

Who's Paul Karros: In his own words



Paul and his wife, Vivian.

*The restaurant industry flows in the blood of **General Manager for Nashville Zoo and Area Manager Paul Karros**. His father's family earned their living in a St. Louis-based restaurant business.*

Paul explains his background. . .

My grandfather emigrated from Greece when he was young. He married my grandmother, and they owned numerous diners like so many emigrant families did back then. My grandmother was the hardest working woman I ever met. You could look into a refrigerator and say there is nothing to eat and she could go right behind you and feed six people on what you couldn't see. They bought an old country inn after the end of World War II that had gone out of business when there was gas rationing. That became my family's business while growing up.

My mother's side of the family is cattle ranchers. While growing up, I was sent to the ranch to work during peak times. From the time I was ten, my parents would put me on the train. It was hard work to say the least, but in hind sight those are some of my most cherished memories. Especially the ones I can't share with you!

My father, after returning from WWII, finished college. While in school he met and courted my mother. After graduation, my father applied to the Diplomatic Corps, but was turned down until he married my mother. Both my mother and father speak Spanish and were ultimately stationed in Guatemala. That's where I was born. I can't tell you how many bets I have won with the guys in the kitchen over that! When I was two, my mother was pregnant again with my sister. It was tough to get medicines etc. so they decided to respect my grandparents' wishes from both sides and return to the St. Louis, Missouri area where my grandfather operated a restaurant. That's how it started . . . Food Service here I come!

My father and his brother, who was a chef, built this little country inn into a center of commerce. It started out as two little dining rooms. They expanded that building three times and eventually built an entire center with offices, shops, a sidewalk café, entertainment lounge, continental restaurant and catering facilities for 1,200 people. My first real job, not including mucking stalls or peeling and deveining shrimp for fifty cents per hundred, etc., was washing pots. They had to stack up the old style wooden coke cases so I could reach the bottom of the pot sink.

The self-described stubborn, head-headed, but funny man with a good sense of humor answers some questions about his life at home.

1. What is the smartest thing you've ever done? Why marry Miss Vivian of course! She keeps me sane (when she is not making me nuts) and gives me balance. She is my best friend, and I trust her with my life.

2. What were you like as a child? That depends on who you ask. My friend's parents thought I was an angel. My mother probably thought I was small devil disguised as a child!

3. What was your favorite toy as a child? The locking mechanism on the bottom of a banquet table, which is used to lock two tables together. If you held it right, it looked like a machine gun.

4. Few people know that I . . . adopt seniors, who are forced to live in senior centers because they don't have a family. My wife and I try to give them a Christmas they would not otherwise have. You should, too!

5. A really great day to me is . . . to get in my truck with my wife and dogs, then head out to explore some place we have never been before.

6. What destination would you most like to visit? I want to go to Australia. After I retire, I want to go on a walkabout. I want to take a very long time and explore that entire continent up close and personal.



7. What do you like to do in your free time ? In this order, taking my boat out to fish and photographing wild life, building or fixing things in my shop and playing golf.

8. What is your most valued possession? Things I have collected from my family over the years. I have my paternal grandparents first furniture purchase, a dining room table and hutch made in 1890. I have my maternal Grandmother's favorite china hutch including her favorite china; the cups even have a china mustache holder on them! I have my uncle's recipes, the original menus from my family's business, my grandfather's worry beads and my Aunt Jenny's favorite rocker with the groove in it from her running her thumb nail up and down incessantly. These pieces of my past, and others like them, are the values of where I come from and how I got here.

9. What's the wildest thing that you have ever done? Who knows? Jump out of an airplane, drive a Ferrari 160 MPH, go to Mardi Gras with 13 cents in your pocket? The list is long and goes on and on . . .



Paul enjoyed fishing even as a young man. He's the one kneeling.