

BUILDING WEALTH IN CHANGING TIMES



The Solari Report

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Successful Kickstarter with Karen Wang Diggs





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C. AUSTIN FITTS: Ladies and Gentlemen, it's my privilege to welcome to The Solari Report Karen Wang Diggs, who is a marvelous person, entrepreneur, and a chef who has had quite a success with her crowdfunding campaign.

I have met Karen through a mutual friend and have been most impressed. Our mutual friend emailed me as the campaign started and she said, "You've got to go look at Karen's campaign." I felt overworked and obliged. I sort of groaned and went and looked, and suddenly I saw that Karen had a product which solved a problem I'd always had, which was I wanted to eat more fermented fruits but every time I looked at the idea of making more myself the system was too complicated. I just said, "What a marvelous idea! I must have one!"

Apparently, a lot of other people said the same, too, because her campaign was quite successful. It's a perfect example of the kind of product that crowdfunding is so well-suited for. Given the success of what she's doing and the campaign, I couldn't wait to get her on The Solari Report to talk a little bit more about crowdfunding.

Let me just describe a little bit about Karen. She's both a chef and a certified nutrition consultant. She graduated from the California Culinary Academy and then worked as a chef in Hong Kong at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel. I used to live in Hong Kong, and that's very impressive.

She also helped to open two eateries in Hong Kong. If you know how wonderful the food is in Hong Kong and how competitive it is, that is also very impressive.

She decided that she needed to learn more about nutrition and become a



nutritional consultant. She got her certification graduating from Bauman College in 2006. It's an extraordinary combination of both understanding culinary skills and nutrition and helping people achieve their health goals through better health and better nutrition.

Karen, it's just wonderful to have you on The Solari Report. Welcome.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: Thank you so much, Catherine. It's a great pleasure to be on. I'm really excited to share what I've learned in this crowdfunding journey.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: In the Solari network everybody loves fresh food and has a passion for health and fresh food. Tell us about how your passion for health and cooking started and got going.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: Sure. Well, first of all, I have to give gratitude and thanks to my mother who actually did not cook. Because she couldn't cook, it triggered the incentive for me and my siblings to cook when we were very young.

I remember vividly my first experience scrambling an egg in a little frying pan. I started at the age of maybe five or six to cook for myself. Although I come from a cultural background where we valued food a lot, my mother didn't cook. We actually had an aunt living with us when I was young in Hong Kong who was a phenomenal cook. She did everything by hand. She wouldn't even buy ground meat. She would chop everything herself – everything made from scratch.

I think the combination of my mother and the exposure to my aunt who was a great cook instilled in me this passion and the desire to seek out really good food and to master the art of cooking myself. Later in life when I realized that I wanted to turn my passion for cooking into a profession, that's when I decided to attend culinary school formally and get that education and training.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: What was it like working as a chef in Hong Kong? I think of Hong Kong as one of the great food capitals of the world.



KAREN WANG DIGGS: Absolutely. Some of my fondest memories of food definitely stems from Hong Kong. But after I finished studies at the California Culinary Academy, I just decided I would go back and see what it held for me professionally. I literally just got on the plane after graduation, landed in Hong Kong, and I walked into the lobby of the Mandarin Oriental Hotel and asked the concierge if I could see the head chef. I didn't really think it through. Fortunately they didn't turn me away and she brought me to the back of the kitchen.

The time that I was in Hong Kong, which was the early 90's, the standard was that there were a lot of European chefs there – Swiss, French, German chefs. I stepped very quickly into that world where there are all these ex-pat head chefs there. Because they couldn't speak Cantonese and I could, I was kind of the go-between for the executive offices and the local chefs that worked in the various kitchens.

It was a great learning experience, but it was also really, really fun. At times it was almost like a comedy because there would be various things that happen, and things get lost in translation. Sometimes the local cooks don't share the same passion or standard of quality as chefs who are trained. So there were a lot of things that happened which you have to take with a sense of humor.

