

Interviewee: Kristin Hartness
Interviewers: Steve Foertsch and Kelse Merrill
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Abstract: Kristin Hartness was born in Chelsea, Massachusetts, in 1971. Although her family's roots are in Worcester, throughout her life she lived in various parts of the country. Kristin discusses her relationship with her parents, who help to manage her multiple sclerosis. She also talks about her relationship with her service dog, which led her to her current position in Worcester as an executive director of the non-profit organization Canines for Disabled Kids. She talks about how her position enables her to provide people with disabilities like her own with service dogs to assist in their daily life. Kristin's work attempts to answer the question, "How do we handle the needs of the disabled, how do we handle the needs of the elderly, how do we provide public services to the homeless on a city level, but also addressing the fact that we don't want to feel like Boston?"

KM: We are completing a citywide oral history of the lives of Worcester women, aiming to collect stories about a broad range of experiences. Based on the goals of the 1850 National Women's Rights Convention in Worcester, we are focusing on the areas of women's education, health, work, and politics or community involvement. We want to focus today on your experience [Kristin Hartness]. Thank you for your help on this important project. So, do we have your permission to record your oral history?

KH: Yes, you do.

KM: Thank you. And so now, let's get started. So, what's your full name, including both your maiden name and your married name if applicable?

KH: Okay so my full name is Kristin J. Hartness-Law, that's both my maiden name and my current name. My married last name was Law, L-A-W.

KM: And where were you born?

KH: I was born in Chelsea, Massachusetts.

KM: Have you ever been married?

KH: Yes, I have.

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KM: What was the name of your husband?

KH: It was Justin Ashley Law.

KM: Do you have any children?

KH: No.

KM: What cultures or ethnicities do you identify with, or your family background?

KH: My family background is probably mostly Caucasian; we follow a lot of Lithuanian traditions from my one grandparent's side that came from Lithuania. On the other side we have French Canadian, Native American, and a lot of that is really mixed into the traditions that we hold within our home, a lot of that is mixed as well as the religious aspect of the traditions that we've mixed in as well.

KM: Very cool. Tell me about your parents- what did they do, what are some of their interests, where they worked.

KH: So, my parents were both born and raised here in Worcester as well. So there's a good family support and cousins and things in the general area which has been really nice. Both of my parents are college educated. My mother studied history and was trained as a high school teacher and she now runs, and for many years has run, a home-based family day care, which has been a wonderful experience to grow up in. It's like having lots of little siblings that keep going away. But it's certainly affected how I see children and how I interact with children as I've grown up. My father has also a bachelor's degree as well, and he went on first to teach veterinary technicians and he served with canines in the Army for a number of years. He served active duty then went to Reserves. And both of them have held education as a really important piece, so growing up we were exposed to a lot of history, we were exposed to a lot of things that would stir a mind, a lot of science, a lot of history, a lot of art, really very well rounded. My parents tried to make sure that we were exposed to as much as possible. And I think that really affected the way that myself and my siblings have met life and the paths that we have chosen.

SF: So would you say that veterinary care or working with animals is in your history?

KH: I would definitely say that working with animals is in my personal history, I've had animals, particularly dogs and cats, my whole life because of what my father did for work. He really kind of just taught us that from the beginning. So while I wasn't formally trained in canine behavior or anything, it's really—a lot of its second nature because it was how we were taught. To interact with animals, to respect them, to care for them properly, to have them as part of our lives. And so I think that influences the way I have my own partnership with my own service dog; my current service dog is my third service dog. And the way that I'm able to help other

people have that type of relationship as well. So I definitely think it didn't take me down the training path but it definitely influenced me.

KM: Very cool. So where did you live in your life? Where did you grow up and what was it like?

KH: So, most of my life has been here in Massachusetts although not all of it. I as a young person moved outside of Minneapolis for a short time while my father was on active duty. It's very cold out there, not a lot of memories per se because I was a very young child at that point, but that concept of getting out no matter what, I think that area of my life as well as being here in new England has affected me to be able to say, "You know what, you take the good days when they're there and you do as much as you can and really try to be more independent." I think those are things that growing up in these areas—Worcester County, out in Lee, I spent some time in southern New Hampshire and such, but the area keeps calling me. I love to travel, I do a lot of travel for work but there's a home here, there are roots here, and so I keep coming back.

KM: So you mentioned there were roots in Worcester. When did you arrive in Worcester? When did you permanently move to the Worcester area? And how did you come to live in the Worcester area?

KH: Actually I blame it on my parents again, my parents were married my father was in the Army so there was a little bit of shifting around then but my parents realized that they didn't want to be floating all over the place, they wanted to be where home was, they wanted to be where they had family where they had support, where they felt they had roots. So it was about second grade when my parents purchased the home they still own in Leicester and really have been there ever since. They had come back from Minneapolis, they were in Lee, Massachusetts for a while based on my father's job then they found that Leicester was a great location. It was close to family that was in Worcester proper, but also close to the family that was in the Worcester area, in surrounding towns as my cousins, their siblings were in the area. And I think that they really felt that it was very central too, so it allowed for job opportunities that you could stay in one place. You didn't have to move your home constantly to be getting opportunities whether for us as we grew older or for our father over the years. You can get to Boston, you can get to Springfield, Hartford, Providence, wherever you need to get to and not be selling your house or moving apartments all the time and that was really important to them. That we could stay in the same school system, that we could stay with the same friends long term.

KM: Very cool. So where do you live in the Worcester area now and have you ever lived in multiple areas?

KH: I recently owned property on Drummond Ave, which is off of Clove Street in Worcester. I lived in Cherry Valley, which is a part of Leicester that abuts Worcester. I lived in Fitzwilliam New Hampshire, which is about an hour and change from Worcester. And I've owned property in Leicester, and I currently am actually living back at my family home. I'm back in the house

that I grew up in which is kind of nice. I have an apartment now set up there which is really great. It just keeps calling me back.

