



*title changed to "When The Door Opens"*

## The World Would Be My Home

It's a long way from a one room school on the Kansas prairie with outhouses and a wood stove to a Television credit on "Hill Street Blues". I stepped into the world and used my shortcomings as assets.

My Dad was a goat dairy farmer. Our lives were dictated by the dairy seven days a week. One Sunday, when I was thirteen years old, we took the afternoon off and went fishing on the four-mile creek. We laughed and talked and forgot work – what a relief it was from the usual routine. On the way home we drove past a farm that Daddy told us belonged to the internationally famous fire fighter Red Adair. There was no truck in the driveway, of-course I thought, he is out somewhere in the world fighting fires. As we drove on I made a promise to myself that I would not stay in Kansas, I would not be a farmer's wife, in fact like Red Adair the world would be my home.

Thirteen years later, when my son's were in elementary school, I went back to college at Wichita State University. I majored in art, knowing that I would find something I could do in that field of study. I am dyslexic and thought college was out of reach for someone who was not a good reader. Two years later I was taking a painting class and my husband was singing in an Opera Workshop. After class I walked to the music building to meet him and ride home. We chatted with the Opera Director who asked if I could sew. I said "yes", and he asked how well I sewed. I said, "If you show me a picture I can make it". I thought he was talking about an evening gown for his wife. He asked if I thought I could construct an 18<sup>th</sup> Century Opera. I thought for a moment and remembered that there was a Martha and George Washington Halloween Costume in the Simplicity Pattern Book. A voice in my head said "Do It", so I said "Yes, I will construct the opera costumes". I was in over my head – I was inventing every step – but it felt like this was the thing I should be doing. The next year the designer graduated and I was asked to design my first opera, The Marriage of Figaro. At that time it didn't occur to me to look at Costuming as a potential career.

Nine complete operas and a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree and I was on my way to The University of Texas at Austin to learn how to do what I had been stumbling through. University of Texas Professor Emeritus, Lucy Barton, had come to WSU to speak at a Costume Seminar. She reviewed my Opera Costume Design Portfolio and commented that I had a lot to learn. She said she thought I would profit from studying with a former student, Dr. Paul Reinhardt, who was the head of the Costume Department at UT. In less than a moment I said to myself, "That is what I will do next".

Once again the voice in my head said "Do It". Motivational trainers tell us to set goals, write them down, determine the steps to achieve that goal and set a time table. I have recognized another plan working in my head. Psychologists describe how the brain identifies a goal and recognizes components of that goal as they pass through your life. I call that quality: "When the door opens – just walk through it". My mind seems to make a quick evaluation of the opportunity and if it is right for me it states the intent to "Do It". I feel a certainty that "This Is the Right Direction – It Will Work For Me". Each time I

jump in over my head – I am confident because I work with three success qualities: a practical sense of finding solutions; calm determination and a positive (Good) Attitude.

While I was at UT I got the opportunity to Design Costumes for the PBS show “Carrascolendas”. When I saw my work on camera I knew that was the medium for me. The camera allows the viewer to be a part of the action. I liked the close up detail and the challenge of creating characters the viewer could recognize and know their psychology.

Maybe contemporary costuming works with my dyslexic mind. My research is first hand. Where ever I am I watch people. I look at news stories of real people on TV, in the newspaper and magazines. I am looking at pictures; I am inputting visual information not word information. I have come to call myself a “social psychologist”. I observe how people are dressed and watch how they function in their society.

I left behind the grand period costumes and moved into costuming real people – illustrating their stories.

I met Directors from the PBS and the Hollywood TV Worlds during the two years I designed costumes for “Carrascolendas”. Through those connections I met legendary Hollywood Costume Designer Dorothy Jeakins. I wrote about her work for my MFA thesis at UT. During my three interviews with Dorothy Jeakins I was privileged to see many of her sketches and discuss the details of her design process. I also interviewed people who had worked with her. My thesis featured a 1976 theatre production of “The Duchess of Malfi” at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles .

July 14, 1977, seven months after “Carrascolendas” was cancelled I turned in my thesis at 4:30 in the afternoon and at 7 PM my son and I were on the road headed west out of Austin with \$400 in my pocket, an Exxon Credit Card and a place to stay in LA. “The Door Opened and I Walked Through It”. I stored the household goods in Austin, just in case, with the idea that I would send for the stuff when I was established. I was in LA for 10 days when I got the opportunity to interview for a position as Set Costumer on a new show, “Lou Grant”. That was the beginning of my twenty five year career in Hollywood. My claim to fame is that my name is on every episode of “Hill Street Blues”. Some of my other credits include “Dear John”, “The 60’s” mini series, and the film “Motel Hell”. I ended my career at the conclusion of the first season of “The District” in 2001. There were good days and bad days, but over all I wouldn’t trade my career.

My high school debate partner commented recently that perhaps the dyslexia caused me to look a little harder to find a career and in doing so I found something that suited me better and made me happier with my work than many people are with their work. I know I have always been aware of my assets and my limitations. I found a career that matched how I could work and something that challenged me. I have come to know I like to work fast. I like short term projects; I would not have made a good research scientist. I wanted every day to be different - different locations, different people. I am not afraid of unknown challenges (surprises). Going to the same office every day would not have been

good for me. I believe I moved forward to success because I listened to my instinct, worked hard, conducted business with integrity and a projected a good attitude. It's a long way from a One Room School in Kansas to a Costume Credit on "Hill Street Blues" - Bottom Line: "When the Door Opened – I Walked Through It".

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