

**WOW 175 \_ Think better, feel better, live better  
with Sheri Denkensohn, Happy On Wheels**

**Nancy Werteen:** Welcome to The Wisdom Coalition Podcast, designed to show you how to change your mindset so you can find more joy in every aspect of your life.

**Kim Howie:** Today's episode is brought to you by Khineder Creations, a company with passion and purpose.

**Nancy Werteen:** Khineder Creations produces all-natural, organic, gluten-free skincare products for women, men, and children. And a portion of the proceeds goes to help survivors of domestic violence and sex trafficking.

**Kim Howie:** Go to [KhinederCreations.com](http://KhinederCreations.com) for more information. That's K-H-I-N-E-D-E-R Creations dot com.

**Nancy Werteen:** We're coming to you with the help of WFMZ TV. Thank you so much for joining us. I'm Nancy Werteen.

**Kim Howie:** And I'm Kim Howie. We invite you to experience the life-changing power of joy with us.

**Nancy Werteen:** Do you remember what it was like to ride the bus when you were in high school?

**Kim Howie:** [laugh]

**Nancy Werteen:** I don't know about you, but I remember it, being in high school, and absolutely hating it.

**Kim Howie:** You know, it's so funny that you say that, because I had to walk to elementary school every day, and I was so jealous of the people who got to ride the bus!

**Nancy Werteen:** [laugh]

**Kim Howie:** Right? And so when I got into high school, and I got to ride the bus—

**Nancy Werteen:** Ah!

**Kim Howie:** Right? The difference between the "have to" and "get to," right?

**Nancy Werteen:** Mm!

**Kim Howie:** I was so excited! And so I guess like everything else in life, it's all about perspective.

**Nancy Werteen:** Okay. But you also were not six-foot-one—

**Kim Howie:** [laugh]

**Nancy Werteen:** —when you were 16 years old.

**Kim Howie:** [laugh]

**Nancy Werteen:** Like it's hard to fit in those bus seats when you're 6'1", lemme tell you.

**Kim Howie:** You're so funny. I'm still not 6'1". [laugh]

**Nancy Werteen:** [laugh]

**Kim Howie:** Not in high school; not now! [laugh]

**Nancy Werteen:** Still didn't grow up to be 6'1". Well, so my daughter is 16 now. She's in 11th grade. And with COVID, she only goes to school two days a week, and there's like literally like three or four kids on the bus. Like that's it.

**Kim Howie:** That is so crazy.

**Nancy Werteen:** It's really weird. And so the other day, the driver had to do some tutorial about a fire drill. I guess it was his scheduled day or something. So she said she was the only one on the bus, and he did the entire tutorial just to her. Can you imagine [laugh] how mortifying? [laugh]

**Kim Howie:** Oh my gosh. Well, I'm not even sure who it's more mortifying for, right? For the teenage girl or the bus driver—

**Nancy Werteen:** That's right. [laugh]

**Kim Howie:** —who's standing there doing a tutorial to one child! [laugh]

**Nancy Werteen:** Like now we wouldn't care, but right, when you're 16—like 'cause she came home, and she was like, "It was so mortifying."

**Kim Howie:** [laugh]

**Nancy Werteen:** I'm like, "I'm sure it was, honey. I'm sorry about that." [laugh]

**Kim Howie:** [laugh] That is so funny, right? You're like, "Just wait, honey. [laugh] In perspective, when you look back on this, you're gonna be like, 'Yeah, that was not really nearly as mortifying as I thought it was!'" [laugh]

**Nancy Werteen:** [laugh] That's right. Tough times, when you're 16. But um, well, I just love our guest today.

**Kim Howie:** Yes, yes. And me, too. And you know, we recently connected with her after, you know, finding that we had some similar messages.

