

Interviewee: Kendra Timko-Hochkeppel  
Interviewer: Tiffany LaRose  
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Interpreter: Sarah Bairich and Anna Harris



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**Abstract:** Kendra Timko-Hochkeppel was born on August 17, 1968. She was born deaf – the third generation of deafness in her family. Her mother, Beverly, is Deaf, and her father, Ed, is hard-of-hearing. She has one brother, Kerwin, who is also hard-of-hearing. Kendra’s husband, Matt, is Deaf, and together they have two daughters, Carissa and Merna – both hearing. They currently live in Worcester, less than a mile from the College of the Holy Cross campus. Kendra graduated from Northeastern University in Boston, MA in 1992, where she earned her undergraduate degree in Human Services. She attended graduate school at Salem State College, graduating in 1998 with a master’s degree in social work. Kendra immediately entered the workforce after college. She began a career in the sign language department at the Massachusetts State Association for the Deaf (MSAD) and remained there for four years, working with hearing parents of deaf children. After leaving MSAD she took the position of Director for Independent Living Services at Deaf, Inc. in Boston, MA. Kendra and her husband currently own an Internet business. She discusses how she handles balancing family and career, growing up deaf, and how she strives to advocate for the Deaf community whenever possible.

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Tiffany LaRose: Hello, Good afternoon.

Kendra Timko-Hochkeppel: Hello, Good afternoon Tiffany.

TL: What’s your name, your first, middle, and last name?

KTH: My full name is Kendra Ann Timko-Hockeppel. I know it’s a long name, oh well.

TL: How old are you?

KTH: Geeze, your asking me that! Oh no, I’m 39 years old.

TL: When were you born? The day and the year, please?

KTH: I was born August 17, 1968.

TL: Were you born deaf?

KTH: Yes, I was born deaf. I’m the third generation in my family to be deaf.

TL: Do you consider yourself oral deaf? Do you use your voice?

KTH: I'm fully deaf and I use my voice when I have to, but I prefer not to.

TL: Do you use your voice with your family?

KTH: No, my family is deaf.

TL: Oh, right.

KTH: Yeah.

TL: Sorry about that.

KTH: I use my voice when I have to. For example, if I go out to a restaurant or something I'll try to voice, but I really prefer not to.

TL: What's your husband's name?

KTH: My husband's name is Matt and he too is deaf.

TL: What does he do for work?

KTH: Who? Myself or my husband?

TL: Your husband.

KTH: Oh, my husband works at the Beverly School for the Deaf. He's a middle school teacher for Social Studies and Math.

TL: Do you have children?

KTH: Yes, we have two beautiful girls. The oldest is two and a half and her name is Carissa. The youngest is 7 months old and her name is Merna and they're both hearing.

TL: Can you please describe the rest of your family? Your parents, are they hearing or deaf? What do they do for work? Your brothers and sisters, how many do you have? Are they hearing or deaf?

KTH: O.K. My mother's name is Beverly and she is deaf, and my father's name is Ed and he's hard of hearing. My mother's family is deaf. Her parent's are deaf and she has a sister who's hard of hearing. My father, he's the only person in his family who's hard of hearing, everybody else is hearing. My brother, Kerwin, he's hard of hearing and it's just the two of us. And, I can't remember, what was the other question?

TL: How many... Are they deaf or hearing? That's it.

KTH: My brother works at the Post Office and both my parents are retired now. But before my mother was a teacher's aide for a deaf program at a school in Connecticut. My father worked at Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation for many years, but both are retired now, and now they travel often, they travel more than me.

TL: Are you jealous?

KTH: Yes, I'm jealous!

TL: Where did you grow up?

KTH: I grew up in Fairfield, Connecticut and moved here to Massachusetts in 1987 because I was coming here for college. I attended Northeastern University and I just decided to stay here ever since.

TL: When did you move to Worcester?

KTH: Hmm, in 2004. My husband and I wanted to buy a house and we searched many places and they were so expensive and we found that Worcester had affordable houses, so we moved here to Worcester and we like it here. It's close to major highways and it's also close to my parent's house in Connecticut. We feel that Worcester is in the perfect location, you can shoot over to, over to Boston, you can shoot up North, down South, we just really like it here.

TL: Where do you live now, in Worcester?

KTH: Uh, Really close to here, I'd say about two blocks away. I mean even I can hear all the parties the kids have!

