**Kim Durnell**

**Interviewed April 2021**

Kelly

So Kim, what was your family's daily routine prior to COVID-19?

Kim

So both me and my husband work, my mother would pick my daughter up off the school bus, and then get my nephew when he got off the school bus. And she usually would just come to our house and be with the kids. You know, my daughter was going to school every day on a regular school bus and, you know, come home from work, cook dinner, just kind of that normal everyday kind of life. You know, get up, cook breakfast, go to work, then come home, cook dinner, do homework, you know, do some family time. I also would go to church. Every Sunday we would have Sunday service. You know, with my cousin every Friday night, I would hang out with my best friend and my daughter, we would go out and eat and that was like our Friday night routine. It was like every Friday night we would have kind of like girls night but we always took my daughter with us so that she could kind of have a model. So that's what we did every you know, kind of week we did that. I'm real active in my church. So we have a lot going on there. On the weekend, active in doing things in the community, would be around a lot of you know, my cousins. We would during the week walk. You know I'm real social. Like, I love people. I love seeing people. So, you know, my life was just being around people. I also had a side business and I would do that. And it would do it, you know, but that consists on being around different people. So that's what I would do.

Kelly

Yeah, so that gives us a good idea of your activities throughout the week. And so given that background of what your family's daily routine was before the pandemic, what are some of the ways that the pandemic has impacted your life now?

Kim

Well, everything that I mean, when the pandemic started, literally everything stopped. Every single thing stopped. It was kind of funny because my mother had a problem with her knee and I called the doctor, this was right before everything closed down. And the doctor was looking over her history and said she could have septic arthritis. And he told me to take her to the ER. And this was kind of like, we were just starting to hear about it. It was the beginning of March. And I took her to the ER, I couldn't actually get her there so I had to call the ambulance and they took her to the ER. And she happened to cough. Literally, she coughed. And when she coughed in the ER, they told me you have to go home. You can't be here anymore and you have to leave her here, like it was crazy. And it went completely into I guess it was like the COVID protocol of that day. And it just literally shut everything down. I couldn't see her. I couldn't be there with her. My cousin was there with me helping me because we're a real tight family. They told me only one person could be there. So her son had to like pick her up anyway because she couldn't even come into the ER with us. And from that minute, it ended up being a septic arthritis. But because of COVID, they had to test her first it took seven days for her test to come back negative. And I didn't see her for a total of seven weeks because she was in the hospital and then had to go to rehab. And I couldn't check out a rehab facility for her. I couldn't do anything and literally could not see my mother for seven full weeks.

Kelly

Wow. And your mom and your mom did end up testing negative for COVID?

Kim

Tested negative, yes. But they had to surgically go into both of her knees and clean them out. Because septic arthritis is like an infection that gets into the bloodstream and it attacks and weakened her. And my mom's knees were bone on bone.

Kelly

Wow. So it was a pretty dangerous situation.

Kim

Oh, yeah. It was. It was sepsis, basically. But it was something that, you know, they were treating with antibiotics. And it was kind of working, but her fever would spike. But they just, you know, they said we can clean it out if it was a danger to her. But she's you know, responded really well to everything else like everything. Because they said that she had a touch of like a pneumonia. But it cleared right up because she had had the pneumonia shot. So you know, all that cleared up. But it was like to get her knees cleaned out, they wanted to wait for this COVID test to come back. And we didn't have a Health Department. You know, Delaware County didn't have Health Department. So they sent the COVID test to California and it literally took seven days.

Kelly

My goodness. So because we didn't have a Department of Health at that time, you had to send a COVID test all the way or they had to send a COVID test all the way to California. And it took seven days to get the result. Wow. So Kim, it sounds like your first kind of introduction to how the pandemic was going to impact your family was missing your mom for seven weeks.