SF: So you mentioned that your cousins live in the Worcester area. Do you have any other family members that live in this area?

KH: No I mean I have aunts and uncles, I have cousins. Both my brother and sister have left the area, though. My sister is in South Carolina in Myrtle Beach and my brother is in Colebrook, New Hampshire on the Canadian border.

SF: As we've already stated, you don't currently live in the city of Worcester. But what other connections do you have to the city of Worcester?

KH: My church, which I've belonged to for forty-plus years, is here in Worcester. Saint Luke's Episcopal Church, I'm very active there I do a lot of community involvement pieces that are done through the church, so that has really helped me to try to be part of the community that's here. We also do things with the other Episcopal churches in the city of Worcester, so that's been very active. I figure skated for many years out of the Lake Ave rink, a number of friends have lived or continue to live in the area. We've been involved with Girl Scouts out of Worcester County, Boy Scouts out of Worcester County, my job is based here now in Worcester. We service nationally but it's based here in Worcester. Really, it's the kind of community that keeps calling me back. I've been involved with a number of different things and they really always seem to come back to center around Worcester even if they've blossomed out. "Oh, we're going to do something at Tower Hill, we're going to go do something at Charlton Orchard." But it's always based back into Worcester.

SF: What challenges do you think the city of Worcester still faces and what would you change about it?

KH: Wow, that's a can of worms, I think that one of the challenges the city faces is the balance between being a fairly large city, but not feeling like a fairly large city. People and myself included, I really like how Worcester feels spread out versus feeling condensed. I don't feel like Boston, I don't feel like Providence where everything is closed in on itself, the buildings are so big you can't see the sun kind of thing but to remember that it is a city, it's one of the largest cities in New England depending on the year, it's either been the second or third largest city in New England and so it needs to act like a big city sometimes, it needs to put its weight into that versus acting like a town, even though a lot of the neighborhoods and the spread out feeling can make you feel more relaxed and more intimate in a lot of ways with your neighbors than I think a lot of major cities that I've visited have. I think that they struggle with some transportation battles. We have a beautiful airport, I'd love to fly out of it on a regular basis except I can't because they don't offer those things, and I think over many decades they've struggled with "Well, we have an airport, but we don't want to use it. We have a train station, but we don't want to use it. Oh, well we have a major highway, but we'd like to divert it." Those kinds of struggles between becoming a big city and balancing out the neighborhoods and the intimacy that

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Worcester offers really as a heart does. That's probably the biggest balance, and I think that balance feeds off to a lot of other things. So that big city/not big city feeds into transportation battles. Feeds into education and how are we educating the very large number of students that are in a city versus in a town environment. How do we handle the needs of the disabled, how do we handle the needs of the elderly, how do we provide public services to the homeless on a city level, but also addressing the fact that we don't want to feel like Boston. We don't want to feel that condensed or separated, we want to maintain that heart. That root, that piece that makes you feel like you're coming home. And that's a hard balance. I don't envy anyone having to make those final decisions, because I think they are difficult. But I also think it's part of what makes Worcester unique and part of what keeps bringing people home to the Worcester area.

SF: What changes have you seen over time in Worcester specifically?

KH: There's been some significant growth, it's been wonderful to see business, small businesses really revitalizing in Worcester and in my lifetime the deterioration of Worcester Center for example, businesses really leaving that area, and now businesses really being called back to that area, their revitalization. When I was a young person where the Hanover Theater was, was a movie theater, and it was a very active movie theater. And then it became a non-active movie theater, and then it became a building that people were wondering what to do with, and then the Hanover came in and it was revitalized and it was beautified and then now it's this amazing place where people from all over the area are coming to see Broadway quality productions and really acting as an anchor. Mechanic's Hall is an amazing space that brings people from around the world to perform in and there was a time when it kind of was like, "Mechanic's Hall is all there is." And now you're seeing it's driving that rebuilding of a community, of using buildings and not destroying the history just because we need to reuse the buildings, in a way. I think those are fabulous things. The Worcester airport, I think is an example of that. It was more active when I was a younger person and then it went almost extinct at one point. That's my word probably not the right political word. A now it's growing again and they're expanding, and I'm hoping that they'll bring in more than one airline that goes more than one place for business purposes. I don't have to leave the city. I want to see that growth continue. When Union Station was revitalized and now people can use public transit more easily, use the train system to go places in the state. But not just in the state- to go to New York, to go to D.C. and being able to come right back to Worcester instead of saying, "Oh, I have to go into Boston and I have to drive an hour and a half out of the city." I mean it affects how you make choices for your social engagements and I think for your work engagements as well. So all of those regrowths, all of those pieces that I think they're currently in, I think they're very positive and I'm excited about them.

SF: What distinct characteristics make Worcester the place that it is?

KH: Gosh, that's so hard to put a finger on. It's hard to put a finger on because I think it's very emotional. I think there's something—we talk about Worcester being the heart of the state, and I think in more than its physical location, that's true. There's something in Worcester that brings you back, that makes you feel, "I can travel all over the country and come home and know that things in Worcester are going to welcome me. There's something about Worcester that makes

you feel like you're part of it instead of making you feel like you're a visitor. I go to a lot of major cities, I travel for a lot of reasons for work, and a lot of the cities I'm in, it's okay and it's fun and it's great but there's nothing there that makes you feel like you can settle in. and Worcester does that. It says, we've got this great industrial area and we encourage businesses and encourage growth, but you don't have to live on top of that. You can live in a neighborhood where you have a yard, and you don't have to feel like you have to pack the kids up and go find a park so they can see what grass looks like. You can have a bit of that classic American dream. I have a yard and a dog and kids, and I can do that all right here in the city. So I don't have to give up easy access to amazing food sources, we've got all sorts of ethnic food sources plus very traditional American meals, fast foods and the trouble here is not deciding what I want to eat but deciding what I want to eat tonight because we have all those great options right here. I don't feel like I have to travel for them and at the same time I don't have to feel like I have to live on top of it, either. I can get to the theater, I can get to music, I can get to the DCU Center and it's all right here. So I can get into that quickly and experience all those wonderful things then very easily get home, turn on my television and have my yard and have my home, and not feel like a concert is happening literally next door. I think it's wonderful, it's the best of both worlds. Does that make sense?

