marriages to take heed, in hopes to attain the same fulfillment they both gladly gave their own perspective as to what has worked for them. David says, "We knew from the beginning that we wanted to travel together, but Karen didn't drive then. We decided that if she is going to be out here she might as well learn how. The deal was for her to drive three years, then she can go home and do whatever she wants. 24 years later, she is still driving as much as I do." They agree that being around each other day in and day out can add to the stress of such a demanding profession. Karen laughs as she makes light of a few instances they've had. "I'll tell you, slamming the curtain is not very effective." On a more serious note David added, "We don't argue much. When we do disagree, we know that we can't remain angry long. Working as a team, you have to learn to get along no matter how bad things seem at the time. Driving down the road upset is never a good thing." Karen adds, "Plus, you must have each other's back! David can be frank, but he is honest and an extremely hard

worker. I know that he depends on me to get each job done, so I give him the same equal amount of respect. We always give 150%! Even if it only calls for 50%. Trucking is the perfect fit for us and we do it well... Together."



Karen is from the state of Missouri. Before joining David on the road, she had never traveled further than Kansas. Her father drove a truck for 30 years and her mother stayed at home as a full-time housewife for their four daughters. Karen, being the oldest, took notice of her father's line of work. She never shied away from large trucks, even though the trucking industry was not suited or catered to women during that time period. As a child, the idea of leaving her home town and driving far away became her obsession. "I was comfortable behind a steering wheel from a very young age. I could drive nearly any-

thing. By nine, I was driving a hay truck. They would even let me drive our family car down the road two miles to get milk. Then I became more adventurous and wanted to go cruise on the highway. As I grew older, I would pray that He would let me do something where I could travel and see things," she said. Karen's answer to her prayers came in the form of a teenage boy that caught her eye at a local hangout. She was instantly attracted to David. Little did they know that very night was the beginning of their future together. After their first date, the two became inseparable.



David is the youngest of three children, born in California. His father operated heavy equipment, while his mother worked

at a local diner. At five, they moved to Wisconsin and opened a grocery store. Years later, the family relocated to a farm in Arkansas and his father returned to running heavy machinery. When he wasn't working, he helped the family tend to their chicken farm.

At 16, David landed his first job outside of the family farm at a truck stop pumping diesel. Soon after, he became sick and was diagnosed with stage 3 Hodgkin Disease (Hodgkin Lymphoma). David endured months of intense chemotherapy and further treatment through injections. After a long battle and overcoming cancer, he was ready to take control of his life again. Finding his way back to where he had left off was a process. In all; his life was forever changed.

Many years before as a young boy, David and his cousin, whose father drove a truck, would play around trucks together. They would talk about one day when they were older, driving one of their own. When David became well enough to find work again, his parents reminded him of his childhood dream. Cancer had taught him many things. The main lesson was not to put anything on hold. He immediately enrolled at his community college that offered classes in their truck driving

division.

For the first five years, David and Karen welcomed the role of professional tourists. Karen says, "We made plans according to our locations. We would go snorkeling, scuba diving, and did lots of camping. We just had a ball! Then we began running dedicated and our schedules left little room to breathe. We were going week in and week out." Before they knew it, their fun job had been replaced with long-extended hours, tiring and boring days leaving them wondering if things would ever go back to the way they were. David explains that in a way, given their situation driving as a husband and wife team (back before such teams was sought-after), there were many times they felt excluded and completely on their own. "We basically had no outside influence to help direct us. We just had each other. We pushed through as a team and

haven't turned back from it," he said.

Becoming owner operators, the stakes were higher. Karen continues, "We struggled for years, but we never gave up. Then the good Lord led us to Landstar. I can't say enough about the amazing community of people here that are exactly like us. The vast network of teams, consisting of husbands and wives was very encouraging at the perfect time. To find this group here at Landstar revitalized our entire trucking careers. The company as a whole gave us dreams we never imagined. One being that we could own a truck such as the one we have now, Firefly. All of it was made possible by being a part of such a great atmosphere. Landstar has opened avenues for us to get back to loving our job." Once joining the work force, their first truck leased to Landstar was a 2009 Volvo.



