

## MARIANN AALDA – FACT SHEET

As half of the candid, common-sense duo, “The Divas of Diversity,” co-writing the wise and witty ethnic etiquette advice column, *Dear People Like Us*, with Karen Greyson; and as “The Voice of the Boomer Chick,” penning the sage and sassy humor column, *Black Don’t Crack...But Don’t Try and Spread It Too Thin*, (both for the hip, urban e-zine, *BlackBerrySpeak.com*) actress-author-humorist-hypnotherapist, Mariann Aalda, could be the poster-person for “Life Begins at Fifty.”

As a motivational speaker, she has done presentations for such major organizations as the Screen Actors Guild, Adelphia, and the Chicago Dept. of Human Services. As a volunteer, she has been cited by the California State Assembly for her work with Friends of the Family’s Teen Moms Program, and was named “Volunteer of the Year” by the Los Angeles Dept. of Children’s Services for her many years of contribution to MacLaren Children’s Center.

In addition to a year of graduate training from the Hypnosis Motivation Institute, Mariann has a Bachelor of Science degree in Communications from Southern Illinois University. She is a member of the American Counseling Association, the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development, and the Association for Adult Development and Aging. Certified as an NLP Practitioner, she has also received facilitator training through the Healing Racism program.

Aalda recently wrote and performed an “empower-tainment” comedy cabaret for women at midlife, built around her *Black Don’t Crack* stories and essays. It is being produced under the PeopleLikeUs Productions banner, the company she co-owns with Greyson. Along with *My Kid Is My Guru: Christopher’s Wisdom*, an aid for relaxation and self-hypnosis, *Black Don’t Crack* is available on CD and can be purchased at her website, *VoiceoftheBoomerChick.com*.

Highlights of Mariann’s twenty-plus year career as an actress include starring in the ABC soap opera, *Edge of Night* as the popular “DiDi Bannister,” and co-starring in the teen cult films *Class Act* and *Nobody’s Perfect*, along with the perennial holiday, family favorite, *The Wiz*. She was also a series regular on the CBS sitcom, *The Royal Family*, starring Della Reese and the late Redd Foxx, and the HBO football saga, *First & Ten* opposite O.J. Simpson. Recurring roles include the tragically disfigured “Lena Hart” on the NBC soap opera, *Sunset Beach*, and Meshach Taylor’s notoriously uppity girlfriend, “Lita Ford,” on CBS’ *Designing Women*, which is in perpetual re-run on the Lifetime channel. Host/interviewer credits include: Lifestyle reporter for *Now!* (WNBC, New York), and series co-host for *Designs for Living* (USA Network).

# PeopleLikeUs Productions

TO SCHEDULE AN INTERVIEW

CONTACT: Mariann Aalda / Karen Greyson  
(818) 255-1096

## KAREN GREYSON – FACT SHEET

Writer-producer, Karen Greyson -- along with actress-humorist, Mariann Aalda -- pens the ethnic etiquette advice column, *Dear People Like Us*, for the cutting edge, on-line urban magazine, *Blackberryspeak.com*.

Growing up with news and world events as a constant dialogue (Karen's father was a news announcer with WGN in Chicago) and the exchange of ideas that it fueled from her liberal versus conservative "friendly adversary" parents, provided Karen a forum for tolerance and understanding. Her parents' differences helped her realize that the dream for everyone to "get along" was possible. Bolstered by her upbringing, and having a need-to-know about the tensions she saw arising out of race, gender, social and cultural diversity, she partnered up with Aalda, who also shared that need, to form PeopleLikeUs Productions to develop projects in a spectrum of genres that support their concerns.

Twenty-plus years working in the world of advertising with an award winning commercial music company, which produced spots for such clients as Levis, Pontiac and McDonalds, Karen donned many hats, achieving a comprehensive overview of the psychology of how advertisers sell America: what it wears; what it drives, and what it consumes. "A definite plus in the understanding of human behavior," says Greyson. She added to that understanding by becoming a certified mediator. "From my parents, I'd already learned that people with different opinions could get along," she says, "but my training as a mediator taught me why most people *didn't*...and how I could remedy it."

Having attended Western Illinois University, Karen defected early to pursue a career in Chicago's prestigious theater community where she was also instrumental in helping to initiate Chicago's professional children's theater contract for Actor's Equity. After touring with several productions on the East Coast, she eventually landed in Los Angeles to star in the children's television series, *Teego The Star Traveler*.

