

MASTERS Audio Club, March 2009

Kathy Buckley

If You Could Hear What I See



Gifted comedienne, award-winning actress, accomplished author, and renowned inspirational speaker **Kathy Buckley** is a force like no other. Billed as America's first hearing-impaired comedienne, she has appeared on *The Tonight Show*, *The Today Show*, *Good Morning America*, *CBS This Morning*, *Entertainment Tonight*, and *Extra*. She was featured in *People* as one of their most touching stories of 1997.

Interviewed by **Winn Claybaugh**, Kathy shares her story of overcoming some of the most difficult obstacles imaginable and how she met those challenges with dignity, courage, and laughter.

WC: Hi everybody, this is Winn Claybaugh. Welcome to this issue of MASTERS, and I met this woman literally five minutes ago and, of course, as I walk up to her home, she screams at me from the street and then hugs me for a very long time the second I make it to her porch. And here I'm setting up and just having the time of my life and I know that our listeners are going to absolutely love, love, love this time that we have today with Kathy Buckley. Kathy, welcome to MASTERS.

KB: Yes! I'm so *excited*!

WC: *[laughs]* Okay, I probably have more notes because I wanted to get this right in preparing for this interview. I have to tell you, my niece Allison saw you speak in Salt Lake City and you just blew her away. And she's known that I've had this company for so long and I've interviewed some pretty amazing people, including your good friend Leeza Gibbons—

KB: Yeah.

WC: —and Larry King and all kinds of wonderful people. And knowing that I had this company, she contacted me and said, "You have to track this woman down. You have to interview her." And you were so gracious. You immediately said yes. I don't think you even knew who I was but you just said yes.

KB: Who cares? If we can get a good message out and help people change their lives and touch their hearts, I'm honored.

WC: Well, I—okay, I’m going to read this and I—it took me a long time to go through your bio, your website, your book, ’cause I wanted to make sure that I got it right. So, I’m reading this, so bear with me because you need to know, and this is just the tip of the iceberg. So, Kathy Buckley is a comedienne, award-winning actress, accomplished author, a renowned inspirational speaker. You’re billed as America’s first hearing-impaired comedienne. You’re a five-time American Comedy Award nominee as Best Stand-Up Female Comedienne. As an actress, you are known for guest appearances in shows such as *Touched by an Angel*. You had a critically acclaimed one-woman, off-Broadway show called *Don’t Buck with Me*.

KB: Yay.

WC: I love that.

KB: *[laughs]*

WC: As a motivational speaker, you inspire hundreds of thousands of people around the world, sharing your story, obviously with dignity and courage and using humor as a teaching tool, which, you know, we love that. You wrote an amazing book called *If You Could Hear What I See*, which I’m going to get copies of that book today. So when you’re not looking I’m going to steal a few. You have an original PBS special, *No Labels, No Limits!* You received several awards as both writer and executive producer. Highly acclaimed autobiography theater play, *Now Hear This!*, had its off-Broadway premiere at a theater in New York. Then you moved on to Los Angeles where you received more awards, including—love this one—Los Angeles entertainment industry’s coveted Media Access Award as best play of the year. As a comedienne, you won fourth place out of over 80 comedians and soon began touring the U.S. playing major, major comedy venues including Caroline’s in New York City, Catch a Rising Star in Las Vegas, the Improv in Los Angeles, the Comedy Store, Laugh Factory in Hollywood. You have appeared on programs such as *The Tonight Show*, *The Today Show*, *Good Morning America*, *CBS This Morning*, *Entertainment Tonight*, *Extra*, *Inside Edition*, *Turner Entertainment*, and it just goes on and on. You’ve been featured in several national magazines including *People* magazine as one of their most touching stories of 1997. You have appeared on shows such as *Stand Up Spotlight* on VH-1, *Comic Strip Live* on FOX, *Evening at the Improv* on A&E, and *Caroline’s Comedy Hour*, also on A&E. You’re also very, very philanthropic in several organizations that you have been involved in. I see that award that you have up there with City of Hope. You have had your own story with cancer and a hundred other stories and so, Kathy, I just can’t tell you what an honor it is. And especially just walking into your home ’cause oftentimes I’m honored meeting people but just how you made me feel the second I walked in here, into your presence, truly makes—

KB: Ahh.

WC: —this a special day for me. So thanks, sweetheart.

KB: Well, you—I was scared of you. You wrote that book, *Be Nice (Or Else!)*. You scared the heck out of me.

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: This nice stuff is not easy for me.

WC: I also told her before we started recording that, you know, we edit these, you know, to make sure that it sounds clearer, you know. So I told her, “Hey, if you mispronounce a word...” and she’s like, “I’m hearing impaired, I’m—”

KB: I have a speech impediment. I’m—

WC: Yeah, okay.

KB: You’re gonna be editing until you’re blue in the face. You’re going to end up with what? Two seconds of a film.

WC: *[laughs]* I just love this. But you were actually—it wasn’t until you were two years old before you were even diagnosed as being hearing impaired, correct?

KB: I was eight.

WC: You were eight before they knew that.

KB: I was eight years old before they found out I had a hearing loss. I was in school for retardation for several years before they found out I had the hearing loss and I was eight years old, and that was a long time to go without language. ‘Cause without language you can’t protect yourself, you can’t communicate, you don’t know what love is and all that. So I was in the school for retardation for two years before they found out it was just a hearing loss. *[laughs]* And they called me slow.

WC: *[laughs]* So, what was your life like up until that time, until you were eight years old?

KB: Well, actually, if you really think about it, in that school, back then—we won’t say how old I am, you will have to add the numbers up for yourself—but in that school, back then, they didn’t have like special school for deafs and, you know, and—it was all kids with disabilities.

WC: Okay.

KB: So when I was in that school with the kids that had mentally challenged, I looked really smart. *[laughs]*

WC: *[laughs]* So you were top of your class there.

KB: *[laughs]* No, I really was. That was the only time I was the top of my class. But we had—the thing was in that school, among these kids, there were no judgements passed.

WC: Hm.

KB: And in that school it wasn't what you couldn't do, but what you could do.

WC: Yeah.

KB: And it wasn't the value of words and communication, but what your heart had to say.

WC: Hm.

KB: So if somebody could have that, can you imagine a world where people didn't pass judgement, where people just focused on what you could do instead of focusing on what's not there? That—I have yet to figure that out. Why people focus on things that are not there is amazing.

WC: Right.

KB: But more importantly, can you imagine being able to communicate without words and knowing what's in somebody's heart? Because I think emotion is probably one of the hardest things in the world to communicate.

WC: Hm.

KB: Into words. You really can't—even if you love somebody so much, it's like you want to crawl under their skin—there's no words to say how much I love you, you know? And it's just—there's no words. Love—“I love you” is nothing. So there's just the communication but knowing how much that person loves you, that's a gift. So I got to have that for a few years in my life and that's a blessing.

WC: At what point did you realize that that was a blessing? I'm sure at eight years old you weren't thinking that this was a blessing.

KB: Well, at eight years old it wasn't so bad because half of the kids didn't know I was going through their lunches.

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: I love Oreo cookies. What can I say?

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: Milk and Oreo cookies. Yes. No, at eight years old I was confused. I was confused, I was lost, especially in my own home because the communication wasn't there for me. My eyes were probably bigger than my head half of the time. My brother caught on to the fact that something was not right with me and he figured out that if he breaks something all he had to do was point to me.

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: *[laughs]*

WC: Okay.

KB: And it was like, Kathy got it. And I'm like—so now I got to the point where now I'm learning to duck even when I didn't have to duck.

WC: Right.

KB: But it's amazing, you find ways to survive.

WC: In your book you talk about the first time that you heard an audience laugh.

KB: Yes.

WC: Can you explain that?

KB: *[pauses and voice breaks]* It's hard to explain that because, like I said earlier, there's just some emotions you can't put into words.

WC: Uh-huh.

KB: But, wow. It was a time of acceptance for me. I spent my whole life being judged by hearing people and thinking I'm not good enough and I'm not worthy. And here I put myself in front of 200 hearing people, 250 hearing people, doing something I knew nothing about: standup comedy. And I really couldn't hear the laughter 'cause I didn't have the hearing aids that I have today when I started but I could feel the vibration from the floor. And I'd play off faces that I could see and if I saw a face I didn't like, I'd move on to another face.

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: It was total acceptance. I cried. I was on stage and I heard the laughter and they scared me.

WC: Huh.

KB: And then I'd tell a joke and they laugh again and I'm like, *Oh my God, this is a give and take.*

WC: At that time, did people know it was okay for them to laugh or was your audience uncomfortable and—

KB: No, nobody—

WC: Wow.

KB: —was uncomfortable.

WC: Wow.

KB: It was just the noise was new to me.

WC: Wow.

KB: You've got to remember, when you have a hearing loss and you go into a comedy club, I don't get a lot of comedy because I take things very literally.

WC: Right.

KB: And that's part of the challenge that I get. So, you know, you see somebody on stage going, "Hey, man. What's with the Indian people and the red dot on their forehead? What's that for, target practice? Ha, ha, ha." That's not funny. They need that dot.

