

The Story of Karen's Botanicals

While I thought my career as an herbalist began in childhood, in fact it started long before I was born. As a girl growing up outside of Philadelphia, I concocted "huckleberry finn water," an infusion of tap water and wildberry-flavored life savers, and made "honeysuckle dew elixir" for my dolls. While living in Alaska in the '80s, I infused the yellow buds of the cottonwood tree in olive oil to make the analgesic Balm of Gilead oil. As a gardener, backpacker and trained forager, I learned to find, grow, and use plants to



make natural food, beauty, and health products. But not until traveling to a small village in what is now the eastern Slovak Republic did I realize that my passion for botanicals was bred in the bone.

In 1993, I went to the Slovak town of Stropkov in search of the gravestones of my paternal great-grandparents. An old woman in the graveyard seemed to understand what I was looking for and excitedly rushed me out of the graveyard, straight to a ceramics studio in town where she quickly produced a woman named Edita. As I was a potter myself, I was suddenly very curious. After examining the papers I had brought—copies of my great-grandfather's birth and baptismal certificates—Edita peered closely at my face, wrapped her arms around me and cried, "you are my family!" With the help of Edita's granddaughter Denisa, who spoke English, we figured out that Edita's grandmother was the sister of my great-grandfather, Jan Palcso, who like many Slovak men in the mid-1800s had immigrated to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where I was born.

To find living family instead of gravestones alone was cause for celebration. But we were not simply related; we were living parallel lives. Edita's daughter and I were and still are not only lifelong art teachers, but we make art that has remarkable similarities in style, subject matter and symbolism. Denisa and my father both worked in journalism early in their professional lives. Edita and I were working ceramists, and we both made botanical products from the fruits of our abundant gardens. An even more remarkable moment came during a visit in 2002 when I learned that Edita was descended from a long line of female herbalists. At the time, I was making herbal creams, lotions, and medicines as a serious hobby and thinking of trying it as a business. Learning about this part of the family history was the magic spark that inspired me to formally open Karen's Botanicals.

As far as we know, the herbal practice began with Zsuzsanna Palcso, Edita's great-grandmother, who made herbal medicines in the 1850s for which people traveled from far and wide. Zsuzsanna's daughter Anna added a successful wound cream to the line, but it almost stopped there when Anna became involved in raising her children. Edita remembers customers being upset to find that her mother, Anna, had forgotten the recipes. Karen's Botanicals, which I created in honor of Zsuzsanna Palcso, is my way of continuing the family tradition of using ancestral herbs to create botanical products for beauty, pleasure, and health. I am inspired by the serendipity of our family connections, and by the passions that bind us together.

Today, I strive continuously to develop safe, effective and luxurious formulas for skin and body care. Nearly all ingredients are certified organic now. As a small company, I am able to carefully practice

simple, sensible, and sustainable manufacturing processes. Best of all, due to low overhead costs, my products are offered at much lower prices than comparable companies. I sincerely hope that you will enjoy the plant based purity and beauty of Karen's Botanicals products.



ABOVE: Zsuzsanna's descendants Edita Jr., Karen, Edita Sr. and Denisa.

AT RIGHT: Karen's Botanicals is dedicated to the spirit of Zsuzsanna Palcsó.