**Nancy Werteen:** Yeah. And um, it's one of those really interesting times where you just—you know, you—you meet somebody, and virtually—in now—the times that we're in now—and you're just—you know, you have that little click moment. So, um, we—we wanted to just uh talk a little bit with her today. She is Sheri Denkensohn-Trott, and she and her husband have a company—and you'll love this name of the company, Kim—it's called Happy on Wheels.

**Kim Howie:** Aww, I love that.

**Nancy Werteen:** Uh-huh. She's a speaker, a writer, and a consultant, but her main mission is to deal with life's challenges and be happier.

**Kim Howie:** So thanks so much for joining us, Sheri.

**Sheri Denkensohn-Trott:** Oh, thank you for having me, Nancy and Kim. I'm thrilled. And yes, it is strange to meet in a virtual world, but uh—

**Person:** [laugh]

**Sheri Denkensohn-Trott:** —it's nice when you see the click. It—it happens.

**Nancy Werteen:** Yeah.

**Kim Howie:** Yeah, yeah. So why don't we start out with you telling us a little bit about yourself?

**Sheri Denkensohn-Trott:** Sure. So, I am originally from upstate New York. And right now I'm 53, but when I was 16—it's funny that you talk about your daughter riding the bus at 16 and having mortifying moments—when I was 16, I had a life-changing moment. I dove into a pool and hit my head, and I became a quadriplegic. So I'm paralyzed from [0:03:49 audio cuts out] down. I can use my arms. But I went from, you know, a very active, uh

involved in sports and everything, being able to do everything for myself, to a total change in my life, um, at a time, at 16, when you're sort of just even dealing with life on a daily basis, and you don't really think of yourself as being able to be invincible. And so it was—it was a huge change. And um, you know, from there, I was able to go to rehabilitation and learn what I could do, but sort of adapt to a new way of life. And that just—you know, uh, a lot of work. Um, and it's evolving. Uh, it evolved. I had the wonderful support of my family and friends, and then you really need to decide how you want to have an outlook on life. And that to me was really the—the aha moment.

**Nancy Werteen:** Yeah, I—you know, I—I read a lot on your website, Sheri, which uh, you know—about you and your background. And, you know, you went on to become an attorney, and you served in high-level positions for 25 years with the federal government. You're a breast cancer survivor. Um, you have just um—you know, you—you've lived a full life. And um—and now you're, you know, focusing on Happy on Wheels, just trying to um help other people with their outlook. And it's really amazing to me, Sheri, how much you've done and—and where your heart is now. So what is the main thing that you try to let people know about yourself and how that relates to how *they* can succeed and deal with life's challenges?

**Sheri Denkensohn-Trott:** Sure, that's a great question. So I don't really like to feel as if I'm an inspiration. Um, that sometimes comes with a degree of, you know, "Oh, you've had it so bad, you poor thing." It's more the fact that you have to make a decision. We all have baggage. That's how I address people and how I try to view things. We all have difficult challenges and obstacles, and it's how you approach those obstacles that really makes a difference. I have found that really it—it comes down to uh three simple things. First of all, basically making a decision that you want to be happy as best you can, whatever your circumstances, and whatever happiness means to you. Uh, and if that's living an authentic life, it's trying to even change small things. So when I approach people and we chat, I'll tell them stories about maybe instances where I've had to overcome obstacles, just as an example, and ways for them to think about reinventing things in their own life that they can do differently to make it happier for them. And then third is trying to be true to yourself, to really dig in. And you guys *really* do a wonderful job of that. To dig in and just be true to yourself and figure out what makes you happy. In your upcoming book,

you're talking about it in your [0:07:19 fire?] book, in your podcasts. It's the little things. It doesn't have to be a huge adventure. Just appreciating a beautiful walk outside. Um, spending time in the moment. Really thinking about, you know, just having a really great latte. I am a coffee lover.

**Person:** [laugh]

**Sheri Denkensohn-Trott:** You drink it. Just enjoying that time. So I really try to get that across to people that you can—you have the power to make easy change. Sometimes it's not easy. You have the ability to figure out what makes you happy. And then also try to be in the moment.