Kim

Yeah, it actually was really interesting. So that happened. And the next weekend, I knew people that tested positive. And older people within the church. They actually were no longer members of our church, but they were rooted in our church and their family was still in the church. They tested positive. And they both passed away from COVID within maybe a month of having it, not even. They lived in New York. And then it was just like boom! All the sudden. And then someone else passed away from like, it just it was like my first experience became my first nightmare that seemed like it lasted forever. It lasted forever because I started thinking back and I was like, I remember going to the supermarket with my cousin in the end of March. And we had mask on but that was before we were really understanding, you know, because masks weren't really required. And I was like, well, I had a mask so I'll wear the mask. You know, it was kind of like it wasn't really required.

Kelly

Sure, in the first days it was confusing.

Kim

It was and then that same week, so it was funny that I took my mother that Sunday, that same week that Friday, the school closed. They were taking off for one day. And I remember my daughter coming home Thursday from school, because then I was home and my daughter coming off from school and she had all her schoolbooks and I'm like, well if it's only one day why are they sending you home with all your school books? And the school shut down after that.

Kelly

So I do want to ask you a couple of questions about schooling, but maybe first it makes sense. Could you tell us a little bit about your daughter?

Kim

Sure. My daughter was born with bilateral hearing loss. She has it's called sensory neural hearing loss. Which one ear was severe to profound, and the other one was profound. So basically, for the most part, she was deaf. Like, the lack of hearing was so great that basically she was deaf. We got cochlear implants for her. They did one ear and then, you know, everything has to get approved through medical assistance. You had to have medical assistance. And I remember when she was she was born that way and then they tested her, I remember I kept saying, Why do I need medical assistance? I have health insurance. But hearing loss is not covered by insurance. So at least we're happy that the state of Pennsylvania will cover it through medical assistance.

Kelly

That sounds like really important information because I would imagine that people who haven't had to navigate the system aren't aware of that distinction.

Kim

Oh, absolutely. Because when she was little. So she was born 2008 and in 2009 we went to visit my cousin in Tennessee that summer. And she had just gotten her first pair of hearing aids, we went through the chaplain, and she had gotten her first pair hearing aids. And this woman ran me down in the airport. Because she was like, Oh my gosh, she is has hearing aids! When did she get them? Because her child was, I think 21 months and didn't have hearing aids yet. Because they're so expensive.

Kelly

Yeah.

Kim

And the access to hearing is so important. So important.

Kelly

And early on, too, I would imagine.

Kim

Absolutely. It's actually important enough that so when they age your child, when you have hearing loss, as far as for, I guess, growth in schooling, and I know we will kind of go into this part later, but they age them by their hearing. So when she was young, they would say she's this age because of this is when her hearing age started. Like after her cochlear implant, because they realize that she was hearing so very little.

Kelly

Wow, that's amazing. So you're really saying that they attribute I guess, the developmental age of the child to when the child gets the implants?

Kim

Yes. Or for some, it is just when they receive hearing aids. And you know, because it depends on their level of hearing loss.

Kelly

Mmhmm. So Kim, that's a little bit about your daughter when she was first born and very little but how old is she now?

Kim

She is 12. And my daughter is like, she's amazing. She really is he has never been to me the normal children like she talks all the time. I mean, well now she's preteen and so it's when she's not talking it's that preteen I'm in my phone not talking. But you know, she's very social. She's very kind. She's just really a great child. I mean, of course I'm biased, because she's mine, but she's very sweet. She loves everyone.

Kelly

No one will begrudge you for being biased towards your child. So your 12 year old comes home from school. One day, I guess, last March with a bunch of books in her bag. And you think I thought it was just for a day we were closing. And then I guess you found out like all of us that we weren't going to be closed for just a day. So tell me a little bit about now that we know a little bit about your daughter. But tell us a little bit about how this very social 12 or maybe 11 year old at that time, what happened in terms of her schooling at that point. So I'm talking and asking you to remember the very early stages. So March, April.

