

# KAREN GANTZ ZAHLER

## Negotiating, creating, and contributing

BY BETH TORRE

If there's a main ingredient in Karen Gantz Zahler's life recipe, it's education. The high-powered New York attorney-turned-literary agent believes it's the greatest gift any parent can give a child. In Gantz Zahler's life, it's the gift that just keeps on giving.

Born and raised in Harrison, New York, a suburb north of Manhattan, Gantz Zahler took advantage of the educational opportunities available. She spent her sophomore year of high school in Lyons, France, where she lived with a family who spoke no English; and learned the high art of Lyonnais cuisine, considered by some to be the tastiest in France.

Flash forward to many years later, and the woman who calls herself a very good home chef challenged herself to write the first of two cookbooks. "I was on QVC and sold thousands of copies of *Taste of New York*." Ask her to whip you up one of her soufflés, and you'll go home wanting more.

She volunteered in the kitchen of the James Beard Foundation, where she had the occasion to interview chefs from all across the United States. Out of that came *Superchefs*, a compilation of their recipes.

Her interest in artists' rights propelled Gantz Zahler to become an intellectual-property attorney, but her passions ran deeper than the law. "I really wanted to be an expert in something, and I love to read." She worked on book, television, and film deals, and realized she could combine the best of all possible worlds by pairing her commitment to all things legal with her passion for words. She made a hard left turn and became a literary agent. "About 75 percent of what I do is as an agent. The other 25 percent is legal work related to books and the exploitation of books." This is certainly a job well-suited for a woman who loves to hang around with the people who inspire her the most!

When independent bookstores were thriving, she held literary salons all over Manhattan. She engaged speakers to talk about literary giants like Proust and Hugo. "I did that until the demise of the independent bookstore in New York." That was a prelude for what happened next. "For the past 18 years, I've chaired The Great Books Course for the The Harmonie Club's 2,000 members." Among the many authors she's brought to the table are Bill and Hillary Clinton, Barbara Walters, Jeffrey Toobin, Ken Auletta, Maureen Orth, and Alec Baldwin.

She does something similar at her daughter's school.

"Brearley prides itself on developing great writers, people who can dissect and understand literature." The Brearley School's Gantz Zahler Authors Fund introduces students to wonderful writers.

When it comes to giving back, Gantz Zahler took a page out of her grandfather's book. "He came from Europe and waited on bread lines in the Depression. As he started making a little money, he always gave something to the Jewish community and to the community in general."

When she was a teenager, Gantz Zahler's parents established a kindergarten in Jerusalem, because they felt that education is the foundation of life. Every year Gantz Zahler travels to Israel with her own children. They take toys, books, and educational materials for this kindergarten in its financially-depressed neighborhood. "It's a great thrill to see the joy on the children's faces," she confides.

On Passover, the Gantz Zahler family delivers baskets to homebound people on Manhattan's Lower East Side. "Writing a check to a child doesn't mean anything, but if you do the activity with them, they learn the joy of giving back."

It's hard to imagine that this Vassar graduate has time to breathe while representing authors like Alec Baldwin, Kathleen Turner, and First Amendment specialist/attorney Floyd Abrams. She makes it work by combining all of the ingredients in her life—just like in the soufflés she loves to make. Karen Gantz Zahler—wife, mother, philanthropist, wordsmith, and word-lover—is the quintessential creative concoction of all those ingredients! ☺



Kathy Gantz, Karen Gantz Zahler, and Anne Bialkin conversing with Alec Baldwin