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C. AUSTIN FITTS: I can't imagine translating between a Cantonese sous chef and a Swiss Chef.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: Believe me, I had to work with a German chef whose accent was so thick that I could barely understand him. At the end of the day it was just exciting to put out excellent, good food.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: It's extraordinary. And the eateries that you worked with, where were they?



KAREN WANG DIGGS: After my time at the Mandarin, I was lucky enough to be approached by a couple of different groups of people. The first one was a private investor who had always dreamt of opening a restaurant. He was actually from Hong Kong and his wife was of Spanish ancestry from the Philippines. They wanted to open a Spanish restaurant in Hong Kong.

Through connections he contacted me. I was lucky enough to be able to take a project from scratch, develop a menu, look at different spaces, and build a kitchen from the ground up.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: How wonderful!

KAREN WANG DIGGS: In Hong Kong, everything is small, but it was a great experience. Then after that other people approached me to open a small wine bar which is in a very popular area in Hong Kong called Lan Kwai Fong which is very close to Central, the main business district in Hong Kong. That was really fun, too, because we brought in all types of different wines from around the world – a lot of New World wines – and paired it with just very simple food. We also put emphasis on coffee, too. We paired coffee with good food.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: I worked in a nightclub in Central District and it was always remarkable to me the flow of people coming through.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: Yeah, in such a small area. Thousands of people every evening, every weekend.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: So how was it that you decided to come back to study nutrition?

KAREN WANG DIGGS: Basically I was just completely burnt out. After seven years in Hong Kong I was just physically tired, mentally stretched, and I missed California. I missed the blue sky. I missed the slower pace. I missed that you could go to the movie theatre and not be surrounded by 1,000 people.



That's what brought me back, and – of course – I missed my family here, too.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: So tell us about Kraut Source. I think Kraut Source is such an ingenious thing. I can't tell you, Karen, there are no words to express how many times I have looked at fermentation and then said, "This is way too complicated. If I buy all this stuff, I will never do it."

So when I saw Kraut Source on Kickstarter I was like, "I must have this! Finally somebody has figured this out!"

KAREN WANG DIGGS: Thank you for your excitement and for your positive comments. First of all, I do have to say I have my business partner, Eric Klein, to thank for the excellent, excellent design. He, by training and education, is a product designer. He also comes from a family of inventors, so he knows how to write a patent which is very important.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Yes.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: Initially I came up with the idea after I studied nutrition, and I realized the health implications of having truly homemade fermented foods in your dietary regiment. Also, to me, it was a lost art. It was a culinary art that has gone underground for the past few decades. Since the 1940's we've had TV dinners and fast food and industrialized food that completely decimated the idea of any food that has live bacteria.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: I also just have to say my recollection and my experience is that Chinese cooking has a lot of fermented foods. Is that not the case?

KAREN WANG DIGGS: In Asia in general there are a lot of fermented foods, so growing up I was used to it, but I never really thought deeply about the health implications.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: Therefore, the idea of lacto-fermented foods or foods



that have live cultures in them wasn't foreign. Even for me as a chef for many years, the process of making fermented foods just wasn't part of my cooking routine until I studied nutrition.

That was a really good awakening for me to go back to my cultural roots, but then to also look at fermented foods from around the world. From a nutritional, therapeutic standpoint, to really study what the lacto-bacilli bacteria that are thriving in culture foods can bring us as far as health, it can up the health benefits for us. I think the most familiar one for most of your listeners would be yogurt or kefir, which is a similar thing to yogurt but more of a drink.

These dairy fermented foods are very familiar to many people, but yet the idea of turning vegetables like cabbage into sauerkraut and all of that, probably people know it as having sauerkraut with hot dogs. The idea is making it at home has been lost for – like I said – many decades.

That was an incentive for me to start fermenting at home which I did in traditional crocks. Some batches would turn out really good and some batches would turn out really slimy and terrible.