Kim

So Brielle's teacher of the deaf has always been very good, like, you know, she reaches out and she connects. And you know, she kind of reached out because everything went virtually, and Brielle received a lot of services through the school. As part of the hearing department, there's other services that she received. So with the occupational therapy, speech therapy, physical therapy, there's a bunch of other services that she received through the school, and it became, well, the first couple weeks, it was kind of interesting, because she had all her books. And they use Chromebooks at school. So she had an email address but she didn't have a Chromebook at the time, but we had, you know, a laptop, but they sent a survey home. And I think this was in kind of preparation, I think it was actually before they close the school, they sent a survey home, asking about your technology, asking about the technology you had in the home, do you have computers? Are the computer shared? Or does she have access to her own? You know, do you have internet are you, you know, all of this information. And so we you know, sent the survey that so that they knew, you know, that she had everything she needed, basically at home. And the first couple weeks, were kind of review, because of when they close, it was like, a couple weeks where they did some stuff that they like they had a packet of like, work, and everything, all the stuff that came home with all these books. And then it was supposed to be spring break, you know, and at that time they were going to be closed for I think it was two weeks maybe. And so the two weeks, they were kind of doing assignments, but it wasn't, if I can remember correctly, it wasn't really like 100% teacher taught, but it was kind of reviewing and making sure you know while they're figuring out the platform and how to get these teachers up to speed to be online. It was you know, just kind of work that you did. So we would do that work. And then I had work that like they would always give her extra work like extra words and things that she could do for spelling. And I had brain teaser books. And so, you know, it was like all of a sudden you become a full time teacher.

Kelly

It sounds like you have two working parents in the home, although it does sound like you have, you know, also a tight knit family. So how did that work out?

Kim

Well, the funny thing was, very, very shortly before the pandemic, I was laid off, my position was eliminated. But I was on severance and everything and as you're doing that it's not like you can apply for unemployment. Like you can't do any of that when you're on severance, you know, for the job. So I had just started actually the beginning literally March 1, it seemed like I had started interviewing, I had second interviews, third interviews. I literally was it felt like I was jealous about to get the job. Because I was like, okay, I've been home for a month, I'm tired of being home. I've had that break now I'm gonna start to go crazy. And as soon as I had that second interview, and I was supposed to talk to the person on that Friday, and that was the Friday everything shut down. And so it just everything literally went away. Everything went away. So now, and I kind of feel like for me, I always feel like God doesn't make mistakes and it was kind of like His will because my mother is sick and she's my primary babysitter/caregiver because my father has passed. So as far as you know, with our family because of Brielle's hearing, there's only certain people we would always keep her with. We had a circle of people that were like her group because they know how to handle, you know, first hearing aids and then her her cochlear implant until she was old enough to start to be able to handle her own. But my mother was that primary, because she retired when my daughter had her implant surgery. She was like I'm retiring to help take care of her, you know. And so, you know, we I talked to my husband, and we were like, Well, I mean, we thought it was just going to be a couple weeks. So we said, okay, let's just kind of see what's gonna happen, because everything was kind of put on pause then. And it was funny, because I had a recruiter call me the end of March, and say to me what type of position you're looking for? And I told her, I said, if you'd asked me two weeks ago, I would say something totally different. But now, I don't know. I honestly told her that I don't know. Because my daughter's home. And you know, she had a one on one in school. So now I'm her teacher, I'm her one on one. I'm her, you know, assistant to the therapists, I'm her whatever. And my husband was essential. So he never stopped working. His job was essential, or is essential, I should say. So he never stopped working. So and then I was also in being my mother's caregivers talking to doctors every day, because we're waiting for COVID tests to come back. And they're calling me because you could get COVID tests in three times a day at 8am 12 noon. 4pm. And I think 7pm actually was the last one. So literally, the doctor, the doctors were so great. He ended up he like gave me his cell phone number. And he would call me at like 8:30am, at like 1230, 430. And then he would call me with a seven o'clock. And he would tell me if her test came. And this was every day, he would call me.

Kelly

Wow. So just to clarify, you're saying there were COVID tests coming in that frequently.

Kim

So evidently, they could get test results back on those certain times of the day. Every day. And you remember and I think at one point, it was like three to five days. But then I think that's what they were saying. But they really had no rhyme or reason some would come back. Some would not come back quickly. I mean, they were actually very, not concerned that she was ill. But they were like, what happened to the test that it literally took seven days. Because it was kinda like that. I think they were really telling people five days, because that's when a lot of them were coming back. But it seemed like and this is maybe it's just really my point of view. But it seemed like COVID was here a whole lot longer. And we do know this now, than we knew. So the amount of tests, even though it was like you weren't getting tested, but they were getting tested, it was just harder to get tests done.