WC: Right. *[laughs]*

KB: And I would get all upset.

WC: Right.

KB: So I didn't find the humor in a lot of things. And Robin Williams—so I went home and I rented videos. Robin Williams has the fastest lips I've ever seen in my life.

WC: How do you read that?

KB: You don't, honey.

WC: *[laughs]* Okay.

KB: I had to go to Evelyn Wood's speed lip-reading class.

WC: *[laughs]* Okay.

KB: So you just learn. You know, you—it's amazing. I have a life that I could not have dreamed because I didn't know it exists.

WC: Right. I heard it once said that according to *The Book of Lists*, the number one fear is public speaking.

KB: Yeah.

WC: And the number two fear is death by fire. *[laughs]*

KB: *[laughs]* Oh, is it death by fire?

WC: Yeah. So you can imagine, to stand up in front of an audience, how you must feel and yet—

KB: In front of a fireplace. That will really screw you up.

WC: *[laughs]* Well, how did you ever get the nerve, first of all, to be—there was nobody else blazing that trail before you—

KB: Yeah.

WC: —who had done a hearing-impaired comedian. Nobody had ever done that before. How did you ever get the courage to do that?

KB: Well, one thing I'm going to teach you about life: if somebody tells you to do something or gives you a suggestion—

WC: Right.

KB: —that's nice. But if you hear the suggestion more than once, you better listen.

WC: Okay.

KB: So several people were saying—see I was a massage exercise therapist and I found out laughter was my best medicine in healing. But several people said, "You should do this comedy contest. You should do this comedy contest." And I was like, "I ain't gonna do no—what the hell is a comedy contest? What's comedy? I don't understand it." And then they—it was to help raise money for children with cerebral palsy.

WC: Okay.

KB: And I love kids.

WC: Right.

KB: And I thought, *Oh well, okay*. Three people had suggested it. Two people brought me the article. So I thought, all right, it's for the kids.

WC: Time to listen.

KB: You know, it's time to listen. And I was scared because I really had no idea what I was getting involved in. And I couldn't educate myself on it because back then the videos were not closed captioned. So I sat in front of the TV crying, going, "Why am I trying to learn something that's impossible for me?"

WC: Hm.

KB: And then I thought, *You know what? It's for the kids. So if I make a fool out of myself, it won't be the first or last time.*

WC: Right.

KB: You know? And so I just kept going with it and I said, "Do you know what? I can talk about being six foot tall, flat-chested, having a hearing loss. Damn, I've got plenty of material here."

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: And I went with it. And I just kept going, "It's for the kids. It's for the kids." And that night I was so scared. And do you know what I was afraid of?

WC: What?

KB: I wouldn't hear them call my name on the stage.

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: I drove the producer crazy, "Did they call me yet? Did they call me yet? Did they call me yet?" That guy was ready to hang me somewhere.

WC: Right.

KB: And I thought—and I was talking to everybody. It was like, "Hey, so how long you've been doing comedy?" "Three years." I go, "Excuse me?" I thought it was amateur night. "Well, how long have you been doing comedy?"

WC: Ohh.

KB: And they said, "Ten years." I'm going, "What the heck am I doing here?"

WC: Wow.

KB: I was pacing back and forth outside the club going, "What am I doing? Father, please, tell me what to do." And as soon as the guy came out to get me, he goes, "They're calling you!" Well, how would I know? *[laughs]*

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: And I started walking toward the audience and, Winn, I tell you, it was like a blanket fell on me, of faith.

WC: Hm.

KB: And I went up on the stage. I stood in front of 250 people and I shared my story.

WC: Hm.

KB: And then I ended up finding out that when you won that night—I won that contest.

WC: Oh, wow.

KB: And what I found out is if you win that contest, you had to go to the semifinals.

WC: So you had to do this again.

KB: Which means more jokes!

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: And that's how I ended up placing fourth out of 80 comedians who'd been in the business from three to ten years and I was in it only for the two weeks.

WC: Wow.

KB: So there's an old saying, "You want to make God laugh, tell him your plans."

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: *[laughs]*

WC: You've been through quite a few other things, too. Tell us about your experience on the beach one day.

KB: Well, I was laying on a beach sunbathing and I don't hear music very well.

WC: Right.

KB: And I had a girlfriend who loved music.

WC: Okay.

KB: And what she would do is she would put my back up against the speaker of the stereo and she would sing the song and I can feel the vibration and I would lip read her to try to imitate the song. And I went to the beach. I always took a radio with me so I'd look like everybody else. *[laughs]*

WC: [laughs]

KB: I'm boppin' around. I didn't even know it wasn't on. [laughs]

WC: [laughs]

KB: What an actress, you know?

WC: Right, right.

KB: You're always trying to find your place to fit in society.

WC: Right.

KB: I was always trying to make myself look like, hey, I'm hiding this secret and nobody knows about it that I can't hear, including me. I don't even know about it.

WC: Right.

KB: So I'm sitting on the beach and I was laying on the beach and I'll never forget this because I saw the Jeep, the lifeguard Jeep, running around on the beach. And I thought to myself, *My gosh, the way that Jeep is running around, someone's liable to get run over.* Never thought it was going to be me.

WC: Hm.

KB: And all of a sudden, I heard the song, *Billy, Don't Be a Hero*. Do you remember that song?

WC: Oh yeah.

KB: [sings] Billy—

WC: Yeah.

KB: —don't be a hero. That song.

WC: And now you sing.

KB: Yeah, now I do.

WC: Okay.

KB: I taught myself through a balloon.

WC: Wow.

KB: So that song came on and it reminded me of April singing the song so I laid there for a couple of minutes and then all of a sudden I felt all this pressure and blood on my face—

WC: Hm.

KB: —my chest, my back. And so somebody called her to tell her she ran me over so she came back and finished the job.

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: So I was laid up for about five years, in and out of a wheelchair for two and a half years—

WC: Five years.

KB: Yeah.

WC: Recovery.

KB: Yeah.

WC: Wow.

KB: And they said I'd never walk again and I figured I didn't hear them, I got up and I left.

WC: *[laughs]* You have a lot of advantages to this—

KB: Oh yeah. Life is good.

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: It's all in how you want to look at it, honey. It's all your choice. It's your vocabulary that makes you a happy person or a sad person. It's totally up to you.

WC: And that wasn't the last of your battles nor will it probably be your last. There was one other one that I read about.

KB: There were several of them. *[laughs]* But yeah, I died at the scene of that accident.

WC: Did you really?

KB: Yeah. I saw life after death. At least I believe I did, you know.

WC: I want to write a book called *Wishful Thinking*, and it will be a collection of stories of people who have had those types of experiences, 'cause I like what

you just said, that you believe that you did, and so some people will say, “Oh, that was just wishful thinking.” Well, all of life is wishful thinking so the fact—

KB: Yeah.

WC: —that you believe that it happened—for people to add value to something that maybe other people won’t believe it, but you believe it, and it has value for you.

KB: Yeah, it does. And it changed my life immensely.

WC: Hm.

KB: Because, you see, I spent the first 20 years of my life looking for three things: that was love, warmth, and acceptance.

WC: Hm.

KB: And when I died, I got a love that’s—it’s out of this world. I mean, a warmth in knowing that I am totally protected—

WC: Hm.

KB: —and accepted. Accepted as I am, totally as I am. And then I was given a fourth gift that no one had given me my first 20 years of my life and that was the gift of choice. Something, someone loved me so much to let me make the decision as to whether I was going to go or stay.

WC: Hm.

KB: And I just got ran over by a Jeep so I don’t know if I was thinking too clearly.

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: But I’ve never regretted the choice.

WC: Wow.

KB: And the thing that I loved about that experience: I never knew a love like that. And I like to believe that when I came back I brought it back with me. And I want the whole world to see that love. I know I can’t give it the way it was given to me, but I want to love as many people as I can while I’m here, unconditionally, because I know for sure, for a fact, that no one out there is junk.

WC: Huh.

KB: Everyone has something to contribute. Everyone has a gift within them. They just need to focus within themselves instead of looking to find a way to fit in a nasty society sometimes in their environment.

WC: Today is one of those days that I wish this were a video 'cause, first of all, if people could see your emotion right now—

KB: Yeah.

WC: I think you're just a big boob and you—this is the third time you've cried and we just barely started. Second of all, if I had a camera to kind of just show people the room that we're sitting in right now. In fact, when we walked in, you have a wall full of photos and you said, "Hey, Winn, those are my kids."

KB: Those are my babies.

WC: Those are your babies. And—

KB: Yeah.

WC: —just people that you—

KB: I've met all over the world. Parents that have called me from watching me on television. I met a woman—she called me—it was so funny—she called me, she goes, "My daughter is deaf." And I said, "I had nothing to do with it."

WC: *[laughs]* It's not my fault.

KB: No. "Don't be getting mad at me, Missy." But I got this long letter and she was really worried and, you know, people get into a fear mode when something's different in their lives. There's nothing wrong with a child with a disability. You've just got to find out what their accessibilities are so they can move on forward.