SF: It definitely makes sense. What do you think women's experiences in Worcester have been generally?

KH: I think in general it's probably a stew. I mean there are women in Worcester who have been oppressed. There are women in Worcester who have been abused, there are women in Worcester who are neglected. But at the same time, I think Worcester has amazing opportunities for women. Ten major colleges right here, I mean you don't have to say, "I'll get up and move my family so I can get a good education." The colleges and universities around Worcester, the high schools really have been very supportive. My personal experience has been that they produce some amazingly educated women, which then gives us opportunities to go forward and we have a lot of great support mechanisms for women in the city. Professional things like Women in Development to support mechanisms like Abby's House for women and children, I feel like I think that this is an environment that says, "We don't want to marginalize women. We understand that it happens, but we want to do what we can to try to prevent that from happening. To try to prevent that, period, but if it does happen to try to address it." I've had wonderful support religiously in this city as a woman, the education, employment. My first full-time position out of school, I was hired as a manager for the Easter Seals Society right in the heart of Worcester. I think it's a really great place to be a woman socially and professionally. It's not a city I'm afraid to move around in. I don't feel like I have to fight the glass circle the way I would have to fight it in New York, Boston, or in other environments like that. I think it's a great place.

SF: You mentioned neglect of women in Worcester, could you elaborate?

KH: I think that any time you are in an environment where there's a community, there are good apples and there are bad apples unfortunately. And I think that there are women who need assistance because they get involved with bad situations. And I'm paraphrasing here, I don't

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want to put my finger on a specific situation. But there are women who end up involved with drugs, with partners who are abusive and I think that women continue—although I really feel that we've made progress, I really feel that women are often put in the role of taking on the burdens of others, so we take on if somebody's upset, it's okay that they yelled at us. If somebody lost their job it's okay that they lashed out at us, because we want to support them so we take on their burden. And I think that without healthy support, without healthy outlets, we run the risk of becoming abuse victims, of becoming addicted to negative substances, of becoming pushed aside. And I think that's a very real piece everywhere and I think it's very real in Worcester as well. But I do think that Worcester has a population that wants to respond to that, that's attempting to respond to that better than some other communities that I've been in. And I think that's important. I don't want to give the impression that it doesn't still need to be addressed, that it doesn't still need to be improved, but I do think that Worcester's trying harder than other places that I've been.

SF: You mentioned a glass circle, and how you didn't feel it was in Worcester. Did you mean a glass ceiling and could you elaborate on that?

KH: Yes, a glass ceiling, right. Sure. I think in many environments despite how we try to fight battles, we find that for a lot of reasons; everything from people believing that women are worth less in some environments to women being willing to accept less because they don't know that there's more or because they don't know what that line really is. I think there's really that division between the people who are perceived to be entitled and I think that that happens a lot in the work environment. That's where we hear the classic glass ceiling effect that stops people from being able to progress, but I think we also see that socially. I think we also see that in social expectations. That we expect as a society, we expect women to do certain types of things. And while that is changing and expanding, I think it's cracked which is good but I think it still exists in different places. I have run into it less often in Worcester and in Greater Worcester than I have in other places. But I don't want to say that it doesn't exist here either because I don't think we're that perfect. Camelot hasn't come home yet, so to speak. But that's I guess what I would say on that.

KM: Some questions about your education. Where did you attend school?

KH: I graduated high school from Leicester Public High School. Actually, grade school was also in Leicester—second grade on was in Leicester. Really wonderful, small town feel at the time. The town has grown since then, but really fabulous teachers who encouraged me to experiment in areas that weren't always traditional women's areas. I had amazing math teachers, fabulous science teachers that really encouraged me to do different things and to test those things out. And to this day, I still enjoy doing math for fun. I know that sounds silly, but I enjoy that type of thing and I don't think that it was discouraged, that was something that was very encouraged by my education system as well as my family. From there I graduated from Franklin Pierce University in Rindge, New Hampshire. I have a degree in Theater Arts, Directing and Production. So again that encouragement to be creative but to be well rounded. All of my educational experiences encouraged me not just to focus on a small area. I studied theater but I also went to science

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lectures. If I'm in museums I'm not just looking at art museums, I'm looking at science, I'm looking at medicine, I'm looking at anatomy. And where does all of that blend in? And I think that's so important for everybody, but for me it really helps to be a well-rounded person. I can walk into a lot of environments and have a general conversation about a huge number of subjects. Can I get into detail about heart surgery? No, I can't, but that's okay. But by having that well-rounded experience, it means that I can connect with more people and more environments. And I think that's really important to the work that I've done but also to the social aspect of my community. I feel like it helps to reduce alienation, to reduce segmentation, and to make those lines between groups more blended because I can walk into a number of different groups and have a conversation.

KM: Could you tell me the years that you attended these schools?

KH: Let's see. I graduated high school in 1989, and I graduated college in 1993.

KM: So what were some challenges you experienced in education?