**Kim Howie:** Yeah. Well, and I know you talk about it as a choice, right, and you said that after your accident, you realized you had two choices. You could be angry, or you could move forward and live your life. So how did you make that choice?

**Sheri Denkensohn-Trott:** Well, I was someone that was always a glass-half-full person even before my injury. I think when something difficult happens to you in life, your underlying personality becomes amplified. And I don't have scientific data behind that, but I've seen enough of it. And it's very hard to overcome obstacles of any type, but you have to draw on what you have. I found that being angry took so much energy—

**Person:** Mmhmm.

**Sheri Denkensohn-Trott:** [0:08:46 audio cuts out] angry for a little while, but to be long-term angry takes so much energy. And if you take that energy and put it into trying to figure out how to be positive, whatever that means to you, it really makes life a lot easier and makes it better. And that was my aha moment—that, you know, I could cry and cry and cry—that doesn't mean that every day is, you know, beautiful with—with sunrises and fireworks [sp]. You know, we're allowed to have down days. It's just [0:09:20] that you don't go down the rabbit hole. And I've found that a positive outlook has just brought me so much joy. It's brought me great friendships, great adventures. I found a husband. I—you know, great things happen. And I put myself out there in situations where I can help people, where I can do things that make me happy.

**Nancy Werteen:** Yeah, I love that. I think it's so poignant. Um, just one second, though, please, Sheri; I have to thank our sponsor, Khineder Creations. And um, you might like these products, actually, Sheri. They're all natural, gluten-free, chemical-free. And there's a really great cream that I just love; it's called the Thanaka cream. It's a moisturizer and a foundation and a sunscreen all in one, which is great. Makes it nice and easy. And it comes from—it's something called the Thanaka tree, which is a perennial found in Myanmar, and the bark of the tree has been used as a cosmetic paste for like 2,000 years. So they kinda know what they're doing with that.

**Kim Howie:** [laugh]

**Nancy Werteen:** So you can go to—

**Sheri Denkensohn-Trott:** Wow!

**Nancy Werteen:** —yeah, it's really cool. You can go to [KhinederCreations.com](http://KhinederCreations.com) to get some more information on that. And Sheri, the one thing that uh, you know, I've been um—you know, you and I connected, and um—and—and I've been, you know, uh, sort of watching your posts and things, and it strikes me that you have a really strong support system. You and your husband do the business together, if I'm correct, and—

**Sheri Denkensohn-Trott:** Yes!

**Nancy Werteen:** So, you know, I imagine that with your accident, with your life as you went forward and um that having that strong support system must have really made a big difference for you.

**Sheri Denkensohn-Trott:** Oh, it made a huge difference for me, and I don't take it for granted. Um, I have a wonderful network of friends. I mean, I'm still friends with people from in high school that—and that knew me—people that knew me when I was three years old, all the way to new friends that I make today. Uh, I'm known as someone that—you know, we say goodbye 'cause someone is leaving or going somewhere, and they say, "Oh, we'll never hear from you again." And the joke is, you know, that's not true with me. I value relationships. I have a wonderful family, and a wonderful new family of 15 years when I met my husband. So I don't take that for granted. I realize that everyone does not have that. But I try to tell people that if you don't have your own support network—maybe, you know, issues with your family, or you've moved to a new place and

you're lonely—that there are a lot of ways to form a support network. So, my network also includes people that I've met, for instance through my breast cancer support group, through my activities with the American Cancer Society, through some of my advocacy interactions. So there's ways to get involved in organizations where you can form a network. You just have to be willing to go out there and be a little uncomfortable when you don't know people. But if you have something in common—and normally you're going to find someone, in that situation, that you have something in common with—that you can form a network, uh, as well as your own personal network that you may have with your family and friends. So building on that, I've—I've met wonderful women in my breast cancer support group that have become many of them great friends over the past ten years. So there's lots of ways. But yes, my family and friends are—and my husband are really my foundation.