WC: Okay.

KB: And so she went into a panic and I told her, I said, "Look it, I'm going to be in New York. You live in New Jersey. Let me finish my job in New York and I'll come and visit your family and let's see what we've got to work with."

WC: Okay.

KB: And then I traveled around to find out what the schools were in her area.

WC: Hm.

KB: You know, if you take time you can make a difference in someone's life. And it doesn't take a whole lot. All you do—I like to look at myself as a gardener. I

plant the seed. I give you the seeds, you plant it, you nurture it, you water it, and you see what you get.

WC: Hm.

KB: Or God will take care of it for you.

WC: Hm.

KB: So I just went up there and Becka —wow, what a wild baby she was. She was all over the place.

WC: How old was she?

KB: She was three when I met her.

WC: Okay.

KB: And her mother became the most incredible advocate for her daughter and when she was 17 in high school, she ended up being the Beauty of *Beauty and the Beast* play.

WC: Are you serious?

KB: Yeah. My kids can do anything.

WC: Are you serious?

KB: Yes! Yes. My boy—

WC: I have goosebumps. Oh, my gosh.

KB: My boy, Jordan, the one with the red hair up there, he—I met him when he was five and he was profoundly deaf and his mother became a great advocate and he just got accepted into Caltech.

WC: Wow.

KB: So my boy, who was in Florida, now lives next to me.

WC: Hm.

KB: Life is good!

WC: Life is good.

KB: It is. It's precious.

WC: Wow, and it's—there's something really cool about—I mean, you obviously, you have a name. You have a celebrity. You have influence. And what you do with that is just incredible. And sometimes, all it takes is probably a little phone call from you or a little note to somebody, and that alone, because of who you are and the name that you have and people recognize you and acknowledge you—

KB: I don't—yeah—

WC: Something so simple makes such a difference, though.

KB: Yeah, I don't look at me as a celebrity. I just see myself as an opportunity to make a difference.

WC: Wow.

KB: And the celebrity-ness—the one thing about having a voice—and if you have a voice, by all means, use it. Don't be selfish with it.

WC: Right.

KB: You know, people say, “Oh, my family, my family, my family.” This whole world is your family.

WC: Hm.

KB: Open your doors. Open your arms. Let people in. Nobody has to be alone. You don't count on just your family. My whole neighborhood is my family.

WC: Mm-hm.

KB: I am so blessed to be loved unconditionally by my neighbors.

WC: Hm.

KB: You know, we pass out food, we go to each other—everything. I mean, in the summertime, they're all in my pool. I have a little pool, when they all get out—
[laughs]

WC: Right.

KB: Life is great.

WC: And sometimes they say that the only time that you ever meet your neighbors is if there's a fire—

KB: Yeah.

WC: —in the neighborhood. And that's—yeah.

KB: No, we call each other. We check on each other. You know, I travel a lot and I have like, what, six, seven keys to people's homes here.

WC: Right. *[laughs]*

KB: Want to go looking around?

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: Come on.

WC: They're all at work right now, we can go.

KB: They're all at work. Let's go. Let's go party. *[laughs]*

WC: So how do you find humor after going through such major, major tragedies that, for some people, would basically kind of be the end of life, literally or figuratively?

KB: I think you find the humor in stupidity, in ignorance. You find the humor in realizing that this life is not as serious as we tend to make it.

WC: Hm.

KB: I really believe that this earth is God's playground. And how well we get along here is how good our life can be.

WC: Right.

KB: You know, that's my belief. And so I just find the humor in the silliest things. I mean, people are funny.

WC: But have you always been that way or did—

KB: No.

WC: —you have to teach yourself to be that way.

KB: No, I—

WC: Or did somebody teach you.

KB: No, uh-huh. You don't—I think it's a gift. I'm not going to say I went to class to learn to be funny or find the humor in tragedy. It's a survivor mechanism. I think when I was little, when I was in high school, you know, you go through that peer pressure and all that. It's funny because I never saw myself as funny but when I went to my class reunion, everybody goes, "Oh my God, you were hysterical."

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: I go, "How could that be?" But I remember, I did the talking so I wouldn't have to do the listening.

WC: Got it.

KB: So I wouldn't look stupid.

WC: But I have to ask the question, so do you have to be looking at me to understand what I'm saying or your hearing aids work well enough—

KB: Well, depends—

WC: —that you can—

KB: Well, we're in a quiet environment right now—

WC: Okay.

KB: —and my hearing aids pick up your voice. And you have a really good, strong voice, anyway.

WC: Oh, really? I've never heard that before.

KB: Yeah. For me.

WC: Usually people are telling me to, "Shhh." *[laughs]*

KB: Hush, hush, hush, hush!

WC: You're too loud.

KB: You're too loud. *[laughs]*

WC: Okay. But that works for you and I. We were meant to be.

KB: Uh, hello.

WC: *[laughs]* Where have you been all my life?

KB: What took so long? *[laughs]*

WC: So, in this environment, with just the two of us, your hearing aid would pick up my voice.

KB: Yes.

WC: But when you're with a crowd of people, you need to be watching people and reading their—

KB: Well, I still need to lip read because lip reading is like—I don't trust my hearing aid because—

WC: Okay.

KB: —you've got to remember, I went through years without—my brain has not registered to listen to separate words and sounds. So if we're in a gathering with a lot of background noise, I can't pick up your voice so I would have to totally count on lip reading because the background noise will pick up my hearing before your voice.

WC: Okay. Now, at what point did you—and, again, you have had a huge career as a comedian.

KB: Yeah.

WC: You have played *the* best venues.

KB: Yes, I have. I've been blessed.

WC: You have been on *the* best TV shows, comedy shows.

KB: Mm-hm.

WC: As well as, your appearance on *The Tonight Show*. Who was the host?

KB: Jay. Jay Leno.

WC: What was that like?

KB: That was awesome. Jay was awesome. I'd just got brand-new hearing aids. I knew Jay so when I got on the stage—he took me to the stage before the audience got in there.

WC: Okay.

KB: So that I can get a feel of the stage, and we also had to adjust my hearing aids because there's a lot of equipment in studios.

WC: Got it.

KB: So, we went out there. So, it was so funny because I went out there, I had curlers in my hair, no makeup and here there's people in there. *[laughs]* I said, "Look, I'll get better, believe me, I'll be better." It was a wonderful experience and Jay is such a wonderful, wonderful human being; very compassionate man.

WC: Well, as long as we're talking about it, what are some of your other favorite moments and memories of entertainment or TV work or of meeting different celebrities?

KB: Um—

WC: But before we started recording, we realized that we both know Leeza Gibbons and so we jumped on the phone and we both said hi to Leeza.

KB: That was awesome.

WC: That's what I meant earlier by—'cause Leeza is a celebrity and the fact that she uses her celebrity, the fact that she has a name and people, "Oh, there's Leeza," and they want to hear what she has to say.

KB: Yeah.

WC: So she uses that in such a great way and so—you know, what other, you know, favorite memories do you have of—

KB: Some of the people that really made impacts in my life is Anthony Robbins, motivational speaker.

WC: And you've done events for him.

KB: I've worked with him many, many times. I consider him my little brother 'cause he's just—he's just this awesome human being.

WC: *Little* brother?

KB: Well, yeah.

WC: He ain't so little.

KB: Hey, he's younger than me. He's my little brother.

WC: Oh, younger. Got it, got it, got it.

KB: *[laughs]* And he's just an incredible, compassionate, passionate man about wanting people to live their lives to the fullest. And Suze Orman and I—I just adore her. I love people who want to make a difference in other people's lives.

WC: Hm.

KB: I've met a lot of celebrities and I love celebrities that—like you said earlier—will use their name to make a difference in society and make—I work with a lot of people who are always contributing and that fills my heart.

WC: Hm.

KB: And I think if anybody is feeling blue or down or out in life, get off your butt and get out there and give to someone else.

WC: Huh.

KB: I don't care if you bake cookies for your neighbors. I don't care if—I take in my neighbors' garbage cans, back into the house because they are all, you know, at work. But contribute. Do something for someone else. It's not always about you.

WC: Hm.

KB: And I realized, it isn't about me. It's about what's around me and what can I do to contribute? What can I do to put a smile on someone's face or put something in their stomach? I have a school: No Limits, afterschool program, deaf and hard-of-hearing children. My kids have no language. They come in at five years old, they don't even know their names.

WC: Hm.

KB: I refuse to see another child grow up with a hearing loss and not get an education. I lost out on my education. I want to see all kids all have an equal opportunity to a good education.

WC: Is that still happening a lot today? They—

KB: Yes.

WC: Kids who are hearing impaired are not getting opportunities?

KB: Well, a lot—I just had a boy that was eight years old, came into the office and his father was saying that they diagnosed him with autism.

WC: Wow.

KB: And he just has a hearing loss.

WC: Wow.

KB: So, and that was not just—he came in two years ago. His name was Ramon and his father was so passionate about trying to help him. We find out it was just a hearing loss and now we can't shut him up for anything.

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: It's like, "Hush up, Ramon."

WC: The same thing happened to you.