TL: Do you have other family in Worcester? Or close to Worcester?

KTH: No, we're the only ones who live here. My family lives in Connecticut and my brother also lives in Connecticut. My husband's family lives in Cohasset and my husband's brother, one of them lives in Cohasset, another in Virginia, and the other one in New York.

TL: Your opinion, do you think deaf people's experience in Worcester is good or bad?

KTH: Well, it's not only Worcester. It's everywhere. I mean we've always had hardships and struggles. But that as technology changes we have more access to things and our lives have improved. So, it's not only Worcester, but America in general, I mean now we have video phones, we have AOL Instant Messenger, closed captioning, pagers and cell

phones, I mean we can't live without our pagers. So, our lives have changed as technology has changed. That's a hard question. Hmm.

TL: Do you feel the support services in Worcester are good?

KTH: Well, like I said before, it's... ya know Massachusetts as a whole they have pretty good services. I mean we always want more.

TL: What do think needs to change? Or what do you want to change?

KTH: Elementary, Middle, and High School should have something in their curriculum that teaches other kids, kids about other types of kids. Or people with disabilities, deaf people, deaf-blind people, um, people with Usher syndrome, just all different types of people. So, there should be some method to teach these kids in school. I mean most of the time schools don't teach that and when these kids grow up, they, they can't believe that someone signs or they never heard of that before, so, schools should incorporate something into their curriculum teaching about different types of people. I worked at the Deaf-Blind Department at Deaf Inc., in Boston and some of the students who were deaf never heard of a deaf-blind person before. It was crazy. So, I mean, schools should expand more about different types of people and the kids just need to be aware.

KTH: Yes.

TL: More cultural education.

KTH: Exactly.

TL: I understand. Education, now we'll talk about. Where did you go to school when you grew up? Elementary, Middle, and High School?

KTH: O.K., I grew up in Fairfield, Connecticut, and I went to school there. I went to Elementary school, called McKinnely School. It was a public school.

TL: Mainstream?

KTH: Yes, yes, mainstream. But they had a deaf program there. I mean I was lucky, the teacher that I had for first, second, third, and fourth grade, that teacher knew how to sign. So, I was really lucky. I mean now, that teacher is gone, she's not there anymore. But before, I mean my teacher she could sign so I was fine. Yes, I was oral, I knew how to read lips and talk a little so we'd go back and forth between that and signing and I was fine. In fifth grade, it got a little harder. The teacher didn't know sign language but, I was oral, I could read lips and the teacher would always look at the kids and talk to them. So I was fine. I managed just fine. When I entered Middle School I had to use an interpreter. The teacher would always talk while writing on the board and she wouldn't talk to us.

TL: You couldn't see her.

KTH: Right. I couldn't see her lips to read them and it was hard because I wasn't use to using an interpreter. I didn't really like it. I really wanted to look at the teacher but I couldn't see her lips, so I had to practice and eventually, when I was in high school, I became more comfortable using an interpreter. And I continued using an interpreter when I was in college. But understand I wasn't the only deaf student there. They had a deaf program. So, I was fine.

TL: All of your schools were hearing, mainstream?

KTH: Yes, Yup, all of them.

TL: What was the name of your middle school?

KTH: Hmmm.

TL: If you can remember?

KTH: Fairfield Woods School and high school's name, I mean they changed the name since I was there, my class was the last graduating class with that old name, it was called Andrew Ward High School. Now, it's changed to Fairfield High School.

TL: Did you go to college? Or you went to college, right?

KTH: Yes, I went to college. First, I went to Northeastern University in Boston and I majored in Health, er, Human Services. I know that's a broad major and then I began working and went back to college to Salem State Community College for a master's in Social Work. And after I graduated, I've been working ever since. I've decided I don't want to go back to school. I've had enough.

TL: When did you graduate college?

KTH: Which, Both?

TL: Uh, Northeastern?

KTH: O.K., Northeastern in 1992 and Salem in 1999. Before 2000, remember hearing about Y2K, and all the hype, oh I have to get my degree before Y2K. But, nothing happened.

TL: What was your degree in?

KTH: It was a graduate degree.

TL: Did you have problems in education?

KTH: Ummm, no. I mean for me taking classes? Is that what you mean?

TL: Yeah.

KTH: No, not really. Nope.