Kelly

So I want to just interrupt you for just a second because I want to be mindful of your time and so we're at at half hour but I do have a couple more questions to ask you. And so I want to ask for your permission, and it's totally okay if you have to go I know you've got you've got your family there.

Kim

No it's fine! It's fine.

Kelly

Is that okay with you if I, if I continue with my last couple questions?

Kim

Sure. Take your time.

Kelly

Thank you. Great. So great. So it sounds like what you're saying is, well, first that it sounds like when your daughter had her cochlear implants that your mom retired upon that to help out. And then it also sounds that like, you were doing a lot of helping out too around the time when the school closed. And you also mentioned that your daughter had something called a one on one. And I just wonder if you could describe that for context. So people who aren't sure what that means, so we can see that?

Kim

Sure. So yeah, my mother,the week of my daughter's first cochlear implant. Her surgery was on a Thursday, my mother retired that Monday. And she retired to take care and help take care of her granddaughter, because Brielle was one. One, she was just like one and a half when she had the first cochlear implant.

Kelly

And so when she's in school, what does it mean to have a one on one?

Kim

So there's a lot of different things that came with her hearing loss. She also had, like a sensory disorder. Oh and the sensory disorder would come out as a lack of focus. And it was funny because they told me, she does not have ADD because she can focus when she wants to focus. But there's a lack of focus. So the one on one would redirect her. She also has a real aversion to fire alarms. Major, majorly freaks completely out with fire alarms. When she was little, too, it was bad. She started to get, you know, more used to them as she got older. But I mean, so they would take her outside ahead of time when they did a fire drill. And so that one on one is kind of like it's almost like a big sister, or big brother that would take them through their school day. If they looked like she needed a sensory break. The one on one would come up and give her that sensory break. And it could be a fidget spinner, or you know, sometimes they did like a shoulder massage, like just something that would make her refocus. They might would tell her stand up for a minute. You know, just to kind of help her refocus and be able to complete her day. And then also when she was little, this was actually something that was you know, better as she got older, but she also would take her implants off in the bathroom. Like she would take them down because cochlear implants attached to your head to a magnet. So the processor, it's a surgery that is inside your head where they thread it down into your ear. It's like a bionic ear. But the processor attaches and creates sound through a magnet that's on the outside. So the two together work. But if those magnets are off, she cannot hear. She has very little residual sound. So she is completely deaf when they're off. And so they needed someone that just would just would look out like, not like they had to go into the bathroom with her but to look out to make sure she would come out or like if there was a fire alarm or something while she may be in there to be able to maneuver and move her through. So, so and then they help with work, too.

Kelly

Right. So it sounds like some of the services that your daughter received for sure are in person things. Things that happen when we're all together and in person. So do all of them seem like that to you? Like do they translate to the virtual schooling I guess is the question.

Kim

I think they try really hard. I think I'm going to be very honest, I love the Delaware County Intermediate Unit, they have been the best partner in education that I've ever found for child. They advocate for her, they help her advocate for herself. They found other things that she's had wrong, like she have a convergence issue with her eyes that the Occupational Therapist found. They've been a great partner. And not every school district has it. So like, I guess it's a, it's a agreement made between the school district and the immediate unit, we actually moved in to the back into the school district to be able to make sure that we did not have any interruption of service for her. And everything is, you mean, they've been really good at adapting. But if you think about it, how do you do physical therapy with someone virtually? You know?

Kelly

How do physical therapy with someone virtually? Can I ask that as a real question? I mean, does she does she still do physical therapy virtually now?

Kim

She does, she does. So it's almost like having a personal trainer, they worked with her core, she needed like core strengthening, and she has like, they were working with kind of core strengthening. And actually, it's a little different now. Because in school, they would do like some yoga and stuff that would help with that calm and that center, like centering, which they can't necessarily do all of that, but they do a lot of things that help with her core strength.