KB: Yeah. I know, it's true. I don't shut up.

WC: I think some people think that to make a difference, though, means that they have to be able to write out a big old check to some charity. And I like what you just said, bake—

KB: No, that doesn't feel good. That only feels good for the moment.

WC: Okay.

KB: If you go out there and put your hands on something—

WC: What do you mean by hands-on?

KB: You know, feeding the homeless. You know, like I went and I fed the homeless in Santa Monica when I first came out to California and it was my first experience. I guess I don't know where you're supposed to draw the line. But these people were looking at their—their heads were down and I said, "Look at me, I'm talking to you. I've got to see your lips."

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: *[laughs]* And these poor homeless people, "Just feed me already, will you? Leave me alone, lady." But I just like—and before you know it, I'm doing a show at this place. I'm goofing around with everybody. I'm hugging everybody. I stunk like hell by the time I got home but I didn't—

WC: Right.

KB: —care. I didn't care because these are all God's children and we're supposed to be having fun. And we were celebrating that day and half of them didn't have their teeth. I asked them if, "You want me to chew it for you and then give it back to you?"

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: I didn't know what to do for these people. But you've got—you know what? All of us seem to keep our mouths shut because, you know, I'm the person who says what you're thinking.

WC: Huh.

KB: And that's what makes people laugh.

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: You know? I say it like I see it.

WC: I get it. Got it, I get it.

KB: Scary, ain't it?

WC: Isn't it, though?

KB: Woo hoo! *[laughs]*

WC: So, you write about your friend, Anne Baxter. Who's Anne Baxter?

KB: Anne Baxter was an actress. There's a picture I had with—down there. She's the actress who used to play on *Moses*.

WC: Okay.

KB: And she was awesome. I remember when I first came to California, she took me to a restaurant where they had all these fancy foods—Chasen's.

WC: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

KB: It's not here anymore. And they didn't have any menus. They didn't have the price to the menu, the food.

WC: Yeah, right.

KB: So I thought everything was free.

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: *[laughs]* And then I—she says, “Oh, let me help. Here's the one with the price and I'm going, “What do you mean, \$5 for corn?” Everything you had to order separately. But she was just awesome. But what was funny, she had an assistant and she was from England. And Dottie was 80 years old and she's as precious as they came. And I thought Dottie had a speech impediment 'cause I'd never heard anybody with an English accent before.

WC: Oh, how funny.

KB: So, I kept correcting her speech with my speech impediment, which is really weird. *[laughs]*

WC: *[laughs]* And she's British.

KB: *[laughs]* Yeah and she's drinking her wine. She's drinking her Sherry, going, “Oh, Lord. What is with this kid?” You know? So, finally, that night we went back to the house and I said, “Dottie, I want to talk like you.” She explained to me, she goes, “It's an accent.” And I'd never heard anybody with an accent before. So I said okay. And so what she would do is, she'd go, *[in a British accent]* “Buckley.” 'Cause she always called me by my last name.

WC: Right.

KB: And then so I started *[in a British accent]* talking like her before you knew it.

WC: *[laughs]* Oh, my gosh.

KB: So before you know it, *[in a British accent]* I'll have myself a cup of tea and biscuits. It was quite lovely.

WC: Oh, my gosh. *[laughs]* What a great—that's a great story.

KB: Life is good.

WC: What did she teach you?

KB: What did she teach me?

WC: Anne Baxter.

KB: She told me don't go into acting.

WC: Okay.

KB: Thank God I'm deaf. *[laughs]*

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: She taught me the value of living life. She was living life to the fullest. She really was. She lived life to the fullest and I watched her passion for it. And I admired that.

WC: Hm.

KB: And so she kept her life simple and I thought that's what life is about: keeping it simple, not getting caught up in things you have no control over. But she was awesome.

WC: So that's what that means to keep life simple for you, it means to not—

KB: Not create things that are not there.

WC: Hm.

KB: You know how many people make plans in their everyday life? You know, you plan something on Monday for Tuesday. You plan on something for Wednesday on Tuesday.

WC: Right.

KB: You never get to stay in the moment enjoying what Monday had to offer you.

WC: Hm.

KB: And the very thing you were looking for on Tuesday was there Monday in the first place. So you missed the opportunity. So get in the moment and enjoy what's here.

WC: How easy is it for you to live in that moment? Or do you have to constantly remind yourself of that?

KB: Every once in a while I have to kind of—'cause—well, I'm human.

WC: Hm.

KB: You know? I mean, every once in a while I go to a negative place. 'Cause I talk to people who have really—my mother: very challenging. I love my mom but her way of thinking is negative.

WC: Hm.

KB: And it can be very challenging to have to listen to it. And I would tell her, I'd go, "Mom, ten minutes of negative conversation. If you don't have anything positive to say, I have to go, honey."

WC: Right. Yeah.

KB: "But don't forget I love you."

WC: Yeah.

KB: But she's gotten aware of it. And so I do have to remind myself sometimes 'cause sometimes I get off the phone and I'm going, "Okay, let's shake this off. Shake it off. Shake it off."

WC: Hm.

KB: Because it's not mine, it's hers. I have to remind myself what's mine and what's somebody else's.

WC: Huh.

KB: So to stay in the moment is a pretty cool thing 'cause if I didn't I wouldn't be sitting here with you.

WC: Right. See, I'm one of the happiest people that I know but I have to work at it every single day. It doesn't come naturally. Every day I have to work at this. Is it easy for you? Is it natural for you?

KB: Yeah, I wake up happy. I wake up in the morning—drives my mother crazy, “Why are you so happy?” It’s another day! You don’t know what surprises live around the corner. I mean, when you’ve been through as much as I have—you know, retardation, paraplegic, I’ve had cancer twice, I’ve been molested as a child. When you go through so much in life, you now know, as an adult, that no one can hurt you because you’re in control of what your environment is. I no longer look to be accepted in other people’s environment. I create my own world.

WC: Okay.

KB: You are more than welcome to come into my world but I’m so tired of trying to convince the hearing people that I can hear good enough and the deaf people that I can’t. I’m in the middle.

WC: Right.

KB: So hearing people think of me as deaf because I wear hearing aids. Deaf people think of me as hearing because I’m oral.

WC: Right.

KB: So I create my world.

WC: Hm.

KB: And I like a happy world.

WC: So that—being happy, you think that’s kind of a gift that was given to you, as well? Because you—

KB: No, I have—you work at it. I work at it by exercising. I put myself in that pool every day when I can.

WC: Okay.

KB: That pool is something that—there’s a thing on my wall. It says, “God, if I give all my love away can I have a refill?”

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: That pool is my refill.

WC: That’s great.

KB: I had to figure out what makes me happy.

WC: Huh.

KB: Being in water makes me very happy. So I saved for five years to put that pool in my backyard.

WC: Wow.

KB: Because my money was always going to the school for the kids and then I thought, *How am I going to be there for the kids if I'm going to be miserable? So what makes me happy?*

WC: Right.

KB: So I really realized, it's a pool and the water. And so I'm joyful. I get to roll out of bed and roll into a pool.

WC: Hm.

KB: Today I swam in the pool with a hard rain and it felt like a little massage.

WC: Oh, wow.

KB: It was awesome.

WC: Okay, I want to talk about your book, which—

KB: Was written with a lisp.

WC: Is it? *[laughs]* There's a couple of chapters in the book that I loved the titles of the chapter. *I Can Hear the Laughter*, which—is that what we were talking about earlier when—

KB: Yeah.

WC: —you said the first time that you heard—that you felt the vibration and you—

KB: Yeah.

WC: —looked at their faces—

KB: Exactly.

WC: —and everything?

KB: Exactly.

WC: Okay, but then this other one: *Confessions of a Deaf Catholic*.

KB: Oh gosh. *[laughs]*

WC: What's that one about?

KB: Oh, man. You know, they put a deaf kid in a Catholic church. That just should be against the law.

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: You know? My mom sent me to communion. I had no idea what was going on. And in the church, back then, I was trying to lip read the priest. I didn't know he was speaking in Latin.

WC: Oh my gosh. *[laughs]*

KB: My brother told me years later, he goes, "Honey, I didn't understand. They were speaking in Latin." I'm going, "Well, crud." But they made me go to communion and I had no idea what communion was.

WC: Hm.

KB: When you're limited in language—but most importantly, with communication—you just follow people.

WC: Right.

KB: You become a mimic.

WC: Right.

KB: So my mom opened the curtain for me to go into communion and it's this—she closed the curtain and there's this dark room and my only thought was, *God must be in here.*

WC: *[laughs]* Okay.

KB: *And he's not happy with me. And—*

WC: Right. *[laughs]*

KB: —then this littlest thing opens up and there's this—but I could barely see anything. I just saw a little bit of light come through and I'm going, *Oh geez.* So I sat there and I'm like, "Okay, um, hi." *[laughs]* And I got—I left. I didn't know what to do. So my mom said, "Well, what did he say?" And I said, "Well, nothing." And she goes, "Well, how many prayers?" I go, "I don't know." And she goes, "Well, did you tell him your sins?" And I go, "What are sins?" She goes, "Get in there and tell him your sins." I'm like, *Oh, cripes.* With the look on her face sin looks bad.