Finally I purchased a crock from Chinatown here in San Francisco that had a ring around it that looks like a little moat. It's a little indentation where you fill the moat with water and then you cap it with a bowl so that your fermentation is sealed.

When there is a water ring, oxygen cannot get in, but what is fermenting inside the jar will allow the CO₂ to develop as it is fermenting. So the water seal allows the CO₂ to escape, but it keeps new air from getting in – which is really important in fermentation. Plus, it's also important that you keep everything submerged.

I was thinking about what a great idea this is. It's been around for hundreds of years and the Germans also have something very similar. The problem with it is that you need to make a really big batch.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right.



KAREN WANG DIGGS: These crocks are either made out of ceramic or glass, which makes them very fragile. If you have a big batch and you need to move it, it's sort of a hassle.

I was literally in the shower thinking, "What a great idea if we could only shrink it down to fit onto a mason jar." That was when the idea just really came to me.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: It's so easy to get a mason jar, but the other thing is that mason jars are something everybody knows and loves and feels comfortable with.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: Exactly, and I think that it's a gift you give to someone. You make jam or preserves in a mason jar. You give the mason jar to someone. Then someone will inevitably give a mason jar back to you. In a way, it's a very community-based idea of sharing mason jars.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Yeah.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: That's how the idea came. When I explained that idea to Eric, he came back and said, "You know, I think we can make this into a patentable design." That's really how we started about two years ago.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Fantastic! In the meantime, at some point, you must have learned about crowdfunding. How did you learn about crowdfunding, and how did you come to decide that you would try it four Kraut Source?

KAREN WANG DIGGS: Personally before launching our Kickstarter mid-July of this year, I supported probably about eight to ten Kickstarter projects. I learned about it in 2012 or so. The first project that I backed was not successful, but I just really loved the idea that you can support someone directly. They have this idea and you can just say, "I understand your

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between the battle of the spiritual realm and the material realm. I go back to the story of Job in the bible where basically God says to the devil, “You can do anything you want, but you can’t kill him, and I think you can’t separate him from me; he’s mine.”

There’s this game going on where the devil is trying to separate Job from his love of God and his connection with God, and he can’t do it. If you look at what is happening in the invisible realm in the material world, what they’re trying to do is get humans offside. They’re trying to break down their character. They’re trying to break down their integrity. They’re trying to break down their good habits. The reality is that if they get you offside, you lose God’s protection and then they’ve got you.

FRANKLIN SANDERS: You just came to the point of something that occurred to me not too long ago because of the situation. I was being urged by counselors to forget about God and make peace the best way I could.

Well, I thought about that and I said, “Well, wait a minute. I’ve seen God intervene in my life to protect me in a multitude of ways over many, many years in almost innumerable ways. Is it safe for me at this point to change gods?”

C. AUSTIN FITTS: No!

FRANKLIN SANDERS: To abandon the God who has protected me and run after their gods of the world, which is human cleverness, it just hit me. God may let me go down in flames, and I don’t know what will happen to me, but it’s not safe for me to change gods – not after this time, not knowing what I know.

I think you and I are something alike in this. I didn’t come to faith until I was 34 years old. I already had several children. I had one of those ‘Road to Damascus’ kind of experiences – not that I was blinded or anything like that – but I literally was on my way to get somebody arrested for cheating me, and I realized I would kill that person if I could get my hands on him. If I had my way, I would kill that person.



idea. I like it.” It’s community-based, and I chose a lot of projects that were community-based and environmentally connected.

Then also I’ve backed a couple of musicians. It was really fun for me to watch the process of crowdsourcing and I mainly did it on Kickstarter. I probably supported a couple of those projects on Indiegogo. It was just nice to watch the success of a project come through and the changes that it can make for a small business owner.