KH: Some of the challenges I think I experienced were lack of knowledge before I started into certain paths. I think that's starting to change in the many years since I went to school. But there weren't as many venues, or the venues that were available weren't being communicated. So in hindsight, there were a lot of amazing things I would have loved to study in math, but I didn't know they existed. So I couldn't study them. I have found out about them as an adult and I've gone back and read things, but those were being taught in different places and it wasn't being communicated. I think the people around me tried to communicate what they knew, but I don't think they knew. So it was hard for them to tell me about something that they didn't know about, so I think that was a challenge. I think finances are always a challenge with education. There are a lot of amazing things that are out there but if we can't afford to buy the books, to attend the lectures, to pay for the semester then we can't have access to those things. But I have to say that I did have people around me who were always encourage me to look for the free things as well and not just look inside the traditional mechanisms. So both in high school and in college I was really encouraged to go to the free concerts and experience those things, learn from those environments. Go to the free lectures, attend the seminars even if it was something that I thought I was in opposition to, to go to learn and to experience those things. So I think those were great but there weren't enough of them and I don't think there were enough venues. I think that was my biggest struggle in education, that there were not enough venues to really meet my desire to keep learning. To meet my curiosity, my desire for more and more learning. I think that's changing, I think it's becoming more available. As an adult I'm definitely finding more sources. But that was a challenge as a student.

KM: Upon finishing your formal education, what did you see as your options?

KH: I really felt like I had a lot of options when I finished my formal education. I really felt like I was ready to discover what the world offered me. I didn't think I was, you know, going to be president. But I also didn't feel restricted, I didn't feel like I was pushed into one restricted area

of work. I really felt like I could go where I wanted to go. So I applied for jobs and looked at things that were really interesting to me and didn't feel like I was going to be stifled by, "This is all I could do now." I really felt like the doors were open.

KM: What support networks and mentoring have been very important to you?

KH: Gosh. I think a lot of it was mentoring. A lot of the support I got was mentoring from people I didn't know I was going to meet. From amazing professors to amazing volunteers, I mean really when I was in school I had support staff for different departments who were inspiring, who were encouraging about have I thought about going here or have I thought about going there, did I ever experience this. And then in the work environment, and socially as well, I would meet people. I would be at a church dinner and meet someone who is a woman whose lawyer working for a corporation and we would talk about our experiences and that would inspire me to pursue other things. In the work environment, women who had been in fields before me who were now my coworkers, but the experiences that they had and the encouragement they gave me to not feel that I was stuck anywhere. But to feel that I could look for new positions, that I could look for new challenges, that I could create those things. That I didn't have to wait for somebody else. Those women and men in those experiences, educationally socially and professionally, were so important to getting me to where I am and for encouraging me to continue to go to wherever I will end up.

KM: So now onto work. What was your first job?

KH: My first professional job or first job while I was in school?

KM: I suppose both.

KH: Okay. So my first job was that I babysat. Some people don't consider that work, but it's a lot of work, trust me. I think it was also really important because it started to teach me responsibility for others. As a babysitter, I had to care about others, I didn't have to just show up on time and it didn't matter. There was a lot to be done about other people, and that I think is an important piece of what I learned. I have washed dishes, I have stuffed newspapers, I have worked with people who I know were probably not legal as coworkers and really been exposed to choices that they made and why they were making those choices when I was never going to have to make those choices. I have worked non-profit most of my professional life. The Easter Seals Society was my first post-college, first grown-up job if we want to say it that way. They hired me to be the manager of their telemarketing division. And I really worked with some amazing people there both men and women who were well educated and really cared about not just if they get a good paycheck, but what they were doing. What was their job doing and how was it affecting people? So from there I worked for my alma mater, Franklin Pierce University, for a while, again really being exposed to. "what could my job do? How did my job affect people?" From there to Red Cross and from there to here really. Just positions that kept calling me to make a difference in my work, not just in my personal life but in my professional life as well.

SF: You mentioned some of the other jobs that you have had. So how would you describe your job currently?

KH: My job [CEO, Canines for Disabled Kids] currently is wonderful. I love my job. I'll tell you how I got to his job, because I think it's what makes me know it's a great job. I didn't go searching for this job, a former executive of one of the training programs, the training program that I got my first two service dogs from, approached me and said, "What do you want to do?" I was doing a lot of volunteer work for her, a lot of public speaking for her organization, education. I was really enjoying it and doing a lot of advocating for myself and others who were using service dogs at the time. And I half teasingly said, "Well, if your job wasn't full-time I would take it." I have multiple sclerosis, I was diagnosed when I was twenty-one. I've had symptoms since I was sixteen and I've always tried to do all I can, but in my late twenties, early thirties I realized I was not able to work forty hours a week on a traditional basis. I really need to balance my personal health needs with my work. So I knew I couldn't take on a full-time position. So I said to her, "If your job wasn't full time I'd take yours." And I knew she wasn't looking to leave, but I said it that way. And she said, "I have a sister company that's looking for new leadership and I'd like to put you forward for that position." And that was in 2002, and I started with Canines for Disabled kids and I've been here ever since. I really have loved bringing the organization forward more. It was always a nationally serving organization, but it wasn't moving in the right direction, it was becoming stagnant. And so I have enjoyed immensely developing programs and bringing those programs to people here in Worcester and having a great response. I mean, Assumption College and Clark University and I've worked with folks at Flagg Street School and a number of the charter schools, and a number of the public and private high schools. The universities have been incredibly responsive to the work that we're doing and helping us get that work out. Some of the businesses have been fabulous here, we have other partnerships getting support from Worcester businesses to be able to help us do our work. Making those connections has been exciting for me. Connecting with the families who need these dogs for their children and helping them. To say, "I'm not here to sell you a training program. I'm here to make sure that you get the right thing" and, gosh. I could go on about my job forever. You'll run out of space on your recording devices. But I love it. I love it because it's part of who I am but it helps me to help other people, and I feel good about what I'm doing. And even with the challenges I meet, I feel like my team can conquer those challenges and we can go on helping more people. And I don't think I could have gotten a better position. I just don't think I could have.