WC: Right.

KB: So I go back in there and I'm like, "Um, I sinned. Gotta go."

WC: [laughs]

KB: I ducked. I left. I didn't know if something was going to come at me or what. A lightning bolt? So I came back out and my mom goes, "What did you do?" And then she goes—"Mom, I told him I sinned." "Well, what'd you tell—what sins did you tell him?" I said, "I don't know which ones I have."

WC: [laughs]

KB: And she said, "Well, you fought with your brother and you argue with your mother." And I'm going, *That's it. I'm doomed.*

WC: [laughs]

KB: Now I actually have sins. I go back in there and I told him what happened, that I had a fight with my brother, argue with my mother, and I came back out and my mom says, "How many?" And I'm like, *This is not an easy thing, this Catholic stuff.*

WC: [laughs]

KB: So I said, "How many what?" "How many prayers?" She says, "Go back in there," and as she was—I was going back in, the priest came out and he goes, "Don't let her back in here."

WC: [laughs] You've got a revolving door there for you.

KB: I know. [laughs] And the funny thing was is you go in and you have—they give you the communion—

WC: Right.

KB: —that little piece of wafer thing—

WC: Right.

KB: That thing sticks on the top of your tongue, you know, the roof of your mouth like peanut butter. That stayed with me for a quarter of a day.

WC: [laughs]

KB: Catholic is not the way for me to go. [laughs]

WC: What's the overall message and theme? What do you want people to get out of reading your book?

KB: No matter how challenging something in life is, it has a time limit and it's up to you as to how long you want to put that time on it. And, you know, women, we can drag on something negative for the next full moon.

WC: Right.

KB: But it is up to us. When something comes into your life that doesn't fit, look at it. Don't gossip about it. Don't tell the whole world about it. The more you talk about it, the more life you give it, and it grows its own arms and legs to the point where it will take over you. So when something negative comes into your life, you look at it and the first thing you do is, "What is the solution?" What's the solution? How do I put an end to this now? And nine times out of ten, it'll be like—I had to learn that when somebody upsets me, I've learned to go right to them and say, "Look, I heard you say this, this, and this. Is this what you meant?" And the person might say, "Yes," or the person might say, "No." I may have misinterpreted something. And now when they say, "Yes, that's what I meant." "Well, that really hurt me. Are we still having a relationship? Are you my friend? Is this the end? What happened?" I want closures to anything negative in my life. But I also realize that no matter how good something in life is, that, too, can have a time limit.

WC: Hm.

KB: So you better get in the moment and enjoy it. So my message is to people: no matter how challenging life is, it's up to you what you want the outcome is. Don't wait for what the outcome is; you make the outcome.

WC: Hm.

KB: It's up to you. It's your choice. That was the gift that was given to me when I died and I would give that gift to anyone on this earth: the gift of choice. It's unlimited. You can use it anytime you want. If you make a wrong choice, you get to rectify it with another one. There's no limit to it.

WC: Hm. Is that sort of what you mean by your comment, "Get over it and get on with it"?

KB: Well, as the Italians would say, or Cher, "Snap out of it!"

WC: Right. *[laughs]* So back to what you were saying, that there's—things happen to you and you kind of have to put a time limit on it.

KB: Mm-hm.

WC: I mean, I don't know if this is a fair question to ask, are there certain things that—'cause I'm sure people want to get more advice from you. Are there certain things that could happen to a person and you would say, "Okay, you know what? With that, you get three days." You know, you can mourn, you can scream, you can throw a tantrum—

KB: Yeah.

WC: You know, because that happened to you, you've got three days. Or that one, you only get an hour.

KB: Mm-hm.

WC: Or this one, you get a month.

KB: I do. I—sometimes I can wake up and be really sad, you know, and I'll like feel like, "Okay, is this what depression is?" If it is, then I'll get the blues and I'll go, "Okay." And then I'll say, "All right, I'll give you 24 hours. You don't have to do anything today. You can lay on the couch, you can veg out in front of the TV, you can do whatever you want."

WC: Okay.

KB: But I'm going to give you X amount of time and then I'll say, well, maybe sometimes, like I'll say, "Okay, four o'clock, that's it. Until four o'clock you can have whatever you want." And by two o'clock or something like that, I'm like, "I'm over this. This is crazy."

WC: Right.

KB: And I've got to move on.

WC: Right.

KB: But yes, I do give myself a time limit. Now when I was being molested when I was young—

WC: How old were you?

KB: I was 12—11, 12. My body was changing. I had no idea what my body was going through. Nobody explained to me that the body was going to change. They didn't say you were going to have periods. They did say, "You're going to grow boobs." I'm still waiting for that.

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: I figure menopause will get me that. And—*[laughs]*

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: But I went back and confronted the person and I realized I thought I took care of it and then I didn't. And I went back three different occasions to take care of it because I needed it out of my life.

WC: Over the years you did?

KB: Yeah, over the years.

WC: Wow.

KB: Because you think you've got it taken care of but—it's like—they say the muscle stores memory.

WC: I believe that.

KB: You know?

WC: Yeah.

KB: And it's like, you know, if there's somebody in your life that chews gum and *[smacks lips]*, you know, and it's annoying as heck and then you meet somebody and all of a sudden you hear that sound, you can't help but to think about the person who always made it annoying.

WC: Right.

KB: So it triggers memories.

WC: You transfer it.

KB: And I didn't realize that when I was having—trying to have relationships, certain things they would do would make me freak out. And I couldn't figure out what the freak-out was.

WC: Got it.

KB: And then the memories came back and so I went back and confronted this person on three different occasions. And about—we made peace and I told them on the third occasion, I said, "From here on out, it will no longer be our conversation."

WC: Got it.

KB: "We're going to have a wonderful relationship from here on out."

WC: Huh.

KB: 'Cause this is a family member.

WC: Right.

KB: So, about three years ago, I made this care package for this person at Christmas. And I made all these gifts for him 'cause he had really a bad—he was having a bad challenge in his life. And I made all these gifts and I wrapped them up and I send them out to him. And I get a phone call and he goes, "What's all of this?" I go, "It's Christmas."

WC: Hm.

KB: And he says, "Well, what am I supposed to do with all this?" There was a bunch of stuff. I said, "Well, every morning you get up, you open a package." So about the fourth day, he calls me up and he's crying on the phone. I've never heard this man cry before. And I said, "Hey, what's the matter?" He says, "My tree, it looks beautiful." And he had, like what, a foot tree with all these packages. He goes, "All the colors and the bows." And he goes, "I get up in the morning. I make my cereal and I put the package in front of me and I look at it and I shake it and I try to guess what it is." And I heard this five-year-old little boy come out of this 70-something-year-old man. And I said, "Well, that's wonderful." And I felt so touched that I was able to bless him.

WC: Hm.

KB: And so, when I hung up, I started crying. And I realized it wasn't him that was blessed, it was me.

WC: Right.

KB: Because not only did I forgive, I got to the point where I forgot and I'm able to love this person unconditionally in spite of. What happens in the past stays in the past. It's up to you. And I did, I carried the tradition of it in my head and not knowing it until I took care of it. You are responsible for your happiness. You are responsible for your changes. And the best way to go forward in life and not have a ball and chain, the key is forgiveness.

WC: Hm.

KB: Move forward.

WC: Do you advocate that you can forgive somebody but also choose to never have them in your life again?

KB: Yeah, there are people that I've chose, you know—and there are people who chose not to be in my life.

WC: Mm-hm.

KB: There are people that you just can't communicate with.

WC: Right.

KB: There are just some people who will never hear you.

WC: Mm-hm.

KB: And I've had those people in my life and I just said, "Okay, that's okay. That's your choice. I'm going to respect your choice."

WC: Hm.

KB: "But I'm going to respect myself more because the love I'm trying to give you, it keeps bouncing back."

WC: Hm.

KB: "So I'm not closing any doors but when you're ready for me, you can come back."

WC: Got it.

KB: You know? But, no, I haven't closed any doors on anybody I like.

WC: *[laughs]* Okay.

KB: *[laughs]*

WC: At what point did you realize that your performance on a stage doing comedy could actually then become another career, so to speak, as a motivational speaker?

KB: That was a fluke. *[laughs]* They have a thing called the ADA law—Americans with Disabilities Act—and they had a Speakers Bureau because people with disabilities were supposed to do this speaking about hiring people with disabilities. And they had this book that was like about ten inches high, and I don't like to read. I didn't get the proper education so I couldn't comprehend it. And they had pie charts and all that was over my head. So what ended up happening is I go out to these corporations and I'm trying to tell them to hire people with disabilities and I'm trying to use the pie chart and I'm saying all the swearing words left and right because I'm nervous as heck.

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: I'm going, "Ah geez. Effing this and this and shit and *mmm-neh*" and all over the place, you know? I was just—I was nervous. I'm standing in front of hearing people, I'm scared, and I'm trying to teach them something I really don't understand. And then what ended up happening, I thought, *You know what? Why not just tell them about me?*

WC: Hm.