Karen cites her extensive theatrical background for providing her with the impetus to embrace her passion as a writer. Having been represented early-on by the literary agency, The Agency, Karen opted to swap the entertainment industry for the world of Madison Avenue. In her role as a columnist, however, and with the completion of a television pilot and a screenplay; and with several other projects in the works, including a novel and a theatrical musical that embraces the need for changing attitudes in keeping with the changing face of our times, she is joyful to be resuming her happy, daily vigil to the page.

###

# PeopleLikeUs Productions

TO SCHEDULE AN INTERVIEW

CONTACT: Mariann Aalda / Karen Greyson  
(818) 255-1096

## PEOPLELIKEUS PRODUCTIONS -- FACT SHEET

Two former Chicagoans, actress Mariann Aalda, (*Edge of Night*, *Class Act*, *The Royal Family*) and advertising executive Karen Greyson -- whose father, Carl Greyson, was a veteran broadcaster for WGN -- have joined forces to launch PeopleLikeUs Productions to produce multi-cultural, multi-generational, family-friendly television programming.

“We think there are a lot of ‘people like us’ who want to see more heart-warming stories,” says Greyson, who has written a television pilot, screenplay and theatrical musical. Aalda, who is also a certified hypnotherapist and the author of several self-help books and CD’s, continues, “Just as graphic violence and overtly sexual images can desensitize the psyche to its humanity, positive, caring and considerate images can elevate it.”

Aalda, who was named Volunteer of the Year by the Los Angeles Dept. of Children’s Services for her work with disadvantaged youth, is especially concerned with providing up-beat alternatives for teen-agers. “Kids aren’t going to watch a program just because it’s ‘good for them,’ she says, “but *you can* appeal to them with a great story that *just happens* to have a positive message to it.”

As “The Divas of Diversity,” the inter-racial team disseminates positive messages with their “ethnic etiquette” column, *Dear People Like Us*, for the hip, urban e-zine, *BlackberrySpeak.com*. “There’s a certain temerity that comes with trying too hard to be ‘politically correct’ that can stifle forthright communication” says Aalda. “We wanted to create a forum where people can be open and honest with their questions and about their feelings.”

Although the two women both grew up in Chicago, they didn’t meet till years later...in an acting class in Los Angeles. “We were each immediately impressed with the other’s work,” Greyson says. “Mariann did a scene that just blew my socks off. I thought, ‘this woman should have her own television series’...so I wrote one, with the idea of her starring in it.”

“Aalda is equally laudatory of Greyson. “Karen did a monologue in class that I thought was not only a great performance, but a brilliant piece of writing. When the teacher asked what play it was from, I was in awe when she said that she had written it herself!”

“While Mariann was launching her career in New York, I was in Chicago, honing my skills as a writer by day, and ‘treading the boards’ as an actress by night in plays and musicals at places like Mill Run and the Candlelight Theater” says Greyson. “I know how deep the talent pool is in the Midwest; Mariann and I talk a lot about the possibility of re-energizing Chicago’s television industry by producing a series there...and bringing our paths full circle.”

## REALITY TV MAKES WAY FOR “REALITY” ADVICE COLUMN

While others are paying lip service to “Why can’t we all just get along?” -- and reality TV is counting on it to get ratings -- two former Chicagoans now living in Los Angeles, actress/humorist/hypnotherapist Mariann Aalda, and writer/producer/certified mediator Karen Greyson are -- as “The Divas of Diversity” -- putting their creative energies toward coming up with positive *solutions* in their irreverent and humor-infused ethnic etiquette advice column, *Dear People Like Us*, for the popular online urban magazine, Chicago-based, *BlackberrySpeak.com*.

“Mistrust is born out of misinformation,” says Aalda, a certified hypnotherapist (*VoiceoftheBoomerChick.com*) whose articles on diversity have ranged in publications from *Soap Opera Digest* to *The Los Angeles Times*; and who has provided commentary on the importance of diversity in the media for ABC-TV’s *Nightline* and *Tony Brown’s Journal* on PBS. “Karen and I have created a forum for people to ask the questions they’ve been too embarrassed to ask for fear of looking politically incorrect or being labeled a bigot.”

“While our answers are meant to be informative and entertaining, we also want them to be thought-provoking” adds Greyson, who, as a student of human nature, has -- in addition to her background in theater as an actress and writer -- worked in advertising for many years as a producer. “Believe me,” she laughs, “a decade spent in the hectic world of advertising is the practical equivalent of earning a Ph.D. in psychology.”