KM: Excellent. Well you actually answered several questions. What are your primary responsibilities in terms of housework, childcare and the daycare that your mother runs?

KH: Okay so, I think my primary responsibilities are pretty basic when we're talking about personal care, house things, things like that. I do a lot of my own housework. There are things I can't do, that I physically can't do that so I have other people assisting me with them. I'm a terrible cook, so nobody wants me to cook. So there's some blessings in that. It's part of why I have the living setup that I have, which allows me to do the things I can do to offer the support to

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my mother and my father. They offer me support—these are terrible things—I can't shovel snow, it's too heavy for me. So they have to do things like that. There's a lot I physically can't pick up so they have to help me with those things. Heavier cleaning and such like that, they have to assist me with. But I do my daily things. I have a very tiny dishwasher which is really wonderful, so I can take care of the majority of my own dishes. I have my service dog so I'm taking care of his care and such. But I'm also able to assist a great daycare and if she's like, "Hey can you come help?" If she's getting ready for a Halloween party, I'll help with that Halloween party with supervision and costumes and things like that. So I think a lot of it's pretty traditional in that. But I do need assistance for some areas and I'm able to get that. So it helps me to do more of the other things. I do a lot of travel for work, so there's a lot of responsibility in those kinds of organizational things and planning. The ability to handle your own suitcases and things like that. Is that where you were kind of headed with that?

KM: Yeah, perfect actually. So how do you balance different priorities, responsibilities, roles and interests that you may have in your life?

KH: I guess it depends. Some people would say that I don't balance them very well and I'm trying to do all of them, all the time. And we just do everything, and that usually backfires. But I think that overall I try to balance things well, I try to really evaluate my personal energy, my professional needs and my personal, social, volunteer activities. Those types of things. I try to make sure I have things that energize me and things that I give energy to. I want to feel good about what I'm doing, but I also need to recognize that there are times where I just need to stop doing some things. So I'd probably look at the course of a month rather than a smaller period of time, because in the course of a month I try to make sure I'm connecting with friends so many times a month. I try to make sure so many times a month that I'm involved with different volunteer activities. I have a Bible study group that I'm a part of that is really energizing to me because its discussion, it's intellectual and it's social as well. So I use that to balance the boring things that I have to do, like do the insurance audit for work or something like that. But also to balance my time and make sure that I'm not travelling so much that I'm over-fatiguing, which can then cause me injury, then everything else kind of has to be put on hold. It's not easy, but it's something that with conscious decision, I make work.

SF: So what do you think are the pros and cons of the path you have chosen?

KH: Well, I am never going to be as rich as Bill Gates. And I think that's both a pro and a con. I feel like the path I've chosen has allowed me to do the work my heart is calling me to do, to lead a life that both religiously and socially I can feel good about. That I don't go home at night and say, "Ugh, I can't believe that I did that." That it was against my conscience. I think that it has allowed me to be with family and friends, I don't feel like I go home at night and don't have a support system that I can reach out to. Or that I can offer support to. And I think that's a really important piece of the life that I've chosen, that it's a give and take. The same people I take support from I can give support to. There are some people that I give to and some people that I take from but in general I think I'm able to give and take from the same populations. And that's really important for me as a person to be healthy, but also for my community to be healthy. I

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have to be an active part of my community. I love that I'm still able to work part time and I plan to do that for a very, very long time. I love that I can contribute to society, but I love that the society around me is able to give to me when I need that support. I don't think it would work in another way, I think it would be unhealthy and unbalanced if I lived in a different environment.

SF: How do you feel about the choices you've made in your life? And do you have any regrets?

KH: I think everybody who's over ten has regrets, and I do think I have some regrets. I think a failed marriage is a regret, I think that there are career choices I would love to be able to give more, and I can't. And I'd love to physically be able to give more, financially and spiritually be able to give more. And my own limitations cause me not to be able to give as much as I'd like to, so I think that's a significant regret. I think that I've made some choices that weren't always the best choices but in hindsight, they've led me to better choices. They led me to better opportunities to make better choices, I hope. No one's ever shown up at my door and said I'd irreparably damaged them so I'm hoping that the bad choices that I made have not significantly harmed anyone. I don't believe that they have, but I hope that they haven't. but I hope that the good choices that I've made have helped people along their path. And I've had the good fortune to meet some people who many years later said to me, "Oh my gosh, you don't even know you did this but you said this to me and you changed the direction I went in, and I'm so grateful." And I hope that I've been able to do that for a lot of people, because a lot of people did it for me.

SF: During the account of your work section, you allude to moments of moral compromise, or possibly a struggle. Could you elaborate on that?

KH: I think that professionally, sometimes it's hard to balance the professional restraints, the representation of a company, the rules of the states, governments, society that we live in with our own conscience. And there are times that I have to step back and say, while I disagree with someone's personal choice it's still a legally acceptable choice, it's still a legally supported choice and its part of my job. I have to accept that person, even though they made a different personal decision than I would have or would have liked for them to do. There are times that you have to separate out ethics versus legality, and when you're in a professional position like the one I'm in, my job is to support the legality of actions in regards to the Americans with Disabilities Act and with service dogs. And not to say to somebody, "Well I think the decision you just made is incredibly stupid because I feel it was a bad choice." That can be hard at times, especially when you're very involved with the people that you're trying to support. Because I feel that part of what makes people good at certain jobs is that you're emotionally involved in your job as well. So I'm putting out there my life, I'm putting out there my experiences, and I'm trying to use those to help people work within the law and to be able to be as successful as they possibly can be. And when you see somebody make a choice that you feel is not the best choice, it's very hard. If it were my sister I could say, "Stop it, you're being stupid." But I can say that to my sister. I can say that to my close friends. I can't say that professionally, because it would be unethical to do so.