Year after year, more disciplinary regulations are implemented. Also, the number of drivers grow, yet the length of time to become qualified is compressed in order to move production. Through transition, veteran truck drivers notice the growing absence of chivalry amongst one another. In hindsight new drivers, some that are second and third generation drivers, desire to help bring the

old school values back. There is a mutual ground within the trucking realm, but many are so immersed with their work duties, causing a distraction, enabling the connection between separate generations. David suggests opening all channels of communication; ask for advice, don't be ashamed if you need help, and most of all, listen. "Back when we started out in flatbed, people were always helping others. It was not a big deal to stop and lend a hand. People made time for one another. There is still a lot of us older drivers out here willing to help. We've been through it all, ran the ropes, put in the hours, and still willing to help. Now days many don't find the value in our experience due to our age. Even though they go hand in hand. Trucking is not easy and definitely not for everyone. But if we can help guide others in a way that wasn't available to us years ago, then we will go out of our way to do it." Karen agrees with her husband stating, "Everybody is rushed, rushed, rushed. I would suggest slowing down a bit. Don't be so panicked and relax. Enjoy what you're doing, help others, and have a kind heart. That's all you can do. With us, we do every load the best we can and if somebody needs anything, we're there."

Growing a fleet of their own does not appeal to either David

or Karen. Content in their current truck, any future endeavors may lead them to venture outside of the trucking industry and pursue their second choice of dream jobs. In the past, on the weekends when they were able to relax at home, David enjoyed cooking for friends and entertaining. "I have a Caribbean Jerk recipe to die for. I'd make side dishes or different desserts and have everyone try them," he said. His vision also inspired a pirate theme menu full of cuisine items complete with creative titles fitting the restaurant's charm and precise detail, down to the embellished building designs inside and the specific area needed to launch such a venue. He states, "I want people to be able to come in and relax, have plenty of time to engage in conversation and simply enjoy the experience. Each dish would be made to order from a variety to choose from. Everything would be fresh! Quality food at its finest." Carefully thought of, entailed with plenty of originality, we can only hope his restaurant will eventually come to life so we can all get a taste.

Karen on the other had already opened a small business that she would love to return to if the opportunity presented itself. She says, "I started my photography business back when we were on dedicated runs. I had an in-house studio,

but my favorite was shooting high school students for their senior portraits and weddings outside.” With evident material from a large number of satisfied clients, I’m sure many would be glad to welcome Karen back into the world of photography.

For now, the restaurant and photography businesses take a backseat to their existing situation. The details behind their dream truck originated from a hit TV show called, *Firefly*. Unaware of the large fan base that also fell in love with the series, that same devoted following also gravitated to their truck. David and Karen agreed to incorporate the television’s ‘American space Western’ design and build their custom truck unlike any other. The couple explain how the idea unfolded. “From the time we knew that we wanted to build and design a truck, we had at least four or five trucks in between, but didn’t exactly know how or what to do yet,” Karen said. David continued, “We debated back and forth. It was in 2014 when we decided... we were hooked on the show, *Firefly* and then it got cancelled. I remember there was a huge uproar about it. We obviously weren’t the only ones addicted to the show, but we had no idea how many people would recognize our truck and connect the two. After she and I agreed, within five minutes we were in

unison and it all came together!”

On December 24th that same year, the couple treated their new truck as a Christmas gift to each other and became the proud owners of their 2015 Volvo with a Custom 156 Legacy Sleeper. The step deck is specially designed with the purple galaxy scene of *Firefly* with the ship, *Serenity* on its moveable tarp system. “We have had plenty of opportunities to add trucks, but we like things the way they are.” Karen adds, “We are so much happier now with where we’re at and what we’re in. The main thing here with Landstar, is that you basically dispatch yourself. You pick your own loads. You choose what and when. They allow us to control our own destiny and we’re able to be home more often. With that said, we will keep at it until we either retire or no longer can.”