Kelly

And so we have a little bit of an idea of sort of what sounds like a hectic, you know, what was hectic for everybody when the schools closed in the spring, and a little bit of understanding that but some of the services while it sounds like you know, all the services that she receives really are designed to be in person, of course, education is designed to be in person. So that's, you know, no surprise. So now we're into, you know, this new school year, right? That was the end of last spring, now we have this new school year. So what is school like for your daughter now?

Kim

Well, it's actually, it was a shame, because it was the end of her fifth grade year. So then she was going to a different school. And so I felt bad because I felt like all the kids were robbed or saying really goodbye to their teachers and their friends. So, like everyone else, she started the school virtually. Her teachers are very nice, they are really, really good. But it was more or less to a point where I feel like I have to work from home, because I need to be there when she has questions. While the teacher, the school, you know, she gets up, she goes on zoom, and she's there every day on Zoom. She honestly likes it better, because she can hear better. Because she when it came to the point of wearing face masks, that was something that as a person who's deaf and reads lips, that was a stress for her. A stressor. So reading lips and masks obviously don't work together. So she likes to be home because even though her teachers have masks on with the use of her FM and everything she feels like she can concentrate more and she can hear better. And when the school ended, I contacted her hearing support teacher and I just said you've known her since she was three. I would like your opinion, like your opinion is important to me. What do you think we should do with this school year because she was nervous. And I knew hybrid was an option. But she was nervous and you know, I asked her opinion and then ultimately made my decision to keep her home for the year. But that's kind of sad, too. Because she's missing meeting new friends, even though I don't know how you're really meeting that many new friends because it's like, you have to stay six feet apart, and then the desk thing and the masks and all of that. But she has met some, you know, over zoom, which has been pretty good. It's just like if she needs help, or when she needs redirection and she does need redirection, you know, it's me. And if I back up just a little bit when my mother did come out, she's actually been staying with me lately because of the pandemic, she's staying with me. So that we can quarantine together and she would not be by herself. So, you know, my husband goes to work. And my mom and I are helping, and I work but I work from home, which is something that I had to do until we know what is going on. And I still kind of have to do that until we really know what's happening with everything.

Kelly

And when you say until we really know what's happening with everything, what do you mean by that?

Kim

I mean, I think the schools like they want to bring them back full time next year, I just really feel that it's going to be a hybrid situation.

Kelly

Can I ask you, it sounds like since your daughter is actually enjoying increased hearing access through the zoom classes. And because the masks are a barrier to lip reading it's sounding like even if we do have full in person school in the fall. That's not really going to work for your daughter. Do I have that right? Because if we were in person, we would have masks.

Kim

We would be masks if we were in person, I probably would try to push the issue with the schools and getting the masks with the clear.

Kelly

Mmhmm.

Kim

I know that at one point that was an option. I think that is something that we're going to have to advocate for. Because I just feel like masks are here to stay. And I feel like and this is just anywhere you go. Because I feel like people kind of neglect to think about people with hearing loss. And I say this because all the businesses should have masks with clear or be willing to pull their mask down. I have a lot of friends that are deaf and this is the stories that they've been telling me. You know, and the frustrations they've had, because of, you know, asking them to and not understanding and asking them to pull masks down so they could read lips.

Kelly

And I'm sure that could be a point of contention, because people feel strongly about their masks sometimes. And it's probably hard to explain in some situation. I mean, you just want to know what they're saying.

Kim

I mean, I feel strongly about masks, so I am a complete germaphobe. I'm telling you, it's been terrible.

Kelly

I can relate. Kim, I want to ask you three last quick questions where I'm going to ask for your response to be kind of brief right. So you can take a second to think about it. But there are three quick kind of evaluation questions about the past year. So the first question is, what did you or your family lose this past year?

Kim

Family, we lost..

Kelly

What did you or your family lose? Oh, sorry.

Kim

No, I actually mean we lost family. I've lost two family members of COVID.

Kelly

So sorry.

Kim

I've lost numerous friends to COVID. I've lost and our family has lost just time with each other. You know we've lost family members that it wasn't to COVID but you've missed a whole year with being with each other. You can't get time back, you miss time with friends and family that you cannot get back.