SF: This is about politics and community involvement. So do you consider yourself active politically?

KH: No, I don't. I vote regularly, but I am not a political advocate within my community. I read things and make educated decisions, I do vote. It's very important for me to give my say. I will write letters to representatives and congressmen and such, but I tend not to be the forefront on that. I tend to not be fighting those battles. I don't know that that will remain my position over the next several years, and feeling called into certain battles. Political battles, if I can say it that way. But I haven't actually taken action there, so I don't know where that will take me. But I would not consider myself particularly politically involved at this point in my life.

SF: Could you speak to the importance of voting or writing to congress people?

KH: I think that that's the minimal that anybody should be doing. We live in an amazing piece of the world that says everybody gets to give their opinion. And we need to give it respectfully and we need to give it safely, but everybody gets to give their opinion. And if you don't vote, you didn't give your opinion. Now, I vote and sometimes I lose. Sometimes my side loses, but at least I put my statement out there, I put my opinion out there, I let the overall body know that everybody wasn't on the same side. I think that's so important I say to people a lot, "If you didn't vote, then you can't complain." If you didn't vote because you weren't eligible to vote, that's different. But if you didn't vote and you were eligible to vote, how can you complain about what happened? Because you didn't take the responsibility to try and influence that. You didn't take the opportunity to put your opinion out there. And I think writing to senators, having conversations with your representatives whenever possible, maybe they're not going to agree with you, but they're going to know that everybody is not of the same mind. They're going to know what your thoughts are and you never know when your actions are going to influence something. And if my actions can influence a local politician or they can influence a local election or a national election, I want to be part of that. I feel like it's an important responsibility as a person in my community. It's a responsibility of mine to be part of that. Otherwise it's somebody else's fault and what good am I? I mean I have to be part of that. I have to try.

SF: You mentioned that you have written to your congressmen and women, on what topics if you don't mind me asking?

KH: The topics that I have been most vocal on...I've done some very specific local pieces, like "I think it's very stupid that they want to put that building there, please stop that." Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. But I think on greater issues I've written about disability and things that they think are happening that aren't really happening when we're out there. There are rules in place that are not always well followed and they can be simple things like do you know that you're supposed to have, you know that you're supposed to actually mark the handicapped parking spaces? To more elaborate choices like failures that I observed in the disability healthcare process, things like it's all or nothing. So, if somebody needs some assistance, but could continue to work three quarters time or even could continue to work full time, if they could get aspects of assistance, but the system doesn't allow for that. So I've often written about

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things that they're personal to me, and it may be something that is directly affecting me, and it may be something that is affecting the population that they would say I'm associated with. But those are the topics that I tend, that I tend to write on. Then I say, "Look here." And they tend to be things that I'm saying, "You need to look at this piece, you need to look into this, you need to look at the local individual level," rather than my comments on a large group. I tend to say, "Here's a specific instance that I think you need to consider as you consider the overall plans."

SF: So you've mentioned you've worked in a lot of nonprofits, and also volunteered. Could you elaborate on some volunteer work or community work you've done?

KH: Well, I have done things like local fundraisers for groups like the Heart Association, or the MS society, things like that. I have been a Boy Scout-Cub Scout leader for many years, really just trying to get boys to be more active, and be more social. I continued for many years as a merit badge counselor, and some of this, you know in hindsight you go, "Oh of course it all works together!", but I really try to—really tried to expose people to the lives around them. I do a lot if the things I'm called to have to do with disability awareness, not so much saying, "You're not disabled so you have no idea" because I don't want it to be that way, but I want it to be an awareness, walking around the world with your eyes open, not with your eyes closed. And so, I think I do a lot of food collections for the food pantries. I find my limitations prevent me from being in the nitty gritty, I can't show up and build a house, I can't show up and help feed someone at a soup kitchen, I can't ladle the foods, but I can provide the food that then gets cooked for those individuals, or provide the food for a family whose struggling, and they can go to a food bank and pick up that food and take it home. I can get food to a spot where they can get it. So a lot of my volunteer stuff is a little more back from the frontline, if you want to say that, just because physically I can't get to the frontlines. But it's important for me to be part of those--it's important for me to be the supporting those groups, and supporting that awareness, doing education, whatever I can do to support the greater picture.

SF: Yeah, I volunteer for Habitat for Humanity [non-profit for building shelters for the needy], so, you know, when you're saying you can't build...

KH: Mhmm. But I buy food cards, I buy cards that then help support—there's a network in Worcester, Hope for Housing, and so our like, I can buy gift cards through our church that then our proceeds go to Hope for Housing [regional non-profit to assuage familial homelessness]. So I can't go do the housing work, but I can do that sort of work as well.

SF: So you've mentioned a few times that you're very involved in church life. What do you think your role-what do you think the role religion has played in your life?

KH: Huge! I would say religion has been a very significant influence in my life. I have been blessed in that my church community has always been very supportive of me as an individual. They were incredibly supportive of me when I was diagnosed first and when I went to get my first service dog and they raised funds for that, they were beyond my, and beyond my imagination as to what they raised to help with-to help me get that service dog, to gain, to gain

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regain independence I was losing to my disability. The ability to—a lot of my religious life has really encouraged me to education and encouraged me to debate, encouraged me to question, encouraged me to be open about concerns, has encouraged me to look at areas of the world that I didn't—that I wouldn't necessarily have known to look at, and encouraged me to be more open about being aware of others around me, and can I support them or can we support others? And also has encouraged me that I personally don't have to support everything, but that I—it's okay for me to say, my heart is calling me to this population, and that doesn't mean that I'm negating other needs but that by me supporting, by me for example purchasing food which then goes into a big collection at church and then goes out to—and being super active in that area, it allows somebody else to be more active, when they physically building a house, or working with the different population. It's really helped me to look beyond myself, and I think that is a really key piece of who I am today, and who I want around me in my society.