**Kim Howie:** Mm, that's so beautiful. And I can hear the gratitude in your heart, and I know that, you know, gratitude is something really important to you. So can you talk about why that is so?

**Sheri Denkensohn-Trott:** Oh, I'm such a giver. Um, I love doing things for other people. And what's very interesting about that is uh—I know that Caroline Adams Miller is um involved in doing a—well, I read her review of your book and I—I know that she's doing an introduction. And one of the things that—I was lucky enough to have her as a coach for a short time. And she had me write down how your greatest strength can also be your greatest weakness. So one of the things about being a giver that's been very hard for me to learn—I love gratitude, I love doing things for other people, but gratitude is also inward. And that was a very [0:13:39 audio cuts out] lesson for me to learn—that if you give and give and give, and you give, and you do so much for others, that you—maybe you run dry. So you need to realize that the word “self” is not selfish. So being, you know, someone who loves to give, you need to remember that gratitude goes both ways. That you need to be kind to yourself and know when you need to say “no” and just take care of yourself as well. So I love to give, but I've learned over time when I need to stop and just be kind to myself, whether it's reading a book on the terrace, whether it's doing some meditation. So really realizing the power of a pause, to quote uh [0:14:25 audio cuts out] you all are doing, um, I think is very important.

**Nancy Werteen:** Thank you for saying that, Sheri. You know, I—I wonder if you could talk a little bit about grief. You know, Kim and I have done some work in finding joy with grief. And I think we grieve a lot of things in our lives, um, and I would imagine that you have had to come to terms with a certain amount of grief after your—your accident, for what you lost.

**Sheri Denkensohn-Trott:** Yes.

**Nancy Werteen:** So can you um—you know, and we found that subject to be really uh—interesting, and helpful to a lot of people, of how can joy and grief coexist. You know, can it? And how can you find joy with grief?

**Sheri Denkensohn-Trott:** I think they can coexist, because certainly I did grieve, a lot. I cried a lot. I was angry. You know, the stages. Um, I was young, so sort of you're—you're growing up at the same time. You look at others and see what they can do, and you can't. So at a certain time, though, I think you—you take that grief and you say, "Okay, I can't do it the same way." So for example, I was a huge athlete, and I couldn't do all the things that I used to do. I couldn't run out on the field hockey field or be out on the track. But I can be a huge spectator. So I think there's a time where you sort of come to say, "I have to reinvent myself. So what can I do that may substitute for what I'm grieving, or what I can't do?" It's a different kind of grief than maybe loss of a loved one, which is I think a different kind of grief. It's a grief of loss versus—of an individual versus loss of a personal nature. So grief of a personal nature I think evolves over time. Um, you know, I still have those fleeting thoughts—when I see someone running down the street, I grieve that I can't do that. But time has passed. Time helps, both in personal grief over the loss of someone, as well as personal grief over something that has happened to you. It never fully goes away, but you start to think of it differently. Um, when it comes to a loved one, you know, time does heal. It really does. And I think, um, in that respect, it's keeping the memories alive, whether it's, you know, rituals or other things. I mean, for example, we just passed a major holiday in the Jewish religion. I'm Jewish, and you know, my mother would always come down with tons of great food. Well, you know, she's no longer here, and I can't cook all that food, so I uh called up the local store that was doing a big holiday dinner, and I ordered it. And it came—now, it wasn't the same. It wasn't cooked by my mother, and it wasn't cooked by me. But it still had a bit of the tradition. And I had memories of her, and I didn't feel guilty



that I couldn't do it. So it's being creative and being willing to say, "I'm going to be okay with this." You know, and not only that, we have a pandemic on top of it. So it was just my husband and I eating, you know, this feast for six, 'cause we couldn't invite others over to join. And we were really angry about that, but we have been enjoying the moment. We tried to make it special by doing what we did. And it really was special.