TL: Did you have problems understanding the teachers?

KTH: No.

TL: Or socializing with others?

KTH: No, not for me. I mean for some students maybe. But for me, I was really lucky. I mean my family was deaf so, if I didn't understand something at school I'd go home and ask my parents and they'd be able to explain everything to me. So, I had great communication at home. I was really lucky. Some people would go home and their parents didn't know sign language, so they struggled at home and at school. But for me, like I said, I had an interpreter. I had note takers. I had friends who could sign. I would come home and ask my parents about anything I didn't understand, like what does this mean? And they would be able to explain it to me and I would understand it better. Like the same as having two schools. Real school and then home school. My parents taught me about life. I mean school won't teach you that.

TL: Right.

KTH: I mean school taught you about school subjects, so, I mean I was lucky. I didn't have any problems. I did have a few problems with the teachers. Sometimes they were clueless what to do with me. They thought, oh, a deaf student. What am I going to do? Uh, and I'd say, "O.K., fine, I'll explain how this is going to work," and the teachers would just adjust.

TL: How did your hearing teachers communicate with you?

KTH: Through the interpreter.

TL: Writing?

KTH: In college? No, I, we'd tend to use the interpreter. Once in a while we'd write notes, but that took so long, writing them back and forth that it was just easier using the interpreter.

TL: After you finished college, what did you see yourself, what did you see as your choices for work, or for family, or anything?

KTH: After I graduated college, I worked at the Massachusetts State Association for the Deaf, in their Sign Language Department. I wanted to work with hearing parents with deaf children. I wanted to do that kind of work and I worked there for about four years and I had to leave for personal reasons. And my next job I worked at Deaf Inc. and that was a totally different experience. I hadn't planned on working there. I wanted to work with parents of deaf children, but now I don't do any of those jobs. I do talk to parents of deaf children. I mean I have that innate drive to help people, that's just part of who I am. Right now, I'm mostly a full-time Mom. I don't work with parents or kids right now and over the years my goals have changed.

TL: What are your goals now?

KTH: My husband and I want to be home for our kids. We want to be there for them. We want to watch them grow up. Our kids are our top priority. I mean, your life changes when you have kids.

TL: You're busy.

KTH: Oh, yes.

TL: Who do you look up to?

KTH: I've said this before. There's a few people that I admire. Two teachers I had when I was younger. They really, they really empowered me in school and they inspired me through everything and they molded me into becoming the person I am today and of course, my parents. If not for my parents, my life would be really different. I wasn't always the easiest child. In fact, I was a troubled child. I was searching for trouble. My parents were so patient with me and I thank them for not giving up on me because I've become the person I am today because of my parents. I met one little girl recently and she was an awful little girl, oh, she was a fresh little girl and I thought, oh my gosh, that was me when I was little. I told my parents, "Oh, I'm so sorry for being such a trouble child." I mean, I'm really good now. Uh, just seeing her reminded me what I was like when I was young.

TL: Why did you want to work for Deaf Inc.?

KTH: What did I want to do?

TL: Why?

KTH: Oh, why, O.K. Well, I had to leave M.S.A.D. and I was looking for a more challenging kind of job. Deaf Inc. had a position open for Independent Living Services as

the Director there, so I applied and it was definitely a challenge, but I really got to like that job. When I had my first daughter, that job, it, it had a, it was a high demand job, My energy was just really consumed from that. I thought that if I worked there and I was also at home with my kids then my energy would be gone. I would have none of it and my daughter was my priority. So, discussing it with my husband and I decided to leave Deaf Inc. for the time because that job was just really hard when I had a kid at home. So, I left, but I really could not completely leave Deaf Inc., that's where I had my heart was. Deaf Inc. happen to have another position open in a different department. The Deaf-Blind Department. So, I took a job there once a week as the Director's assistant. I would do secretarial work like filing, typing letters, and things like that for my supervisor, but unfortunately two weeks ago they let me know that the position I have now won't be needed anymore. So, that's alright. Pretty soon, I won't be working at Deaf Inc. anymore. It's O.K. Now, my husband and I can focus more on a home business that we have and try to expand that. We'll see. We'll see where this leads us.

TL: What do you do for your home business?

