

# Karen Lombardo

## *—Penning Success For Others*



For some people, running your own freelance business sounds like a nightmare. For others like Karen Lombardo, they make it look easy. So easy, that Karen is now running multiple businesses! But the truth is, it isn't easy. Every person and every business has a story behind them—something always going on in the background that the rest of us don't know about that adds a whole other layer to running a business.

Karen grew up on Keyes Avenue in Schenectady. She loved to play tennis, be with her friends, and...be Italian. They were a tight family immersed in Schenectady's Italian population. "My grandfather used to ask people if they were Italian. If they said no, he would say he was sorry!" Karen says. "I never told my grandfather that my husband was not 100% Italian. My father-in-law spoke Italian with him, and we just kept my mother-in-law away so he wouldn't know!"

Karen graduated from Siena College, working sales for Avon from high school on to earn some extra money. A friend introduced her to Chip, and she knew right from the beginning that he was her special "one." She bought a new dress to mark the occasion of their first date. They went out for a mid-week dinner and movie. Parking across the street from the restaurant, Chip came around to get her door, then took her hand to bring her across the traffic to the restaurant. "I will never forget that moment. I knew right then," Karen remembers.

After they married three years later, they moved to Syracuse due to a wonderful job opportunity for Chip. However, Karen wasn't happy in Syracuse, and it didn't offer anything for her career. After she received a job offer she couldn't refuse from Manhattan, they decided to do a distance thing and went back and forth



BY JENNA CAPUTO  
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THE LOMBARDO FAMILY

between the two places for six years before relocating in the middle right here in Niskayuna.

Karen initially worked as an Account Manager for the Northeast Mid-Atlantic Region at Lexis Nexis before moving on to the Eastern US Sales Manager position. "I loved the company, and in the early 1990s, online searching was new and exciting. It never felt like work," she says. She worked there until 2003 when she took a position as the Director of Business Development for Integrated Book Technology in Troy, then as a Project Manager for Skadden Arps working with a programmer who taught her Visual Basic. Together, they created a program for asset-based lending, bankruptcy, and leasing matters. She then took a couple of other jobs, ending up as VP of Marketing and Client Development at Incserve.

"I led the company to a new look and feel with the help of some amazing young women. It was tremendous," she says. "You know, not all jobs are 100% perfect, but I was lucky and enjoyed what I did and the people I worked with. Each step along the way taught me something about myself and a few precious life lessons."

Chip encouraged her to start her own business, and Put Another Way was born. Focusing on website design, development, and content writing services for clients, Karen enjoyed her new avenue of writing. "I love blogging for my clients, and anything written is both challenging and fun," she says. She began receiving requests to write wedding vows and speeches, so she started another company called My Little Love Note.

Karen and Chip had two children. Amelia (25) received her MBA from RIT last May and is now working as a Digital Marketing Specialist for Redcom in Victor, NY. She also freelances on the side for local, woman-owned businesses and helps out Karen as well. Amelia was recently engaged, and their family is looking forward to the coming wedding in the



Finger Lakes area in 2024. Jack (22) is a German education major at the University of Alabama. He was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to study in Germany and will be returning to Alabama to complete his degree this fall. Their family also includes Miss Tillie (3), a rescued English Bulldog. Karen says that as a family, they are a laid-back group, each person bringing something individually to the whole. Together, they

enjoy supporting hockey and Alabama football, Roll Tide.

Karen and Chip were avid cooks, loving experimenting with new foods and taking cooking and baking classes. Chip always said it was like a dance in the kitchen together when they took recipes and made them their own. Karen created the blog, [Pastaonthefloor.com](http://Pastaonthefloor.com), to document their experiences and general thoughts on life, food, and the love of both. She has gained worldwide followers and has enjoyed the interaction.

