

KNIGHT FOR HIRE

Dressed in 82 pounds of armor, Karl Kindt III shares his entertaining tales of character, values and chivalry

by Heather Berry
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The newspaper ad read, "Would-be knight for hire. Have armor, will travel." Simple, to the point. Surely there would be someone in search of a gallant fellow who would go wherever duty called. And if someone answered the ad, Karl Kindt III would know there truly was a market for a 21st-century knight.

"Someone answered the ad all right," says Karl, who lives in the St. Louis suburb of Webster Groves. "My first call was from an older woman. She wanted to know if I was the knight, and if so, could I come over and fix a leak under her sink.

"I said, 'Why would a knight know anything about plumbing?'" he recalls. "The elderly woman replied, 'Well, I wasn't sure what knights would be doing nowadays . . .' So I sent a plumber over to repair the leak."

Since 1995, Karl — also known as Sir Kwain (Knight Without an Interesting Name) — has been promoting chivalry to young and old alike.

Most people know Karl as an information services coordinator for the law firm of Lewis, Rice & Fingersh in St. Louis and a computer instructor at Webster University. But not everyone knows about the pilgrimage that inspired him to take on his knight persona.

"My father was a 21-year-old machine gunner in World War II in Germany," shares Karl. "My mother was expecting before he left for the war, so he left a letter written to 'the new one,' me. He gave the letter and enough money for a dozen red roses to a friend and asked to have them delivered to the hospital when I was born, should he be killed in action."

Sadly, Karl Kindt II died April 12, 1945, only three months before his son was born.

Karl's mother eventually married a childhood friend of his father. Stepfather John Prescott raised Karl to think of his real dad as a chivalrous knight who'd fought evil dragons so we could enjoy the freedom we have today.

"So I grew up with all these stories of knights gallantly helping others in need," says Karl, 66. "Of course, when I went to college, I put all that away, but I never stopped thinking about my dad."

Over the years, Karl visited with anyone who had known his father, trying to get to know the man he never met. An Internet search led Karl to a man who served in his dad's platoon and knew where Karl's father had been killed in Germany.

For decades, Karl re-read the letter his father left him, and eventually Karl felt the need to travel to Germany and see where his father had died as well as the cemetery where he was buried in France.

"Seeing his grave had such an impact on me," says Karl, recalling the moment again. "I never grieved his death growing up, but I couldn't hold back when I was there."

A statue of King Arthur standing in the cemetery chapel brought back the stories of knights his stepfather had shared with him years ago. That's when Karl thought maybe becoming a knight who shared positive messages with others might be an honorable way to remember his father. So he came back home and began the process of becoming a knight.

He found a man in Idaho who specialized in making armor. After 212 measurements and a year or so later, Karl owned a 16th-century battle armor.

The suit weighs 82 pounds, so Karl began strength training so he could wear it any length of time.

"My iron suit cost approximately \$4,763.17," says Karl, with a wry smile. "It's designed to fit like a glove; it has no mercy."

Once he had the suit, Karl placed his newspaper ad to see if anyone happened to need a knight. The rest is history.

"After that first call from the elderly lady about her plumbing, the calls started coming in from schools, scout groups, senior centers, libraries, you name it," says Karl, who estimates he's spoken to nearly 20,000 people during various presentations over the years.

Some requests have been more unusual in nature. Sir Kwain has walked brides down the aisle, attended wedding rehearsal dinners, ridden in parades on a horse and served as a bouncer at parties.

"Most of the time, it's schools, scout or church groups wanting me to share my stories about chivalry," Karl says. "But I can tailor my presentations and stories to fit just about any group."

Randy Joeckel, leader for Cub Scout Pack 965 in St. Charles, asked Sir Kwain to speak at their banquet recently.

"He explained what the job of a knight was back in history," says Randy. "Then he shared stories about bravery and chivalry. He even sliced a watermelon open with his sword — lengthwise. The kids were mesmerized."

"The moral seeds he planted in these kids, if reinforced by the parents, will stay with them all their lives," adds the scout leader.

Karl calls his many stories "true imaginary tales." These

include Sir Kwain and the Name Dragon, Sir Kwain and the Armadillo and The Village of Imnotsure. Karl tailors the stories to the topic and age level of his audience. But with authentic medieval weapons, including a 4-foot sword, throwing ax and morningstar, Karl can always keep the interest of any age group as he tells both historical and concocted tales that always end with a moral.

"Hilarious stories that are serious in nature," he says. "That's the best way to describe them."

Since 1995, Karl has traveled as far as New York carrying messages of chivalry and good character to all who will listen. His fees vary according to the distance he travels and other factors.

"I love it," says Karl of his time spent as his alter ego, Sir Kwain. "But my wife thinks maybe I need to scale back the knight stints since I'm 66 now. But for now, Sir Kwain lives on."

For more information about Karl's programs, log on to www.knightforhire.com. You may contact Karl at kkindt@earthlink.net or call 314-308-7075.

Sir Karl Kindt III poses in his authentic replica of 16th century battle armor.