KM: So now to the next portion...you've mentioned Multiple Sclerosis. How have health issues impacted your life or those in your family?

KH: I would say that it has been significant. It has not been as significant as some folks, I'm still mobile, I'm still fairly independent, but it really changed the choices that I was able to make in my life. It really made me make different choices. I thought I was going to be able to work all sorts of crazy hours, and climb all sorts of—you know, physically do certain things, and I can't do those things, period. I mean they're just—one of the great delusions of society is that people that people with or without disabilities can do whatever they want, and the reality is it's not true. The reality is that we can all be successful, and we can all be involved and have wonderful meaningful lives, but we cannot all do everything. And it was hard for me, I had to make choices to give up things, recreationally, and I can't figure skate anymore, so recreationally there was a physical activity I had to give up. I thought, I never thought that in my forties I would be working part time because I couldn't work full time. So that was a change. I think my family made the decision to put a studio apartment on as an addition to my parent's house, so that I could be around, no I could be close to them when I needed the physical assistance, but that I could maintain independence. So my family made a real conscious choice to alter their lifestyles. My friends and family have made amazing gifts of being able to support me. I was in the hospital several days this summer. Family and friends adjusted their schedules to be able to support me. I have testing periodically, family they adjust their lives to be able to do that. And so I definitely think it's very significant, but I also feel that none of us feel that it's a loss—it's not a negative, it's a significant impact, it's a significant change, it influences choices and such, but I don't think that anybody feels that it's a loss, per se. And they just feel like it's an adjustment and we're all going to go forward together.

KM: So what are your experiences in accessing quality and affordable healthcare?

KH: Boy, there's another can of worms! I have been blessed in that I went through employers or now through a divorce decree, I have very good healthcare. I want to qualify that by saying good healthcare does not mean it is really fully accessible. For example, I have one of the best personal health care plans that you can get. I have a very reputable, very high-end provider. My

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monthly payments, my monthly charges, are significant, but the government has done some things that have made those come down in price. Okay, that's a positive thing. But I have to make choices as to whether or not I go to the doctor, because to go to the doctor, to walk into the office costs me 35 or 40 dollars, to walk in the office. So, when you're a person, when you're a healthy person, maybe that's not such a big deal, because you do it twice a year and who cares? Right? I mean, blessed be those people I don't want to take that away from them. But when you start moving into people who have health issues, whether it's because your children are super active in sports and so they're always breaking something—I mean, I have a cousin that he's just constantly—we're like, "What'd you do now?" "I got hit by a baseball! Aahhh, I fell on the hockey thing!" You know, I mean, every time you walk in the door, the higher end plans, every time you walk in the door, 35 40 dollars to walk in the door. Medications, costs are going up. People, they say, "Oh, we're bringing it down." Well you're bringing it down on the ones that aren't affecting me. That you're bringing them down on the ones that are not ones that I now have to take for the rest of my life. And I'm glad for the people that those are affecting, but I don't think that people have really—I don't think that people making the decisions have actually balanced this. They say, "Oh look, we brought down the premiums!" Really? You brought down the premium 100 dollars a year, but you raised my copay from 15 dollars a visit to 40 dollars a visit. So do I feel that—I don't feel that that's accessible. I feel that if I did not have the support systems around me, if I wasn't able to work as much as I do work, I would not be able to get the health care that I do get, and even at that, I mean I know that I'm making twice as much to do certain things, so people who are more strapped financially and socially supported-wise than I am, are getting even-making even harder decisions, and getting even less. So I don't think it's really—it could be worse, but it could be a lot better.

KM: So who's health are your responsible for, aside from your own?

KH: Just mine. Well, mine and my service dog, but they probably don't consider that. [laughs]

SF: Before we move out to the conclusion questions, I just wanted to ask you because it seems like an important part of your life. What does the role of service pets play in your life?

KH: So, I'm going to be technical here. Service animals are not pets, legally. See this is me moving into my professional mode [laughs]. But service animals—in my case service dogs—have made such a huge difference in the amount of independence that I have been able to reclaim from my disability and to maintain. I was losing a lot. I slowly am losing the ability to control my left leg, which affects my ability to walk, balance, I can't feel the palms of my hands, I am bending over caught—I can't adjust things quick enough. And I was withdrawing from society. Okay, when you are afraid you can't safely cross Park Ave. and you work on Park Ave. and you want to walk across the street to get lunch but you're afraid that you can't do it because if you fall in the middle of the street, you literally have to crawl across the street before you can get to something stable enough to help you up, you stop going. I stopped going to the grocery store unless there was someone with me. I stopped going out to eat as often, I have friends' houses that I hadn't been in because their houses, most personal houses are not ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act] accessible. So, there were people that I was withdrawing from. And I got

my first service dog, and people within four months of getting my first service dog, people were saying to me, “Oh my gosh. It’s so wonderful to see you again. We were concerned about you. We didn’t know how to reach you.”. And these are people who were close friends, and they were people who were, the waitress at the restaurant that I normally ate at and she was worried that she hadn’t seen me in what in hindsight was months. Many, many months. So fast forward, I have my first service dog April 1st 2001, I now not only live a more independent life, but I help others to do that. So I fly across the country, me and my service dog, and a funny looking suitcase. I say funny looking because of the way I push it. The suitcase looks very traditional, but the way that I push it through the airport it’s a little funny. I hope not ever to see me show up on like Funniest Home Videos [TV show] or something because it could happen. I have fallen in LA [Los Angeles, California] and not been concerned about how I am going to get up, because my service dog is right there to provide me with the tool and the training to be able to safely get to a standing position. Do I move through life at a different pace? Absolutely. But I’m moving through life. I’m going out shopping on my own. I’m working part time which I would have had to give up. I’m using tools that don’t prevent people from accessing me. Which is a really interesting piece that I went through, If I use a cane or a walker for support, people actually treat you like either you’re made of glass so they can’t come close to you or like you’re contagious. The service dog helps to break down those barriers by allowing me to be seen as me, and not seen as those mechanical devices. I do the things when I want to do them, not when somebody has time to help me, and service dogs for me personally are a critical tool. And you know, when you asked earlier about political things, that’s probably an area that I am most likely to be called into taking personal political advocacy beyond the steps I’ve already taken. Because that’s so important to my ability to be as independent and as successful as possible.