However, she has not been cooking much these days. In May 2021, Karen and Chip sold their house to move to Canandaigua, NY, looking for a retirement lake house. They were enjoying life in a resort town and had settled in nicely. But everything changed in the




blink of an eye one morning on their way to the gym. Chip had a pain in his chest, and on the way home, the pain became so intense Karen called 911 instantly. He coded right there on the road, and the ambulance rushed him to Strong Hospital in Rochester, but he had been gone too long. His brain never recovered from the lack of oxygen, and they had to say goodbye one week later. The ray of light in this gut-wrenching situation was

knowing he was an organ, eye, and tissue donor, and that his final legacy would be helping others. "The Honor Walk that occurs when someone is about to donate their organs was the most beautiful and painful experience of my life," says Karen. "The kids and I talk about it all the time."

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Karen decided to move back to Niskayuna and has since taken over Chip's company, The Bajan Group, that he had formed shortly after their wedding. "We named it after a booze cruise we took on our honeymoon. Bajans are people from Barbados and that is where the cruise was. We had such fun!" explains Karen.

The Bajan Group is a print distributor that serves the hospitality, healthcare, retail, and manufacturing industries along with small businesses. Their mission is to provide quality print at affordable prices. Chip also ran Expex—a SaaS program using artificial intelligence for automated bookkeeping. Karen has decided to sell that company since she did not have the appropriate bookkeeping skills to continue running it on her own.

She also streamlined her two businesses, rebranding as The Virtual Copywriter, LLC. The new company provides copywriting, resume and LinkedIn profile writing, blogging, website design and development, wedding speeches and officiant services, and obituaries and eulogies. The new combined business has been working well, and they are off and running with new clients and challenges. It's harder to write the wedding speeches than it used to be, but it has become a special practice. "It has been challenging to write these speeches since my husband died, but it somehow brings me closer to him as I remember our wedding day," says Karen.

She also has recently become a "Secretary of Juliet." Responding as "Giulietta" to people who write to Shakespeare's famous heroine from Verona, Italy looking for help and advice has been a rewarding and joyous venture. It all started when she watched the movie, *Letters to Juliet*, based on the book of the same name that chronicles this phenomenon of letter-writing to the famous character. "I began to investigate to see if this was a real organization and it is!" says Karen. "After conversations and emails, I reached out, they accepted me, and I began writing. I pen about eight letters a week from Italian to English converted emails. I call upon the situations in my own life, relationships, and being married for 32 years. The letters are moving and open, sometimes so raw. I hope I give the



writer some peace when I sign the letter, 'Love, Giulietta.'"

Not one to sit still, Karen also is very active within the Capital Region Chamber and the Adirondack Chamber in addition to her volunteer work within the community. She is petrified of elevators, has a crazy affinity for coffee and cheese, is a self-proclaimed clutz (she's broken over 23 bones!), and loves to travel to Italy and to Skaneateles Lake in the Finger Lakes. At home, she has always enjoyed the local farmers markets, microbrews, and walking the



trails in Saratoga Park. “The Capital District has so much to offer, just open your mind and give things a try!” she says.

Karen is still finding her way after Chip’s death and knows that it will take a while to understand who she is and what her life is now in this new chapter. Her passions in life have changed, but that’s okay. “Losing the one person on Earth that knows you, that sees you, and who you can be with changes when they are gone. It will be a while before those life-passions return.” She is learning about grief as she goes and offers this advice to others in the same position:

“It is okay to grieve and grieve on your timeline. I cry every day, all day when I think of anything about Chip in the car, in the store. People will give you advice and say things that do not help but understand they hurt for you and want to help you. My heart is forever broken, and my soul is lost. I wish I could be more helpful. My college roommate and my dear friend in Maine both lost their husbands. We share a commonality that we wish we did not. But they understand. Find someone that understands you and your profound grief.”

In the meantime, she is taking each day as it comes and looking to the future with her new business and the bright days ahead for her children, as she hopes for them to do well, marry for love, and be happy.

Giulietta approves. ∞



For more information about The Virtual Copywriter and The Bajan Group, visit [thevirtualcopywriter.com](http://thevirtualcopywriter.com) and [bajangroup.com](http://bajangroup.com).