KB: *And my challenges?* And have them understand the passion behind an individual with a disability and what they have to go through. Why not be

truthful? Why try to teach them something I don't understand? And it just took off from there.

WC: What advice do you have—'cause I love people who have a gift, have a talent for disarming people. For—

KB: Yeah, that's fun.

WC: —for defusing people. I'm in awe of people who, somebody could do or say something, you know, negative towards that person and they don't react, they respond. And sometimes how they respond is in a way that disarms the person. What advice do you have for that? 'Cause—you've learned how to disarm people, I mean, through humor, through love, through hugs, through all kinds of—

KB: Yeah.

WC: —ways. What advice do you have on teaching people how to defuse situations?

KB: Well, that's challenging. It's challenging because half of the time you react on your emotions, and your emotions take you to a place like, *Oh my gosh. How do I take that back?*

WC: Hm.

KB: It's like me. I have that thing—I don't have that thing that stops your brain and your mouth.

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: You know, it just comes out and I hear it for the first time right along with you.

WC: Honey, that's not just for people who have disabilities.

KB: No, I know.

WC: That's for—the rest of us have that, too.

KB: *[laughs]* That's what I'm saying.

WC: So we're all impaired with that one. *[laughs]*

KB: I'm always getting my foot in my mouth and I'm like, "Geez, I've got to file those nails." But it's—I think the best way is to be truthful in the moment. I mean, and catch yourself and just say, "Whoa, wait a minute. That's not who I want to be." That's not who I want to be. It's who I might have been. I see stuff that comes out of me that scares me every once in a while because somebody might trigger something of panic that I must have experienced in

the past and there's the thing that you want to—you're always building yourself. You're always trying to teach yourself. It's not something you can all of a sudden read a book and say, "Okay, this is it. This is how I'm going to do it." No. Twenty-four hours a day you have to watch your mouth, you have to watch yourself, you have to watch your emotions, and you have to be aware of yourself. That's all. And if something comes up, don't beat yourself up over it. And, boy, I know I do sometimes. And I have to go, "Okay, that happened. How are you going to put peace with that?" Because the person I have to make peace with 90 percent of the time is me.

WC: Right.

KB: So I think it's just a matter of making a commitment.

WC: Hm. What is some of the biggest misperceptions that you would like to clear with people about hearing-impaired or any kind of disadvantage?

KB: I think the—probably the biggest disadvantages that are out there today are attitudes.

WC: What do you mean by that?

KB: Whether it's toward judging people, labeling people. I mean, attitudes would be—people have put limitations on me because they didn't think I could do something if they were in my situation. I've done it myself to other people and I've had to learn. I've worked with so many people with disabilities all over this country and I am amazed at what people can do. And just because I don't think I can do it if I was in their situation, who am I to judge? Who am I to limit them? Who am I to have the attitude to belittle somebody because they're different? I have a goofy thing that I do and that is I love to know about what other people's belief systems are. I don't judge you for being Catholic or Christian or doing the Jewish thing. I like to know, what is your belief? What makes you passionate about life? What makes you feel secure and know what's looking over you? What makes you pray? So I go to a lot of churches. When I travel, I went to Buddhism church, I went to a temple. I go anywhere that they won't close the door on me.

WC: Right.

KB: You know? I bring cookies so they don't close the door on me.

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: But *[laughs]* I think attitude is probably the biggest thing that's out there. It can be a good one or a bad one and it's up to you as to how you want to drive it.

WC: Actually, I would like you to talk about that a little bit more because, whenever I'm in front of my own students that come to my schools, I'm always saying,

you know, if I were to line up, here on the stage, leaders of the beauty industry, and ask them, “Hey, in hiring one of our graduates, what’s more important to you: their skill and their talent or their attitude?” You know, what are they going to say? And they—the whole audience, they know. It’s attitude. I’m going to get further ahead in life because of having a good, positive attitude. What advice do you have or thoughts do you have about that?

KB: Oh, I believe in that. I mean, having a positive attitude is a choice. Now, there are some people that actually just have it naturally. And I want to slap them silly.

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: ‘Cause they don’t have to work for it, you know?

WC: Right.

KB: But I have to work at it, at a point, because I’ve had so many judgements put upon me—

WC: Right.

KB: —that there’s still memories in my muscles.

WC: Got it.

KB: But I believe that you can have a good attitude and it’s just a matter of making a choice. I mean, I’ve got to tell you, like your book says, “Be nice, or else.” Being nice on a regular basis will give you a positive attitude.

WC: Right.

KB: You know? Laughing at nothing will give you a positive attitude. I wake up in the morning and I—the first thing that comes out of my mouth, “Good morning, Jehovah. What do we have in store for me today?”

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: You know? And a big smile goes on my face.

WC: Hm.

KB: And then I get up and then I make sure—if you physically make yourself smile, even if you don’t have nothing to smile about—

WC: Hm.

KB: —physicality, your body will start feeling joy.

WC: Your body reacts, yeah.

KB: And then you will start bringing in the attitude. I think the thing that gives me a positive attitude—and I know it may sound goofy—is feeding myself properly. Not getting all the bad food in me—

WC: Right.

KB: —'cause that can do something to me emotionally. Exercising.

WC: Mm-hm.

KB: Surrounding myself with wonderful people, especially kids. Kids are amazing to me. They just come up with the darnedest things. I swear. I mean, they have little lips. They always look like they're whispering and I want to smack them but that's against the law.

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: *[laughs]* But, yeah, I think attitude is a choice. I think it's a choice. I believe that, in my heart. It's up to you what you want to believe. And one of the things that changed my attitude was, I have a journal and in the journal, every night before I went to bed I would have to write in it all my blessings for that day.

WC: Okay.

KB: And there were days where I didn't feel like I had any blessing. And I'd just didn't and feel like, "Well, this was a bad day." And I just wrote in there and I said, "You know what? I woke up this morning and the day is over with."

WC: So that was your blessing.

KB: Yeah, that was my blessing. The day's over with. Let's start new tomorrow.

WC: Do you still do that? You still journal like that?

KB: I do it in my head.

WC: Okay.

KB: I mean, I think of right now as a blessing. I get to meet an incredible human being. I get to share. We get to hopefully make a difference in somebody else's life with our conversation.

WC: Uh-huh.

KB: How much better can life get?

WC: Hm.

KB: We're making a contribution. This is a gift. So this is a treasure for me. So this is absolutely a bless-filled day.

WC: Hm.

KB: It is true, though. I mean, I think the best gift—I'll never forget a woman asking me, she goes, "Well, what's the best gift you can give your child?" And everybody says, "Oh, love, love." And I said, "Love is nothing. No. The best gift you can give a child is to be an example of what happiness is."

WC: Hmmm.

KB: Be an example. Kids learn from what you do, not what you say.

WC: Hm.

KB: So be an example. Be joyful. Be successful. Be giving. Let them see the best of you.

WC: Hm.

KB: And they will follow that.

WC: Wow.

KB: You know, you can't tell somebody, "Now you better be happy." It's like my mom. She's just always negative and I always thought it was my responsibility to make her happy. And what I found out, I got miserable.

WC: Hm.

KB: So one day I said, "Well, you know what? Why don't you just be happy and be the example?" And it's amazing to watch the transformation. Because now she sees somebody happy and giving, and that's something she's not used to seeing.

WC: Hm.

KB: And so she's starting to learn, without having to say anything. You can't tell somebody what to be.

WC: Hm.

KB: But you can give them choices. You can give them opportunities by sharing. I have a beautiful godchild, Julia, and she's 15 now. And I've learned more from her than anybody in my life.

WC: Hm.

KB: And she's—and it goes both ways because we have total communication. We talk about anything and everything. And I believe that every parent should give that to their child before they go to bed at night: "Anything on your mind? Anything you want to share?" And I think parents should share with their kids who they are, "You know, when I was a kid, I went through this, this, and this."

WC: Hm.

KB: "And I had this bike and oh, my gosh, I was so excited about giving you this bike because I know the joy I got when I got it when I was your age." You know, talk with them, share with them. Don't talk at them. So many parents are just, "Now, don't you do this, this, this, and this and this." That's not communication.

WC: Hm.

KB: I can go to the army and get that. So I believe that total communication and being the best example possible for your child, that's what they're going to learn from.

WC: What a great answer. I like to, in seminars, you know, say that there's three ways you teach people. You know, "So everybody write them down—write this down." So they're all ready to write down. It's, "By example, by example, by example."

KB: Oh really? That's great.

WC: Well, I mean, I think people—

KB: It's true.

WC: Yeah, living a life—we have this culture that's—it's this Be Nice culture, it's a culture of acknowledging and celebrating victories rather than acknowledging when people screw up. And, you know, we have what we call "Caught Ya" boards in all of our locations where—

KB: Yeah.

WC: —you know, people write them up if they—if I caught you doing something right, I'm going to write it up—

KB: Yeah.

WC: —as opposed to most cultures, you're written up if you do something wrong.

KB: Wrong.