“Mariann and I want to be catalysts for getting a dialogue started,” Greyson continues. “Tough times call for *tough love*,” chimes in Aalda, “so we pull no punches in calling ‘a spade a spade’...or advising when not to,” she adds with a wink. *When Not To Call A Spade A Spade: The New Rules of Ethnic Etiquette* happens to be the title of the book Aalda and Greyson are readying for a 2005 publication. “Just because we’re a black and white duo,” Aalda continues, “doesn’t mean we only cover black/white issues, or exclusively racial ones.”

“With our ‘multi-culti girlfriend coalition’ of advisors, we answer a wide range of religious cultural, social, generational and gender-based questions as well,” says Greyson. “Our ultimate goal is to be as influential and respected -- and syndicated -- as ‘Dear Abby’ was in her day,” says Aalda. “We just want to do it with a little more contemporary ‘flava’.”

# # #

**To submit a question, read the current column, check out the archives,  
and get a free subscription to the e-zine, go to [www.BlackberrySpeak.com](http://www.BlackberrySpeak.com).**

**SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR “THE DIVAS OF DIVERSITY”--  
MARIANN AALDA, C.Ht. & KAREN GREYSON -- ADVICE COLUMNISTS  
ON ETHNIC ETIQUETTE @ BLACKBERRYSPEAK.COM**

1. How did you two come up with the idea of writing an ethnic etiquette column?
2. How are you different from other advice columns like “Dear Abby?” ...or for that matter, other etiquette columns, like “Miss Manners”?
3. Give us an example of the kinds of questions you’re asked and the advice you give.
4. Do you think race relations are getting better or worse...and what is the biggest obstacle?
5. Aren’t you afraid of “stirring the pot” and getting people more riled up than they already are?
6. Karen, as a white person, would you say that writing this column has given you any new awareness’s or insights on the “non-white experience” in this county?
7. Mariann, in your biographical info it says that you played O.J. Simpson’s wife for three seasons on the HBO series First & 10. Do you think his trial and its verdict had any effect on polarizing blacks and whites?
8. So how does somebody become an advice columnist? Any special training?
9. Mariann, as a hypnotherapist, do you think you can *hypnotize* us to all get along?
10. I notice that you frequently answer serious questions with a light-touch and a lot of humor... what role does the humor play in your responses?
11. So, you *are* trying to hypnotize us into getting along, then, aren’t you?!
12. So, you two are the “Divas of Diversity.” Who is the “Multi-culti Girlfriend Coalition you refer to as your advisors?
13. Now give us a little background on your own inter-racial friendship ...how did you two meet?
14. Do you sit down and answer the questions together?
15. What happens when you don’t agree with each other’s answers?
16. Now, your questions are addressed to “Dear PeopleLikeUs...” and I understand that’s the name of your production company...give us a little background on the origin of the name.
17. What else can we expect to look for from PeopleLikeUs Productions?
18. How can our listeners contact you for advice?
19. Tell us a little bit more about BlackBerrySpeak.com, the online magazine you write for.
20. Any future plans to syndicate the column?
21. Mariann, have you felt any negative impact on your acting career from writing the column?
22. Okay, you two, want to give us any advice on who to vote for in the next election?
23. How do our listeners get in touch with you, again?...

**Fun, spirited, and quick-with-a-quip, Mariann & Karen look forward to taking live call-in questions...all those “politically incorrect” queries your listeners have always wanted to ask!**

AN INTERVIEW WITH “THE DIVAS OF DIVERSITY” –  
MARIANN AALDA & KAREN GREYSON

**1. How did you two come up with the idea of writing an ethnic etiquette column?**

**MARIANN:** When Ann Landers died a couple of years ago and *The Chicago Tribune* was looking for a new advice columnist, I sent in a prototype for an ethnic etiquette column called “Aalda Answers” (All-Da-Answers) that played on my last name. It was about a year after the World Trade Center tragedy, and I felt there was a need for a forum where people who were curious about those from other cultures and different backgrounds could get their questions answered without the fear of being labeled “politically incorrect.” Misinformation breeds mistrust and I thought we needed to re-establish the trust in our fellow humans...especially in light of all the paranoia that resulted after 9/11.

**KAREN:** I thought the concept for a column was brilliant and jumped at the idea when Mariann approached me with it. And because Mariann is black and I’m white and we’ve been great friends for such a long time, I think it brings a certain depth and richness of experience to our responses. There’s just nothing else like it out there.