**Kim Howie:** I love that. That's such a beautiful story. And so what I took away from that, too, is that it's sort of a process, right? It's not sort of like a light switch that we turn on and off. And it takes practice.

**Sheri Denkensohn-Trott:** Yes.

**Kim Howie:** So can you just touch a little bit on how you developed this mindset to be Happy on Wheels?

**Sheri Denkensohn-Trott:** Yes. Well, it's interesting because my husband and I are very active. He has a disability as well. So my disability is a spinal cord injury that occurred when I was 16. My husband's disability is genetic and progressive. So he didn't really realize he had it—it's called Friedreich's ataxia. It's quite rare. It's genetic. And uh he just started using a wheelchair maybe two years into our marriage. So for him, um, you know, it's uh a different experience, but we both do things together. We have season tickets to Georgetown games. We travel. We enjoy sitting on the terrace and doing simple things like playing Words With Friends. Most of the time, we're happy. It doesn't mean that at different times we're each angry about something that occurs in life, just like anybody else would be, or something that we can't do, um, for each of us individually, or get frustrated with something. But we really live a happy life. We each individually never thought we'd get married. Uh, we wound up meeting each other, and here we are today, 15 years later. So um we live a life of joy. We try really hard to maintain joy in our life. And that's—that's our mantra on how we live. And we love working together. Many people say, "How can you work with your husband?" Um—

**Person:** [laugh]

**Sheri Denkensohn-Trott:** We have different—we each have different aspects of our—of our skill set and our personality, and we sort of gel and fit really well

together. So we are so lucky, to be able to do what we love, and help other people.

**Nancy Werteen:** Well I'll tell you what—I wanna come hang out with you guys. [laugh]

**Sheri Denkensohn-Trott:** [laugh] My husband's mother says, "Oh my gosh, you guys—I can't keep up with you." So—

**Nancy Werteen:** [laugh] Well, listen, I'd love to sit on the patio and play Words With Friends with you. That sounds great.

**Sheri Denkensohn-Trott:** Yes!

**Nancy Werteen:** So I just want to make sure people know where they can find you. So Happy on Wheels, tell me the website and how people can find you.

**Sheri Denkensohn-Trott:** Sure. So we can be found on our website, which is HappyOnWheels—one word—dot com. And everything is there. You can subscribe to our newsletter that comes out once a month. And you can access past newsletters, pictures, all kinds of things on our website, and blogs as well. We're also on Facebook. We are on Twitter. We're on Instagram, and on YouTube, all under Happy on Wheels. So you can follow us, find us. We post; it's all positive. We try to really help people live a positive life. We write about our experiences. And we'd encourage anyone to do that. And I'm also in the process of writing a book! So uh [0:21:22 audio cuts out]—I can't give you a timeline, as you well know, but it's in process, so I'm writing away. So stay tuned for that.

**Nancy Werteen:** That's right. And you did mention that to me, um, and I forgot to write that down. I'm thrilled that you're writing a book. I can't wait to read it. I've been loving your blogs. You're a great writer. So—um, and listen, take it from us, it's a—it's a bit of a process to write a book—

**Sheri Denkensohn-Trott:** Yes!

**Nancy Werteen:** —but it's gonna be awesome once you have it in your hands.

**Sheri Denkensohn-Trott:** Oh, thank you. I hope so.

**Nancy Werteen:** So thanks again so much, Sheri.

**Sheri Denkensohn-Trott:** Thank you.

**Nancy Werteen:** And that's all we have time for. Thanks again for our sponsor, Khineder Creations, creating a kinder world by giving survivors of domestic violence and sex trafficking a chance to thrive and have healthy, whole lives.

**Kim Howie:** Go to [KhinederCreations.com](http://KhinederCreations.com) to see all of the chemical-free skincare products, so you can be kind to yourself and others. And until next time, remember, stay connected to your why, fuel your core energy with joy, and live your life from the inside out.

**Nancy Werteen:** Thanks for listening. We hope *you* find some joy *today*.

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