WC: And so I asked them, you know, sometimes you go home and Mom and Dad are like, “Okay, what’s going on? Why are you so happy now?” You know, is this happening to you? Why are you so happy right now? And they said, “Yeah, you know, things have changed at home, too, because Mom and Dad see that I’m a different person.”

KB: It makes a huge difference. It gives them hope. It really does.

WC: I can imagine you in front of a women’s group because, I mean, for you, people can point to your impairment. They can point to it and say, “Oh, well, this is what held her back. Oh, and then she got ran over and then she went through cancer and then—” So people can point to it but what about a woman where nothing’s really happened to her? Does that make sense? But, of course, she still might inside feel all of that.

KB: But you know what? That’s just it. You don’t have to have the physical experience to have the sadness in your heart.

WC: Hm.

KB: Everybody has their things that they go through, you know? My physical challenges, whether hearing loss or run over or molested, whatever it might be, they were nothing more than gifts, in many ways, because it gave me strength, it gave me the courage, it gave me an understanding to know that this gift called life is to be lived.

WC: Hm.

KB: Not to be put down. Not to be put in the grave before my time. It is to be lived. And I believe that people have a tendency—I’ve met people who’ve had the perfect life: the wonderful parents and everything like that. But it doesn’t mean there’s not something that’s hurting their heart.

WC: Mm-hm.

KB: And it could be that they need to—you know, and one of the things I had to learn—it’s a hard thing to learn, too, I’m a fix-it person.

WC: Hm.

KB: I want to fix everything for everybody. But one day I realized, I was helping this person out and I had to ask God, I said, “God, am I getting in the way of what she’s supposed to learn?” I have to know what to fix and what not to fix. And I also have to learn that if I’m going to help somebody, they have to ask. Because I found that sometimes you want to help somebody ’cause you see what needs to be fixed. It doesn’t necessarily need to be fixed.

WC: Hm.

KB: And that person's not ready for it. So I have to learn to sometimes to step back. And so I've learned over the years that if you want my help, let's talk about it. Or if I see something that needs to be done, I'll say, you know, "Can I give a suggestion?" It's really important how you approach people that are going through challenging times. And I'll say, "Can I give a suggestion?" If the person says no, respect it.

WC: Hm.

KB: I love my mom and I respect the choices that she makes and if she chooses to have a negative vocabulary, then I can't stop that. But I can change the way I want to look at it.

WC: Mm-hm.

KB: And I don't want it to affect me.

WC: And by not affecting you, you kind of broke that cycle, so to speak.

KB: Yeah.

WC: Yeah.

KB: Yeah, and we have the most incredible—we had a hard relationship growing up.

WC: Hm.

KB: But we have the most beautiful relationship today.

WC: Hm.

KB: And it's all because I took the label "Mom" off of her.

WC: What do you mean by that?

KB: Well, we all put labels on people and we have expectations of them.

WC: Because of the label.

KB: The labels. And when I took the label "Mom" off of her, and I said, "Who are you?" and I saw this scared little girl—

WC: Oh, my gosh.

KB: —who used her mouth to hide her fear.

WC: Hm.

KB: And I just said, “Well, I’m going to love you in spite of you.”

WC: Hm.

KB: I’m going to love you whether you love yourself or not. And that’s what I’ve learned to do. And just recently she trusts my love. She doesn’t trust anybody. But I would do anything for her and she knows that now. And I’ve fought my whole life for her to love me and she’s never going to be the “mommy” kind of person. And I am the mom, now, and she’s my little girl and that’s perfectly fine with me because all I wanted was to love her.

WC: Hm.

KB: What a gift to give yourself.

WC: Wow. I’ve thought about that a lot, you know, about labels and I’ve talked about it in seminars. I do these little activities where I put these labels on people but they don’t know what their label says but they—

KB: Yeah.

WC: —know—they see each other’s labels—

KB: Oh, I see. Okay.

WC: —and they treat each other according to that and they can’t understand why—“Why are you treating me this way?” But they don’t know what their label says.

KB: Oh wow.

WC: But I’ve never heard somebody talk about how maybe we need to remove the label of “Mom” from our—

KB: Yeah.

WC: —own biological mother to be able to—or from Dad to be able to love Dad and—

KB: Anyone. Even your boss.

WC: —see him in a different way. Wow.

KB: You know, people go home from work, “My boss was an idiot today. He is driving me crazy.” Then, well, wait a minute. Let’s take the label, “Boss” off. Maybe something happened in his personal life and he—

WC: Right.

KB: —just didn't know how—he directed it in the wrong direction and you were the target. Don't ever really take anything to heart that's not yours. You know, you don't know what another person is going through.

WC: Mm-hm.

KB: Be respectful. Let them go through what they have to but don't take it with you. It's not yours. Does that make sense?

WC: It makes a lot of sense.

KB: But people do it. They go home and they get, "He was so mean and da-da-da-da." And then they carry it on for three, four days and then they can't face the person and then they want to ditch them and that. This is why people get stressful.

WC: Yeah.

KB: They start judging. One of the worst things that people can do in their life, for me, is think for somebody else.

WC: Hm.

KB: "I wonder if he's thinking this. He could be thinking that." I'm going to tell you something, don't flatter yourself. Nobody's thinking about you.

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: But you waste so much time worrying about what somebody else is thinking that that person—and especially if it's a guy. Believe me when I tell you, he's not thinking a darn thing.

WC: *[laughs]* That's so funny.

KB: *[laughs]*

WC: I have to read this part, again—

KB: Okay, honey.

WC: —so that I get it right because you are very philanthropic and it is important to you and it is who you are to give back. And so just, you know, by way of more information about you, that you serve as the national spokesperson for No Limits, which is—is that your nonprofit? Did you start that organization?

KB: No, I worked with it—we started—Michelle Adams, Christie-Adams, she started this school—we started it out as a theater group.

WC: Okay.

KB: For deaf and hard-of-hearing children. And then she led it into this afterschool program. She's an incredible, incredible pathologist and that's what she started out in and she's just been amazing. And I've been totally supporting this school with her.

WC: How many kids—

KB: I'm the spokesperson.

WC: So, how many kids are—

KB: We have—I think 50-some families but we have 320 families waiting. We just don't have the finances to keep it going.

WC: Wow, wow. How do you raise money for that?

KB: We have walk-a-thons, we have galas, you know, whatever we can and we get what we can.

WC: What's your budget in a year? Do you have any idea?

KB: Well, each child costs us about \$10,000 a year.

WC: Okay.

KB: Washington Mutual Bank, which is now Chase, they have donated two top floors of their building in Culver City and that's where the school is.

WC: Wow.

KB: So we don't have to pay rent and we don't pay—

WC: Wow.

KB: —utilities so we're very, very blessed—

WC: Wow.

KB: —in that way.

WC: You also received the Woman of the Year Award from the Oralingua School.

KB: Yeah.

WC: American Hero Award from the City of Hope as their role model of the year. Toastmasters International Communication and Leadership Award, Dole Foundation Media Awareness Award for your dedication to people with disabilities, National Council on Communicative Disorders Individual

Achievement Award, and the Hear Now Help America Hear Award for your commitment to children. And—

KB: And I just got that award a couple weeks ago, the Jennifer Diamond Gift of Life Award for the Jennifer Diamond Cancer Foundation. I like that one, it's a big diamond.

WC: It's beautiful.

KB: Thank you.

WC: Two bouts with cancer and you actually chose a different path for recovery.

KB: Yes.

WC: You chose a holistic path. I mean, I'm sure you—I'm sure you did both.

KB: Well, the first one, I did.

WC: Okay. All right.

KB: The first one I didn't because I didn't understand—again, when I had it, I didn't understand what was going on. When the doctor told me, he didn't use the word *cancer*, he used another word for cancer and it was like, "Well, what's that?" And he said, "Cancer." Well, when somebody says that—

WC: Right.

KB: Why is it that cancer automatically goes into your mind as death?

WC: Right.

KB: And it shouldn't. It should go in your mind, okay, we've got a disease, we've got to work with this.

WC: Right.

KB: How can we make it fit us? Well, I went through the surgery and everything and then the second time the doctor—six months later the doctor called me up and he said, "We didn't get it all." And that's when I went back and started giving back everybody stuff that I was carrying: the person who molested me, I went back to that person. I went back to my mom, told her things. I went back to anybody—my brother, who, you know, who I love and adore—anybody that I thought that I was holding onto their negativity stuff and I started giving everything back. I changed my diet. I changed my attitude and I started saying, "You know what? I'm going to take charge of my life. I am so sick and tired of everybody poking and probing me, telling me what's wrong with me. I need to find out what's right with me."

WC: Mm-hm.

KB: And find out what is my passion? What is my desire? What makes me happy? What brings me joy? What puts a smile on my face? I have always been surrounded with kids. I have 13 kids in the neighborhood that call me Aunt Kathy.

WC: Mm-hm.

KB: I hate Christmas. *[laughs]* God has always blessed me with a child in my life. I have a little boy across the street that I adore. His name is Tyler. He's five years old. He's going to have a little brother at the end of the month.

WC: Hm.