SF: You talked a lot about the physical benefits of having a service animal, could you talk about the emotional benefits, as well?

KH: So when we talk about service animals, the emotional benefits as all, I like to say, they are the icing on the cake. The cake is the skill, the cake is what makes them legally able to work in public places. And those are the trained skills that they have been giving that helps that individual. When we move into the emotional pieces of it, that's really a bonus because emotional support, comfort, companionship and such are not defined as service dog skills. However, you’re going to get them, it's a living tool. So, I don't ever feel alone, does that sound—I don’t ever feel, “Oh what am I going to do today?” You know? Because I have something to do everyday. At the very least, I need to interact with my dog. I need to do homework with him, I need to take him out so there’s physical exercise for both of us. When the power went out, several years ago, we had the big ice storm, at the time I had working partners, and I had a retired partner, and another dog at the time. You know what? I was not so cold in my space. Because they were, we were, all cuddled up together. It wasn’t bleak, he makes people smile. We walk through airports and total strangers smile which makes me smile more, which makes others smile more and so I think the bonuses of being emotionally healthier, because I have a living tool, are really awesome.

SF: Thank you, so onto the conclusion. How do you get through tough times, what kinds of thoughts keep you going?

KH: Well some of that can be because I know I'm responsible for Ash and she and I are responsible for one another. So it's a team effort, so it doesn't always feel even if something very personal, it doesn't feel like it's just me. My family support is amazing, my religious faith is very key to that. To reach out to God, to reach out to that greater strength when I don't feel I have the strength to go forward. That's huge. But I think for my whole life I've been building strong support systems and that means that the only time I'm alone is when I want to be alone. I mean I have to choose to sever a support mechanism, in order to not have it. And I have so many support mechanisms that it would be impossible to sever them all so I never feel like I can't reach out. And I think that's super important.

SF: How do you define success in your life and has the definition changed over time?

KH: I think it has. I think as a young person, success was very material. I think as a young person success was involved with, do I own my own house? Do I have a productive job? Am I getting a pay check that covers all my bills? I mean I think those were very real, I don't want to discredit those. I mean, as a young person, I was like, high school diploma, check, college degree, check. Those were very measurable pieces to being successful. I think that having a job that I feel is making a difference, that I feel is important piece of success. I feel that my personal health is part of how I measure success. And I don't mean that by, I mean I will deteriorate with my disability, my disability will cause me to deteriorate the rest of my life. However, emotionally, physically, spiritually, I feel healthy because I feel like all the pieces are in the right place. I don't feel depressed, I don't feel like I'm not contributing, I don't feel like people don't care about me and those are successes that are so much more important. Those are ways that I—I'm out every day, I'm walking every day, those are little successes. And so all of those things come together to make me feel that I'm a successful person. I'm a person who is contributing in a meaningful way to society around me and that's probably the most important thing I could ask for.

SF: Based on your life experiences, what advice would you give to women of today?

KH: I think the first thing I would say is get out there and do it. Don't let things and somebody else undermine what you are going to be. Visit things, try things, its ok to say, "I don't like that I not going to do it." I mean, I rode a Jet Ski once, didn't like it, wasn't a good experience, just saying don't ever have to do it again. But you won't know what's not fun until you figure out what is fun. And so I think the best thing is to just keep trying, and try it with as many people. Just try everything.

KM: Since we are now working to tell a fuller story of the history of women that has been recorded in the past, what should we be sure to include?

KH: I think it's important to include that women—because a women does it, does not make it important. It's important because that person did it, and that person happens to be a women is a part of history. I think it's important to recognize that we should not be categorizing them to make them more important or less important because of their sex. And I think that historically, we have done that, I don't want to take away firsts, like the first woman published in English, but sometimes we make some things more important or less important because of who did it. A mother who chooses to be a stay at home mom should not be considered any less important. I mean Einstein's mother was a stay at home mom. Those people play indescribable roles in influencing the people around us. I think that historically that it's important that we don't hide history and that it's important for women to own their own successes and their own failures.

KM: Is there anyone else you would suggest we talk to?

KH: There are probably a whole list of people I could suggest you talk to. There is a lawyer here in Worcester, her name is Liz Miska. She's a very interesting person.

SF: Could you spell that last name?

KH: M I S K A. I'm sure I have contact info; she's a really interesting person. Linda O'Riley, she's associated with UMass. There are so many women that I am thinking of these are the first two that come to mind.

SF: Yeah definitely WWOHP, they contacted you send them a list... We just want to thank you so much for this interview. It was great to learn your history.

KH: Glad to hear it.

KM: So lastly we just have the informed consent and the deed of gift.

KH: And I signed it and I think it's you guys who have to sign it.

SF: This will be a transcript, it will be used by Worcester Women's Project... oops... WWOHP

KH: What were those initials WWOHP?

SF: It will be used as they see fit. As long as you give us the consent so do you here by consent?

KH: I consent fully to this transcript.