The other thing that I like is instead of needing to go to the bank and borrow x amount of dollars and do all the paperwork and the credit check and everything, when you do a crowdfunding project – such as with Kickstarter – you get immediate feedback.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: I realized that in our case – because we were putting together a product that’s a kitchenware – even if the Kickstarter were not successful, we would have done marketing. It was a natural way to test a product.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right. It’s kind of building your first customers and doing your market research and figuring out your advertising.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: You’re doing all of that at the same time. I think for me it was a really, really good way to approach how we would look at Kraut Source and how to fund it.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: As I was preparing for our discussion I looked up some of the statistics. It appears that it’s critical in the first week that you get 30%.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: I didn’t even know that!

C. AUSTIN FITTS: And the average successfully funded project – I was surprised – was \$7,000.



KAREN WANG DIGGS: Wow! I didn't know that either.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: So let's talk about your crowdfunding process.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: Okay.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: How did you go about it? How did you design the campaign? How did you do it?

KAREN WANG DIGGS: Well, prior to launching – about six months prior – I did do a lot of research, and Eric did as well. Online I found a number of resources. I also took a few online classes on how to do a successful campaign, but I think the critical factors in it were that during those few months prior to launching – and we didn't exactly know when we were going to launch – I started building up my community.

I went to different events that I thought would be useful, where people would be interested in fermentation and Kraut Source. I just started speaking to different people who would be interested.

The other thing that I did was I contacted several people who had very successful Kickstarter campaigns. One is a guy out of Chicago. I went to a HealthWare show, and he was a presenter there. I approached him and basically looked at his campaign and how he laid it out and everything. I kind of used his campaign as an inspiration for my own.

There was another campaign from someone locally, and she also did a very successful campaign so I threw myself on her because she was local. I asked her to go to lunch. I really tapped into how she made her campaign successful.

A couple of successful campaigns I looked at what they did and picked out bits and pieces that I thought would be applicable to Kraut Source. That was enormously helpful.

By the way, these two campaigns – both of them – exceeded \$100,000.



C. AUSTIN FITTS: Wow!

KAREN WANG DIGGS: So maybe it was a good thing that I didn't know the average success was \$7,000.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: You originally launched. Your goal was to raise \$35,000 and you raised \$186,000.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: Right. We came out with the \$35k because we were just looking at the cost of manufacturing not the units but just the tooling cost and some other cost that has already occurred in our process. We wanted to be reasonable and we didn't want to ask for something that we felt was too much. As you know, on Kickstarter if you don't make your goal you don't get anything.

We were a little bit on the conservative side, but we asked for \$35k and the astounding thing was that we hit that in three and a half days.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Oh my word! How wonderful!

KAREN WANG DIGGS: It was really wonderful looking back at it because when we launched, we launched at 3:00 in the afternoon. The process was I literally sent out emails to a lot of people who I know but individually. I didn't want to do a mass email because I felt that it wasn't in the spirit of what I wanted to do with Kraut Source.

I wanted to build a community. I just felt like individual emails were very important for me. I would send an email to Susan, to Peter, to Bob, but I would have little individual things like, "How's your dog? Long time no see. This is my Kickstarter campaign. Would you mind going on and supporting me if you feel like it?"

It was very individualized in the beginning and I'm really glad that I did

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that because obviously it paid off.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right. Well, I remember because we have a mutual acquaintance, which is how I discovered it and how I met you. She was adamant, “You have to go there right now!”

KAREN WANG DIGGS: Yeah!

C. AUSTIN FITTS: It was very personal, but I think part of it was that if you look at the product, the product really hits the spot. It’s something that really solves a need that people have, which is: How do you make fermentation something that’s small batch, light, easy, convenient? It’s quite remarkable. I think you had a combination of both a very well thought out campaign with a very well thought out and excellent product.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: Thank you. I would have to say there were a couple of organizations that I tapped into which really helped me. One was ‘Slow Money’. I don’t know if you’re familiar with Slow Money.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Yes.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: They were inspired by Slow Food. The local chapter has Peter Reddick and his friend Thomas Atwood. I met them through a networking thing. They were very kind to take interest in Kraut Source. The day that I launched it I actually went to one of their regional meetings and gave a presentation on Kraut Source and what I want it to do beyond Kraut Source.

