

## A plea for help: Wauconda musician who lost his voice to a brain injury seeks answers through documentary

[Dave Oberhelman](#)



Eric Kinkel is Hersey High School graduate and has been a professional singer for decades. He suffered a brain trauma that reduced his ability to speak and sing. *Brian Hill/bhill@dailyherald.com*

Eric Kinkel can still jam on the electric guitar and pluck delicate melodies on an acoustic, as the self-taught artist has for decades.

The Wauconda man just can't get the words out.

Starting in 2019, he experienced symptoms including a dry mouth, a “lazy” upper lip and what he called a wildly dysfunctional tongue. By 2021, Kinkel’s voice became virtually unintelligible, ruined by a brain injury that’s yet to be fully diagnosed.

He was left with disabilities, including being unable to speak clearly, much less sing.

The 67-year-old [singer-songwriter](#) has since turned to a new medium to chronicle his illness. In 2024, Kinkel began work on a feature-length documentary film that does what he can’t adequately deliver in speech — issue a plea for help.

Kinkel is the executive producer of [“In Search of His Lost Cords,”](#) streaming through Vimeo, in an effort to connect with someone who may be able to repair his vocal cords and reclaim his voice.

The film, which drew a positive response during a screening last month at Wauconda High School, is a portrayal told through recollections, film clips, musical segments, testimonials by friends and colleagues — including guitarist Ted Nugent — and a recent interview of Kinkel by host Wanda Speer.

“My brain trauma affects every aspect of my once-normal daily life, from excessive eyelid blinking to an overactive bladder to dysfunction of my vocal cords, disabling me from speaking normally, which is exhausting. Singing is out of the question,” Kinkel said, responding to a series of questions through email.

“Mentally, I’m on an island of my own, very isolated,” he added.

Despite numerous tests, procedures and medications, Kinkel found no relief.

“All treatments I previously received through conventional medical channels were ineffective and, at times, caused additional complications,” he said.

“I am now looking beyond traditional medical pathways and exploring advanced research in quantum computing models and AI technologies that may be on the cusp of breakthroughs for a myriad of human afflictions, including my own.”

Kristen Todoroff, a personal assistant to Kinkel who also worked on post-production and marketing of “In Search of His Lost Cords,” assisted in a phone interview with him.

“That’s what Eric desires, to find one or many prominent researchers that are trying actively to research these new ways to help people with brain trauma and other brain-related events,” Todoroff said.

In a follow-up email, Kinkel wrote: “Life is unbearable in this condition.”

Before this all began, Kinkel brought life to others through his music.

He combined such early influences as his music teacher grandfather, John Kinkel; a viewing of “The Sound of Music” that stirred his vocal passion when he was 6 years old; and his father, Chris Kinkel, who taught his son three chords on a Gibson Archtop acoustic guitar bought at a pawn shop.

As a Hersey High School senior in 1977, Kinkel famously arranged for the rock band Rush to visit the Arlington Heights school for a question-and-answer session with students before a gig at the Aragon Ballroom.

Kinkel, who moved from Arlington Heights to Prospect Heights in the early 1970s, joined an Elk Grove Village nonprofit after graduating from high school. He worked there for 31 years.

During that time, Kinkel maintained his love of music. He started a hard rock band, Lost Nation, before gravitating to folk and country as a solo artist.

He performed a series of benefit concerts in Schaumburg for his sister, Linda, who died of multiple sclerosis in 2006.

A friend of the Nugents, Kinkel organized a benefit concert in 2006 to raise money for a monument honoring Ted Nugent’s mother, Marion. Since 2007, it has stood outside of Durty Nellie’s in Palatine, where the Nugents lived for more than 30 years.

Kinkel’s final single with vocals was the country-swing “Autumnal Way,” with Angela Martin-Licari on violin. It was recorded in December 2021 by longtime friend, Gary Lingner.

“The thing I miss most is just hashing over the day or the week on the phone with him,” Lingner said in a clip from “In Search of His Lost Cords.”

“I miss hearing his voice,” Lingner said.

In 2023, Kinkel released a [keyboard-based instrumental, “Elizabeth’s Sigh,”](#) recorded in his home studio in Wauconda.

It is beautiful, yet it does not satisfy Kinkel when his main instrument has been reduced to grunts and whispers. He has lyrics that need to be sung.

“It’s awful, losing my voice,” Kinkel said, “especially for a singer like me.”



Eric Kinkel, of Wauconda, is putting the finishing touches on “In Search of His Lost Cords,” a documentary film recounting his story after a brain trauma. *Brian Hill/bhill@dailyherald.com*



Wauconda singer-songwriter Eric Kinkel performs at a 2010 benefit concert at the Al Larson Prairie Center for the Arts in Schaumburg. *Courtesy of Larry Schaefer*



Eric Kinkel, pictured here at age 7 at home in Arlington Heights, got his first acoustic guitar from his father. *Courtesy of Eric Kinkel*



Wauconda musician Eric Kinkel performed in a 2011 concert at the Prairie Center for the Arts in Schaumburg. *Courtesy of Larry Schaefer*