Kelly

I'm really sorry for your loss.

Kim

Thank you. I've lost? I don't know. Freedom.

Kelly

Say it again? What was the other?

Kim

Freedom.

Kelly

Freedom. That makes sense. That's another big one. So then the opposite question. And you can again, you can take a second to think about it, what have you or your family gained this year?

Kim

Um, with my immediate family I feel like we've gained more time, like, you know, while I love having my mom here, because she's my mother, and she's older and that time you can't get back. And my brother lives around the corner. He has one child. And it's my nephew, my brother, we've all quarantined together. And like now every Sunday my brother and I go to Linvilla Orchards and get our fruits and vegetables. So that's been something that I think that we've gained that's been very nice. You know, just spending time with your family is is a wonderful thing. It is a wonderful thing. I think we all gained appreciation, appreciation for friends and for family.

Kelly

Yeah, absolutely. And then this is just my last question for you. If you could talk to your past self and give her some advice about this past year, what advice would you give?

Kim

Oh, God. That's a hard question.

Kelly

It's ok, you can think about it for a second. And you also, you know, you don't have to answer it also, that's the other thing.

Kim

I'm just trying to think about that, it's a good question. What would I tell myself.. don't take for granted that someone will always be there.

Kelly

What does that mean for you?

Kim

I think when you don't see people you realize how much you missed them. And when you lose people to this, like it's a loss like none other, especially if they've had COVID, because you just never see them again. They can't really have a funeral. It got better later. But my first cousin, it was like, it's almost like, and when I say cousin, he was my first cousin. And we were raised so tight he's almost like an older brother. You know. And it's almost like he's on a vacation and then just never came back. It's so weird to try and make it work in your head. And then to try and help his sister through her loss, too, it's just really when it says it robs you of time, like you just can't get it back. It's like, oh, I don't know that it would be doing something different. But it's like, try to reach out, pick up the phone and call. And I don't even know, I don't know, it's like, you just, you really have to appreciate the people that you love. You have to appreciate people. You have to. Yeah, you have to. You know?

Kelly

Yeah, that really makes sense. And thank you so much for sharing about helping me understand what you meant about that. So Kim, that's all the questions that I have? But is there anything else that you want to say, to document about this time for yourself, or for your family, or for your community?

Kim

Yeah, um, this past year, and this pandemic. And I don't know if this goes with it, but along with the racial tensions that have happened in this past year. I think that like, I believe God never makes a mistake. And things happen for a reason. And I feel like us slowing down did so many different things. It did something because we finally have seasons again. So it did something to help with our ozone levels and everything. I think, with the racial tensions that go on, I knew it was there always. But it let people slow down enough to see it. So when the thing happened with George Floyd, people were slow enough to see it. And if it wasn't for this pandemic, we might not have, it might not have been seen. Because people are you're in your own world, and you're moving so fast. But the pandemic slowed us down enough to really see it. And because we were tired of looking at the rate of loss on the news everyday with the pandemic, it was something else to watch when it was happening. And I think the understanding that has come, the understanding that has come out of the year, out of this past year, the conversations that I've had. It gave my daughter her voice because we did a peaceful march that we led and she spoke. It gave her her voice this past year. And to me that part is priceless.

Kelly

She led a peaceful march this past year?

Kim

So we did for the community that I grew up in, but I had her speak at it. I had her speak. And you know, because mommy does it, she's right there next to mommy. You know, it gave her a voice.

Kelly

Wow. So she spoke at a demonstration this past year? And at age 11? Age 11 or 12.

Kim

Yeah.

Kelly

And when was that?

Kim

For Juneteenth.

Kelly

For Juneteenth. And where was that? You said it was the community where you grew up

Kim

In Swarthmore.

Kelly

Oh, it was in Swarthmore. Okay. Wow. So that is another, all of the things that you said are another big takeaway for you from the year?

Kim

Mmhmm. And I think that's one of the best things is that it gave her her voice and that made me so proud. Because I am like the activist at heart. And sometimes I feel like our kids don't have a voice. So it gave her her's.