I think by doing that and honing my vision of what I would like Kraut Source to generate in the future, I kind of held that idea of community of sustainability in mind. I think that really kept the spirit of the campaign going. As a consequence of that, I think we tapped into a lot of people who that also spoke to.

I think the spirit of the campaign also drives the people who will back you.



C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right. And you had somebody do your video as well.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: Yes. A great mother-daughter team, Debbie and Ariel and their assistant, Evan. They are the Food Guru. We ended up choosing them because for one thing, they do really great videos. It's amazing what they can do in two minutes!

Also because they concentrate on food, it really made sense for me to go with a team who was passionate about food, they have a lot of connection with different people in the food world here in the Bay Area, and they really understood the nature of Kraut Source and what I wanted to achieve.

I'm very happy that we went with Food Guru, and I think the video that eventually was launched on Kickstarter was quite effective.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Yeah. You have to have a video. Kickstarter has a little chorus on how to do a video that's quite clever, but I think it's fair to say that you have to have a video.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: Absolutely. You know, people say, "Oh, it's optional," but that video is the story with which you enchant people and there's no other way to put it.

If you can't enchant people in the first minute, you've lost the campaign. That I did learn from successful Kickstarter campaigners. Even though the video runs for two minutes – and I've seen the stats myself for our campaign – most people drop off in the first minute.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: That's an important tip right there. Have a two-minute video, but everything needs to be said in the first minute. The critical parts need to be there.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Anyone else you wanted to mention in terms of partners or people who helped?



KAREN WANG DIGGS: You know, there is one workshop that I went to. Her name is Katie Reid, and her website is www.UnblindMyMind.org.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Great name!

KAREN WANG DIGGS: Yes, isn't it! I attended her first seminar because her nonprofit deals with children who have autism. She has literally cured her own child of autism through diet. Part of it also includes fermented foods.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Wonderful!

KAREN WANG DIGGS: I went to the first seminar that she put together and I made a lot of great connections there. I presented Kraut Source there. I didn't sell it or anything because we hadn't launched the campaign yet, but the connections that I made there made me feel really good because I was putting together a project that not only served people who liked to eat sauerkraut, but it also had a very important therapeutic value for kids with autism. Fermented foods also has great value for other health issues that we're dealing with right now.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right. So, in fact, connecting in with people you really want to help and serve is so, so important.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: Yeah, and also going back to something that is community-based. At the end of it, with fermented foods you help your own internal community of microbes – the good ones. There is definitely an exterior manifestation and an interior connection.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: So now you have a group of 3,500 plus supporters. How do you interact with them? How do you continue to evolve this into a group of people who are your market or your early adapters or your marketeers, if you will?

KAREN WANG DIGGS: With over 3,000 supporters or backers, I really feel that I want to make them feel important. One way is to do regular updates through Kickstarter. I have to admit I'm a little bit late on this.



I'm going to send an update tomorrow, okay?

People have asked me, "When is Kraut Source going to be available? Can we purchase it?" We've had to turn away people who want to buy them right now because we need to serve the 3,000 plus backers. So we're doing everything that we can to make sure that the manufacturing and everything runs smoothly and we get the products in on time here.

The fulfillment is huge because of the packaging and the shipping and all of that. With Eric and I, that is our first emphasis – to put the time and energy behind doing the fulfillment in a timely manner so that the backers feel that they've been served. For the past week I've also been doing tutorial videos to help the backers who may not be familiar with fermentation.

We're doing a series of six tutorials that will only be available to the backers until the end of this year. Then afterwards, we'll open it up and post it online.

The next thing, too, is I want to make our existing website really user-friendly not only for the backers but for additional people who have signed into our mailing list.

There's a lot of education and just sharing recipes and being a resource for anyone who is interested in fermentation.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Karen, do you continue to work through the Kickstarter, or are you shifting to your website? How are you going to grow that? Which platform do you use?