**2. How do you differ from other advice columns?**

Advice columns all thrive on family, relationship and workplace problems. And they’re popularized not only by the insight of the advice given, but also by the personalities – and in some cases, the celebrity – of the columnists. While “The Divas Of Diversity” address the same categories as other columns, our questions are also burdened with the additional considerations that come with racial, cultural and religious differences. Another distinction is that we try to infuse our responses with humor whenever we can. We feel that if you can get people to laugh about a problem, you’re already half-way to solving it.

**3. How did you come up with “Dear People Like Us” as the name for your column, and “The Divas of Diversity” as your moniker?**

PeopleLikeUs is the name of our production company, which we came up with during a phone conversation discussing our desire to create projects that embraced all people – people like us. We both screamed at the same time: “That’s it...that’s our name!” Making that the title of our column was an obvious choice. “The Divas of Diversity,” was the name given to us by Renee West, the editor and publisher of *BlackberrySpeak.com*, the online magazine we write for...kind of tongue-in-cheek, really, but it just sort of stuck.

**4. What are your qualifications to be taking on this type of advice column?**

**KAREN:** “Opinions Unlimited” was a name given to me by friends and co-workers (a compliment...I think) as the designated “go-to-girlfriend” they would always seek out whenever they needed advice. Happily I would listen and advise. One family member – as well as a therapist I knew – even suggested that I get a degree in psychotherapy and turn advice-giving into a career, since I seemed to be so good at it. Eventually, I decided to enroll in UCLA’s mediation program and became a certified mediator. When you couple that with my writing background; twenty-five years in advertising, and an intuitive talent for getting to the core of issues, being an advice columnist seems like a perfect fit.

**MARIANN:** I’ve always been an activist. My dad taught me that if I wasn’t going to be part of the solution, then I was part of the problem. And, like Karen, I’ve always had concerns about “...why can’t we all just get along?” and wanted to do something about it. I went through the Healing Racism Program in Chicago to learn how to facilitate, and have served as a volunteer facilitator with Friends of the Family’s Teen Parents Program in L.A.’s culturally diverse San Fernando Valley. Additionally, I graduated with honors from a one-year certification training program at the Hypnosis Motivation Institute in Tarzana, CA, to become a hypnotherapist. As a journalist, I wrote for my high school and college papers and was a publicity writer for three years after graduating college. And,

**5. Mariann, you have an extensive background as an actress, what inspired you to become a hypnotherapist?**

You know, it's really not that big a stretch. As an actor, you're always looking for a character's unconscious motivations in order to create drama...as a hypnotherapist, you're helping clients discover their unconscious motivations so that they can *avoid* "drama." Ultimately, I think being a hypnotherapist has also made me a better actress...and it's broadened my career opportunities.

The harsh reality is that there are fewer and fewer roles for actresses as they get older...especially for women of color. As "The Voice of the Boomer Chick," I've developed a line of empowerment products, which includes a "recorded live" comedy CD, *Black Don't Crack...But Don't Try and Spread It Too Thin* – it addresses some of the issues women face as we get older from a humorous perspective. If you don't mind my giving a shameless plug, the CD – along with the rest of my "Mmm\*-Powerment" (\*Mariann' magical, motivational) product line is sold on my website at [www.VoiceoftheBoomerChick.com](http://www.VoiceoftheBoomerChick.com).

**KAREN:** Let me give it another "shameless plug;" I was in the audience the night Mariann recorded the CD. Women were whooping and hollering and nodding in recognition...and she got a standing ovation at the end! You could say it's equal parts stand-up comedy, group therapy and revival meeting...very, very funny...and very, very empowering.

**6. Karen, as a white person, how has writing this column changed your perspective on what it's like to be a member of an ethnic, social or religious minority in this country?**

I've had a few personal experiences that have awakened me to the anger and frustration that existed because of discrimination. Naively, maybe, I thought many of the problems had been healed...until we started writing our column. I was taken aback by some of the questions...the feelings of entitlements; the lack of taking personal responsibility; the accusatory assignment of blame to others; simple ignorance, and all the prejudices that are stoked by fear. One would think we were still living in the Dark Ages, with the Age of Enlightenment still somewhere off in a distant future.

I'm surprised and saddened by some of the questioned we get. But the good news is that there are people out there who are obviously as hungry as Mariann and I are to close the ignorance gap and work to a time when we can all "get along." Our column gives them a place to come to where they can get any question answered...and not be afraid of its potential "political incorrectness." After all, how are we ever going to learn about each other, if we can't ask questions without fear of reprisal?