KB: The parents are so cute. She says, "Now, you're going to be home at the end of the month?" She goes—she's going to have induced labor so she goes, "I want to make sure that you're going to be here." So they made it around so that I can be here to take care of Tyler.

WC: Hm.

KB: So, I've always—find out—you have to find out what you—what makes you happy. And if you really think about it, I realized it has to be things that brought you joy when you were a kid.

WC: Hm.

KB: And one of the things that brought me great joy when I was a kid was humming 'cause I loved the vibration. So humming is my thing. And swimming. Those are my—I love being in water. And I said, "I should be able to keep those things in my life."

WC: Hm.

KB: When I'm in this house alone, I swear, if you had a video camera in here, they would say, "Let's lock her up."

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: "Get that jacket on her. Put her away." The noise that I make by myself is amazing. Yeah.

WC: So that—what you just described—all of that you just described of, first of all, you know, going back if you were holding onto some anger, to go back to those people to kind of clean those things up.

KB: I gave it all back to them because—

WC: Yeah.

KB: —I believe that stress causes cancer.

WC: Okay, so that was your holistic approach to all of that.

KB: That was my holistic approach was to let go.

WC: Okay.

KB: I let go of stuff that's not mine.

WC: How fabulous for people to learn that lesson without having to have cancer on their plates, as well.

KB: Oh yeah.

WC: I mean, you don't have to wait to have cancer to then do the stuff that you just recommended.

KB: Yeah. It's like—

WC: Wow.

KB: So many people, they are—have you ever heard that term, "They're carrying a lot of baggage"?

WC: Hm.

KB: Well, why don't you just open it up and take a look what's in it instead of carrying it and then find out what's yours—

WC: Right.

KB: —and what's not.

WC: Right.

KB: And give it back to them.

WC: Wow. What a process.

KB: You know—you know, it is a process but you want to know something? When I looked at my mom and my dad, they both did the best they could with what they had.

WC: Yeah.

KB: Who am I to judge or say that if I was raising me, it would be—I would have done this, this, and this and this.

WC: Hm.

KB: Or, well—'cause you know what you need now but you didn't know what you need when you were a kid.

WC: Right.

KB: And neither did they.

WC: Yeah.

KB: They weren't educated about my deafness. They didn't understand. So who am I to judge them when I still had food in my stomach and clothes on my back and a roof over my head?

WC: Yeah.

KB: So they didn't know how to love and hug and be affectionate, you know. That's okay. They're still my parents.

WC: Hm.

KB: It says in the Bible to honor your parents.

WC: Hm.

KB: So I moved 3,000 miles away. *[laughs]*

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: I didn't know I was honoring myself. *[laughs]*

WC: I believe that, too. I call my mom and dad every single day.

KB: Me, too.

WC: Yeah, my dad's 83, my mom's 81. I mean, how much longer am I going to be—

KB: Yeah.

WC: —able to have that gift?

KB: Who am I to say, "Mom, you did this wrong, you did that wrong"?

WC: Right.

KB: You know, wait a minute. We baked cookies. You know, the more you think about the negative stuff, you forget the good stuff.

WC: Right. You know, nowadays, when I—my parents live in Utah and they live out of state so, of course, when I go there I stay with them.

KB: Yeah.

WC: And I turn down all other dinners so I don't see anybody else while I'm there. I just want to be with Mom and Dad. But all my siblings live there. They all live close by and so, yeah, they get together with Mom and Dad but it's for dinner. I'm telling them like, "You know what? Pack a bag—even though you live down the street—pack a bag and go spend a couple nights at Mom and Dad's house." 'Cause it's this whole—

KB: That's—oh, that's wonderful.

WC: —it's this comedy routine at night. It's hilarious.

KB: *[laughs]*

WC: And first thing in the morning, it's just—and they're missing out on all of that. It's hilarious, the whole thing. So.

KB: *[laughs]*

WC: Wow.

KB: No, it's—we really should learn to respect who is in our lives.

WC: So if you were in front of a bunch of kids—let's say, I don't know, 16 to 25—what would your message be to them? What's the thing you're really—

KB: Sixteen to 25, would be—

WC: Just young adults.

KB: Young adults. Don't be a follower. Don't try to fit in where you really don't fit in. Find out what your passion is. Find out what your desire is. When I do colleges, I always raise—I'll ask my students, my audience, I'll go, "How many of you are afraid of your future?" And almost every hand goes up.

WC: Wow.

KB: And then I ask them, I said, "So, how many of you are picking your career choice—believe that whatever career choice you make today is for the rest of your life?" And they—all their hands go up.

WC: Oh, wow.

KB: And then I ask them, I said, "So how many of you picked your career choice out of somebody else's suggestion?"

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: A good portion of their hands go up, okay?

WC: I have goosebumps.

KB: You know?

WC: Wow.

KB: And then I said, "Well, let's think about it. Let's pretend everybody is 20 years old." And I said, "Now, you're 20 years old, you just left Mom and Dad's house after all these years of them telling you how to wash your ears and do this, do that. And now you're in college and you can't figure this out if the fabric softener goes in the washer or the dryer."

WC: *[laughs]*

KB: "And you're going to tell me you're going to make a career choice for the rest of your life?"

WC: Hm.

KB: I tell them, I said, "Look, every choice you make is for today."

WC: Hm.

KB: Whether you want to keep giving that good choice life, that's what you go for. But I know doctors and lawyers who've gone through college, opened up their own practice, and are now standup comics.

WC: Wow.

KB: So nothing is permanent. Don't stress yourself out. Enjoy the journey.

WC: Wow. Now let's say you're in front of a bunch of bosses who have control over work environments, employing a bunch of women. What would your message be to those bosses?

KB: Anybody who's in charge of anyone in a workforce needs to learn how to be grateful and appreciative.

WC: Hm.

KB: They need to give compliments. They need to say, "Thank you. You did a great job. I really appreciate it." Because the more you're grateful and appreciative to your employees, the more they want to do for you.

WC: Hm.

KB: But the more you just dish out the mouth, the more they're going to back up. That old saying—what is it? Honey attracts flies or whatever the heck—you hearing people come up with more sayings than—

WC: I—

KB: I came into this world—

WC: Well, I never got that one either—

KB: *[laughs]*

WC: —so you're okay.

KB: And not only that but every once in a while, be giving. You know—

WC: What do you mean by that? What would that look like?

KB: Treat a lunch.

WC: Wow.

KB: Treat a lunch.

WC: Hm.

KB: Give a gift card to a restaurant. You know, you want your employees to work for you and you want them to be trustworthy. The more you're giving and caring—

WC: Mm-hm.

KB: —and appreciative, the more they're going—it's—what you give is what you're going to get.

WC: Hm.

KB: That's all there is to it.

WC: That's the law of the universe.

KB: Yeah.

WC: Not just the law for good bosses.

KB: Exactly.

WC: Yeah. Sometimes a boss thinks, “Well, I gave them a bonus, therefore I rewarded them.

KB: Well, that’s the same saying like when I make a contribution, I write a check. You did nothing.

WC: Right. I hear you. Yeah, some—

KB: Connection. Human connection.

WC: I heard someone say that what they do is they find out what’s important to their employees and based on what’s important to that individual is what they will give to them. So like this person, they might like a favorite band. And so they—

KB: Yeah.

WC: —find out that that band is coming in concert and so they buy two tickets and say, “Here, go.” I mean—

KB: That’s the way to do it.

WC: Yeah.

KB: Know who your employees are. Know who they are. You won’t know them if you’re talking at them. It’ll be like living with Mom and Dad again.

WC: *[laughs]* And who—

KB: And no employee should be afraid of their employers.

WC: Right.

KB: You know? There should be no fear in the workforce.

WC: It seems like that’s kind of what rules the day, though.

KB: Yeah, it does.

WC: Yeah. That’s why I love the beauty industry, which, you know—of course, many people are going to hear this interview but it’s primarily the beauty industry. We get to break those rules. You know, in other industries if you’re laughing and having fun at work, what does that mean? You’re not doing your job.

KB: Not working.

WC: In the beauty industry, I heard it said that hairdressers go to work every day with the intention of having fun.

KB: Yeah.

WC: So, which is great. Beautiful.

KB: That's wonderful.

WC: Yeah.

KB: So that's why my hair's messed up.

WC: *[laughs]* You—we're just having fun.

KB: They were having so much fun that—

WC: We're laugh—

KB: —now I've got this little toupee thing going.

WC: We're laughing behind you when you're not watch—right. Kathy, do you have a final message for our listeners?

KB: If I can give you *[voice breaks]* one gift, that would be the gift to know that you are truly loved. And to know that in your heart, because to love yourself will be the best example you can give anybody in the world. So: loving. That gift that I got when I believe that I passed away was probably the most precious thing I could have ever received to live my life to the fullest today. So love yourself. Love yourself enough to know that when you're loving someone else, it's being received. So my final message would be believe in yourself, love yourself first and foremost, and enjoy life to the max. It is truly a gift that is given to us.

WC: Thanks, sweetheart.

KB: You are so welcome. You are such a gift. God bless you.