KAREN WANG DIGGS: On the Kickstarter we will be growing it through our website. As I said, our next step after we do the fulfillment is to build a better website so that people can purchase Kraut Source online, they can watch tutorial videos, and I'll have a blog. I'm hoping that it will be a

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very interactive website where people can also share their recipes and have a dialogue and talk about the challenges of fermentation as well as the rewards of having fermented foods in one's diet.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right. So when am I getting my Kraut Source?

KAREN WANG DIGGS: You'll be getting it in November. Exactly when we're not sure yet because we are right now subject to the manufacturing process.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Yeah, well, I can't wait to get mine. Now if you are someone listening and you want to access and follow your work or ultimately buy a Kraut Source or sign up for nutrition consulting, how do we access you? How do we follow you? How do we get a Kraut Source?

KAREN WANG DIGGS: The best way is to go to www.Kraut-Source.com. I also have another blog which is www.KarenIsCooking.com. That has more recipes and nutritional tips.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: And I've linked to that one on the blog.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: Thank you. Yes. So with the www.Kraut-Source.com website you can enter your email and join our newsletter which I will also be sending a new one this week.

The problem with being an entrepreneur is you don't sleep and your time is very crunched, but I am trying my best to do everything in a timely manner so that people don't feel that they've been abandoned.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: I've now funded five to ten crowdfunding things, and I don't feel that way at all. If you look at the entrepreneurs that I've funded, they are very conscientious people and I know that when they've got something for me they will be in touch. I don't worry too much.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: I'm glad that you're giving me that feedback. Thank you.



C. AUSTIN FITTS: In closing, are there any do's and don'ts? Is there anything else you think for our audience of people – for them or someone in their family or network – who are considering crowdfunding, are there any more important do's or don'ts that you would like to communicate and close with, Karen?

KAREN WANG DIGGS: I would say definitely several months before you plan to launch your campaign do your homework and also build up your community – whether it's through social media such as Facebook or Twitter. You don't have to have a sizeable community, but at least several hundred people who really know you well and who are also excited about what you will be launching.

Even tap into them for idea. For instance, if you are working on a logo or you're not quite sure about whatever idea you would want to launch, ask them for advice so that they feel that they are part of the process. That way, when you actually approach them and say, "Hey, my Kickstarter is live," they feel as if they've been part of the process and they are much more likely to contribute and share your idea.

That's a definite do. The other do is to have a good video.

The don't is: Don't take it for granted that once you launch it people will come. You have to do a lot of homework, and whether you launch it for 30 days or 45 days, sleep really well ahead of time because during the launch of the campaign you will not be sleeping.

But do take care of yourself, eat well, try to rest as much as you can. The other thing that may be a little tricky is once we launched the campaign we did have these mass media companies that promised to take your campaign to the next level. You give them x amount of money and they will really blast it everywhere in the press for you. Be very careful with the companies that approach you.

I'm not saying that they are all bad, but just be careful. It's just better to build your home base organically.



C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right. I couldn't agree more. I couldn't agree more.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: And then back to another one of the do's: If you know of bloggers who may be able to help you with your project, do approach them. Be really nice to them, and foster the relationship.

In our experience with Kraut Source, definitely there were a few outstanding bloggers who supported us. As a result of that, I developed very good relationships with them, too.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Fantastic. Well, Karen, I'm so excited about your success. I can't wait to get my Kraut Source and start finally fermenting at home. We wish you all the best and we'll be following and watching and praying for your every success.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: Thank you, Catherine.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: I think what you are doing can help so, so many people.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: If I could just add in one little thing: If any of your listeners want to contact me directly about their own projects, I'm happy to help in any way that I can.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Oh, that is so generous.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: I put it out there because of my own experience in people who have helped me, I'm happy to pay that forward and share with other people.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: It's all about community. Karen, you have a wonderful day.

KAREN WANG DIGGS: Thank you so much, Catherine. It's been a pleasure.



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