KTH: HMM, well we um, how can I explain that, nice and short? Well, we own an Internet business. What we do is order things through the Internet and earn a commission from the products that we order. And we expand the business by involving other people into that are also doing similar kinds of businesses and you know, its 2008 now, and the Internet is really everything. It's really popular. It has information, absolutely everything. You can order whatever you want from the Internet. It's really the biggest thing out there. So it was just appropriate to have and own a business related to the Internet.

TL: O.K. How do you balance your priorities and responsibilities?

KTH: What do you mean?

TL: For instance being a Mom, a business owner, being a wife, how do you balance all that?

KTH: Well, actually, I have a clone. She's just like me. No, I'm just kidding. Well, How do I handle my responsibilities, is that what you mean? Well, I just do it, I just do it.

TL: You make time for it.

KTH: It's in me. Everyday, you know, I have a routine and I wake up and follow that routine. My husband and I always communicate about our schedules, so you know, if I have to go out, he has to watch the kids. Like today, you know, I was like "hey, I'm going out for a few hours" and we agreed on the schedule. It's not like life before when you just wake up and run out of the house. You need a schedule and a routine. My husband and I have our plan books and we match them and coordinate them to make sure we know where the kids are, where both of us are, and it's tough. But, if we didn't have those plan books and that schedule we'd be hopeless. We'd be lost.

TL: Same with me. I need my planner and my calendar.

KTH: Yeah, it's great. But first of all, my priorities, I'm always a Mom. Ya know, life changes and so now, when we're with our kids we're looking for places that they can come too. Our friends that don't have kids, they go out and are like, "no, the kids can't come." and we just say, "We can't go." We want our kids to be with us wherever we go. They have to allow our kids to join. We don't want our kids home with a babysitter or a friend. I want them to spend the time with us, we're a family. It's hard. Our lives are changing.

TL: Did you always know you wanted to work to support of the deaf in some way?

KTH: What do you mean?

TL: For instance, you worked for Deaf Inc. You support the deaf community, right? Did you always know you wanted to do that?

KTH: Well, for me yes, absolutely, because when I was growing up I saw some of my friends and how frustrated they were when their parents couldn't sign to them and their brothers and sisters didn't sign. For example, I had one friend that I grew up with and she had, I think, fourteen (14) brothers and sisters. Fourteen. When I would go and visit their house, her brothers and sisters would be circle around here there were so many.

TL: They were all deaf?

KTH: Nope, they were all hearing. So, my friend and I would sit across from each other, at the dinner table and it was always so boring there because no one would talk to us. They would all be having chatting away having their own conversations and we'd be like "Hello." It was so boring. I can't imagine, my friend had to sit there everyday and go through that. You know, at my house we were always chatting about different things, the world, what was happening at school, what happened at my father's job. All the information was there, it was accessible, it was visual because we were signing and my friend just didn't have that. I always wanted to help other deaf people that have hearing parents and encourage them to learn sign language. Communication is incredibly important. It's the best thing parents can have with their kids, communication. And I always knew I wanted to work with people and I have always worked with since I had a job. I worked at a group home, at Deaf Inc., at Work Inc, at M.S.D.A. for the family sign language program. I'm always working with people. That's just part of me.

TL: I want the same thing.

KTH: Yeah, I'm a people person. I couldn't live without people. I need other people.

TL: What's your favorite part or the hardest part of your job?

KTH: Well, you know, work means you have to show up on time, be responsible, then you get your check, blah, blah, blah, at that stuff, but I like to do the things I do at work. I don't just show up on time. I want to show up any time and even outside of that I still love working with people. I don't really know. I don't think I really answered your question. Everyone has to have a job.

TL: To make money.

KTH: Right. Even when I'm not working I still love working with people. For example, I went to this one place my parents went to, an event. I think it was bingo or something like that. When I went, I saw a group of people from the group home. I just got excited to get involved in their conversation and work with them even though I wasn't like at my job. I didn't know who they were, but I just felt I had a connection with them, I just knew how to communicate with them. Other people were like "No, don't go over there. Be careful, don't do it." And I was like "Uh, don't worry. I know what I'm doing. It's fine." And I just had a conversation with them. Then that this one woman just won't leave me alone the whole night. It was fine. It was great. So, whether I'm working or not I still love working with those people.

TL: Your opinion again, Do you feel your deafness has helped you or hurt you in starting your business? You own a business.

KTH: Yeah, that's right, I have a business.