**MARIANN:** Sometimes, even well-meaning overtures can be suspiciously misinterpreted as being overly-solicitous and condescending. So, I think it's important for *all* sides to give *another* side the benefit of the doubt about its intentions. It's not always an "opposing" side, after all, just a differing viewpoint – and one that could be open to change with more information.

**7. Do you always agree on each other's advice...and what do you do when you disagree?**

We divide up the questions pretty unilaterally, except for the ones we feel may apply to one or the other's particular experience; then we meet once a week and go over them together. When we disagree on what the best advice would be, we listen to each other's point of view, which usually includes a perspective the other one hadn't thought of. Sometimes we turn to our "Multi-culti Girlfriend Coalition" to get their opinions, but for the most part, it's just the two of us. It's definitely strengthened the bonds of our friendship.

**8. How long have you two been friends, and what brought you together?**

**KAREN:** We were probably friends in another lifetime, another dimension, (they laugh) but this go-round it was Darryl Hickman's acting class...Los Angeles, California, planet Earth, that brought us together. I watched Mariann perform a scene and thought she was talented and funny and needed her own sit-com, so I created one, called "Lookin' On The Bright Side;" and from that we started PeopleLikeUs Productions. Mariann and I are like bookends. We share similar philosophies and, as someone once observed, when we set our minds on accomplishing something, we're both "forces to be reckoned with."

**MARIANN:** A *friendly* force! (more laughter).

**9. Right now, your column is only online at *BlackBerrySpeak.com*, what are your plans for the future?**

*Blackberry Speak.com* publisher, Atty. Renee West, has plans for the magazine to go to hard-copy sometime next year, but before that happens, she's going to start streaming a 60 second video segment of *Dear People Like Us* for the online mag. From its inception, Renee's plan for *BlackberrySpeak.com* has been to turn it into a broadband multimedia news and entertainment magazine covering what the likes of *Sixty Minutes* and *Entertainment Tonight* have been missing in their service to the multicultural market. Our *Dear People Like Us* column is one of the magazine's most popular features, and since we're both actresses, Renee decided to make us her "lead-off" show. Additionally, plans are in the works to syndicate a one-minute radio segment of *Dear People Like Us*; and we're working on a book spin-off entitled, *When Not to Call a Spade a Spade: The New Rules of Ethnic Etiquette*. We've also developed a diversity edu-tainment presentation which promoted through speakers bureaus. Beyond that, we have PeopleLikeUs Productions, which will continue to develop other projects; some of which include: *Lookin' On The Bright Side*, a sitcom which is currently being serialized in *Blackberryspeak*; a screenplay, *Mastering Love*, a mystical romantic comedy, and *Home* a musical fairytale for adults.

**10. Any final suggestions from "The Divas of Diversity" on how we can all live and work and play better together?**

We espouse a philosophy we call "MEND" – which stands for:

**M** – Make a friend by being a friend.

**E** – Enjoy the differences.

**N** – Never make assumptions.

**D** – Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

**D** – Do no harm.

**D** – Don't drink the Kool Aid.

The second "D" is to emphasize the first "D;" and the third "D" is a reference to the Jonestown mass suicide tragedy of the early eighties when cult members were ordered to drink the poison-laced beverage by their leader, Jim Jones. It's a warning of how outrageously one can be hypnotized and manipulated by a "run-with-the-herd" mentality. If This seems like to much to remember, we suggest at least concentrating on practicing the three "D's," and remembering that everything comes into focus and achieves greater clarity when viewed through 3-D!

# PeopleLikeUs Productions

FOR MORE INFORMATION

CONTACT: Mariann Aalda or Karen Greyson  
(818) 255-1096

## EX-CHICAGO GALS GIVE GOOD (HUMORED) ADVICE

In addition to PeopleLikeUs Productions, in which they have joined forces to produce multi-cultural, multi-generational, “family friendly” television programming, two former Chicagoans now living in Los Angeles, actress Mariann Aalda (*Edge of Night*, *Sunset Beach*, *The Royal Family*, *Class Act*) and TV commercial music producer Karen Greyson (whose father, Carl Greyson, was the longtime “Voice of WGN”) have now partnered as the “Divas of Diversity” to write *Dear People Like Us*, a wise and witty advice column on the new rules of ethnic etiquette, for the hip, urban online magazine, *BlackBerrySpeak.Com*. With their “multi-culti girlfriend coalition” of advisors, the duo put a sage and sassy spin on what-to-do when cultures clash.

# # #