

The name Kendra means “greatest champion.”

For UNC junior volleyball player Kendra Koetter, the name rings true.

But for her, Kendra also means tripping over nothing.

And it means loving to eat.

And it means honoring god.

And it means having seven different homes.

And it means not caring what anyone else thinks about you.

It means not being afraid of change.

And she couldn't be- when Koetter made Chapel Hill her seventh home as a transfer student last year, she had been through enough change to know how to handle it.

“It was probably the best decision of my life,” Koetter said. “When I got here I knew I was exactly where I was supposed to be.”

It took a lot for her to get there. Koetter was born in Oregon before moving to Idaho, Arizona, Jacksonville, Atlanta, and finally Tampa.

“Home is wherever my family is,” Koetter said. “I would say I grew up in Atlanta. I feel like I had the most experiences and learned right from wrong there. But then I consider home Idaho because we go back there every summer.”

Although Koetter's life was full of constant change, one thing remained constant since she was little: her passion for volleyball. It all started at her older sister's club volleyball practice, which she was forced to go to. She can thank her mom for that, because one day, she was asked by the coach to join practice after he saw her serving the ball to the wall.

She tried out for her first team when she was eleven years old. She continued to play for club teams as she got older, despite moving around so much.

When Koetter was a junior in high school, the meaning of her name was fully embraced. The Wesleyan wolves won the state championship, defeating the number one team, Westminster. Koetter performed well, but what made it so special was that her dad was there. The current head coach of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, her dad is so busy that he rarely could come. But Koetter doesn't let any obstacle hold her back.

In the sixth grade, Koetter told her parents she was going to play Division I volleyball.

She was right.

Koetter originally went to Georgia Southern University. It was a comfortable choice for her- three hours from home, a successful football team (at the time), and she would get to play volleyball.

But Koetter has never been one to stay inside of her comfort zone.

“I had never really thought about transferring because I always looked at transferring as quitting and that’s not how I was raised,” Koetter said. “I made a list of pros and cons and really thought about it, talked to people I felt closest to, and decided it was probably a good move.”

Koetter loves to eat. You can catch her at Purple Bowl or Shiki Sushi with her teammates any day of the week. But food isn’t the only thing she’s hungry for: she craves success. Success motivated her to come to Chapel Hill.

“I think a big thing is that I really wanted to be coached,” Koetter said. “I felt the coaching staff would put me in a really good situation to succeed and get better.”

Head coach Joe Sagula would do just that- with a little bit of trouble.

“She’s very cerebral. It was hard for me to figure her out at first,” Sagula said. “Her facial expressions are very the same. I want her to smile a little bit, because that at least makes me think she’s agreeing with me a little.”

A dinner at Living Kitchen with Segula and assistant coach Eve Rackham was all it took for Koetter to seal the deal, after she received a phone call about UNC while visiting Bradley University and quickly made it down to Chapel Hill.

Koetter was supposed to just be a back-up setter if Mariah Evans got hurt. When Evans got a concussion that left her out for the year, Koetter found herself starting every game as a new transfer. Once again, the unexpected obstacle couldn’t stop her grind.

“I always believed in myself,” Koetter said. “I was pretty confident I would find a way onto the court. There were definitely times where I was like, “Don’t mess up! C’mon get it together.” It was difficult but it was a lot of fun.”

Koetter gets a lot of her confidence and steadiness from growing up with her dad.

“When we lose, I feel badly as a player,” Koetter said, “But I feel more badly as a daughter because I’ve seen how much it effects coaches when they get home, and it’s really hard to separate that.”

Being in the spotlight from her dad and from boyfriend and UNC basketball player Luke Maye is just another uncomfortable situation that Koetter has learned to handle with ease.

A typical game day for Koetter looks like waking up, going to Starbucks for a vanilla latte with her teammates, and going to the locker room to let loose to an unnamed song with the team. When she gets on the court, she is focused and steady.

“She’s one of the hardest workers I’ve ever played with and so competitive,” said teammate and roommate Madison Laufenberg. “She likes to motivate people. I think she shows it more on the court.”

Off the court, Koetter enjoys obsessively cleaning and embarrassing herself, two things not many people enjoy- but Koetter is different.

“I think it goes back to being comfortable outside of my comfort zone,” Koetter said. “I am who I am. I just feel like it’s a good way to live your life. If you’re always worried about what other people think, you’re missing out.”

Koetter also enjoys being involved with Athletes in Action, an organization based around Christianity.

“I hope in everything that I do I glorify God,” Koetter said. “I enjoy being around other believers who hope to incorporate that into their sports and demonstrate what it means to be a Christian on their team.”

As for the future, Koetter has plans to be a leader next season now that her adjustment period is over. Further down the road, Koetter wants to work in college recruiting to help people make a decision as impactful as the one she made was.

“Regardless of what happens, I feel like I keep it together,” Koetter said.

Despite all of the unexpected change in her life, Koetter has always kept it together and kept her values and passions at the forefront of her life.

And that’s what makes Kendra Kendra.