TL: Do you feel your deafness has helped you or hurt you in some way?

KTH: I don't think it really mattered. For the business I have now, everything is accessible for the deaf community. We're really lucky because everything we need for this business is completely accessible, we have DVD with closed captions, workshops with interpreters, everything is just accessible for the deaf and hard-of-hearing with this kind of business. I think businesses don't have that kind of access, but this one, absolutely. It doesn't matter and we're lucky. We don't need to fight for services; everything is already set up for us. It's really great. So, there's no barriers.

TL: Do you have any advice for deaf people trying to start a business?

KTH: I'm sorry again, one more time?

TL: Do you have any advice for other deaf people who may be want to start a business of their own?

KTH: A different business or the same kind that I have?

TL: Uh, any business.

KTH: Yeah, definitely go for it. It's nice to be a business owner because you then you have both time and money. Ya know, some people that have a job have money, but may be they don't have time, but if you don't have a job you have time, but you don't have money. You really need both, time and money. If some people in the deaf community started opening their own businesses and they had both time and money, I think that would be great. You can have time with your family and your kids but then you'd have the money for life as well. It'd be great.

TL: O.K., finally, the last question... three questions. What do you do for fun? What's your hobby?

KTH: Well, before I had kids, before I got married, I used to make things with dried flowers. I just loved doing things with dried flowers. It was almost like my, I guess you could call it my therapy. It just felt good to be creative and forget about everything that happened in the day, but now I have no time for a hobby. My new thing is to go out with my kids and have fun outside doing things. That's the new activity. Oh, I do really miss reading books though. I miss a lot of things. Well, every year we do get to go out camping. We go to Martha's Vineyard. Every year, that's our family tradition now.

TL: I went to Martha's Vineyard last summer.

KTH: Yeah, it's nice.

TL: I love it. Do you have a house there?

KTH: Nope, we camp, in a tent.

TL: Oh, camping. How do you feel about the choices you have made throughout your life, do you have any regrets?

KTH: Oh, this is time for regrets... No, I was able to do so many things before I got married. I was married; I've been married for almost four and a half years now. We got married late but I absolutely had the opportunity to live my life. I had the opportunity to experience so many things. I got to travel, I mean not quite as much as my parents do now, but still I got to travel. I was Miss Deaf Connecticut.

TL: When?

KTH: Oh, when? Hmm, 1989. I was able to experience so many things with that. It opened so many doors. I met so many people and I got to go to the Miss Deaf America Pageant and meet people there. I got to go to college. I just had a lot of fun in college. I feel like I've had enough experiences and I don't regret anything. Now I married and I

have kids and life is changing, but still absolutely no regrets. New experiences and a new life and it's awesome. I regret nothing.

TL: Did you meet your husband in college?

KTH: No, no, we meet at a deaf social event. I was in college and he was in high school and at that time I completely shrugged him off. I was like "Go home, go home to your parents." When he got into college we started dating and I broke it off, met again and we started dating again. I think before we were married I knew him for about 15 years and we were friends for most of that time and finally we just got married. But we were friends before that.

TL: O.K., for real now, the last question.

KTH: Wait. Another experience I got, that I've had, I got to skydive in Key West. It was so beautiful.

TL: Was that exciting?

KTH: Oh, it was great, fantastic. So, really, I did live my life already. Oh, it was great.

TL: I want to do that.

KTH: Oh, yeah, it's fun.

TL: Adrenaline, right? Adrenaline rush?

KTH: Oh, yeah, definitely.

TL: How do you explain your success, in general and in life?

KTH: Oh, my successes? Hmm, related to what?

TL: Your own success. How do explain it? Or what do you contribute it to?

KTH: Well, we're business owners; I never thought we'd be business owners. I thought that was for hearing people, ya know. Wow, we can do it. Like I said, technology is changing and now we access to a variety of things. It's given us a chance to become business owners, it's really great. That's something I never expected to happen. We have a house, that's a success. I always thought about that, would we be able to afford a house. It's so expensive, but we got a house. Hmm. Yeah, I think that's it.

TL: Are you happy?

KTH: Absolutely I am happy.

TL: O.K., well, thank you for coming today.

KTH: Anytime, it was my pleasure.

TL: I hope to see you again soon.

KTH: Yup, Definitely.

TL: Thank you again.

KTH: Thanks.