

Interview with Jeff & Kathy Hess, Work Crew Manager and “Mom”

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The Hill Cumorah Legacy Project

Recorded over Zoom

Interviewees: Jeff & Kathy Hess

Interviewers: Lee Goodrich & Liam Guthrie

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Transcript

[00:00:00 → 00:05:00]

Liam Guthrie: There we go, recording. All right, so, thank you both for meeting with us today.

We are—I guess we’ll introduce ourselves. I’m Liam Guthrie, and this is Lee Goodrich, and we’re doing this interview for the Hill Cumorah Pageant History Project [sic], and we’re here today interviewing Jeff and Kathy Hess, so... I guess, just to start, would you guys like to introduce yourselves and tell us about what sort of work you guys did in the Hill Cumorah Pageant?

Jeff Hess: We are Jeff and Kathy Hess!

[The Hesses laugh]

Jeff Hess: And we spent about ten years working with the work crew at the Pageant. The work crew is responsible for setting up the stage, and then, once the stage is set up and the cast arrives, the work crew takes on the role of half [*Kathy says something indistinct*]—about half of it is stage crew, and the other half climbs up into the towers to operate the follow spotlights, follow

spots, and they do that until the show is over, and the night the show is over, we immediately start taking the stage down, storing it on the other side of the Hill, to be used the following year.

Rinse, repeat, the next year! [laughs]

Kathy Hess: There were 28 young men. They were 17, 18 years old; sometimes, we had some 16-year-olds; and they'd be there for a month. They'd come a week before the cast and stay a week after the cast left. So, it was quite a commitment on their part, you know, to be there for a month, and they had to pay their way and [laughs], again, [indistinct] it was not like it was paid for them, so...

Liam Guthrie: Mhmm.

Kathy Hess: But...

Liam Guthrie: So, as the heads of the work crew, what were your guys' primary responsibilities?

Jeff Hess: So, I was the work crew director. My wife, we informally call the work crew mom. I reported to two different people and had two different sets of responsibility. One person I reported to was the technical director, and so I was responsible to him for getting the stage up, getting the scenes up.

Kathy Hess: [Calling?] the show.

Jeff Hess: And then, during this show, I was—the theater title is stage manager or whatever. I was—I have the guys all on headsets, and I was telling him when to put up the sets and when to take them down. And then, I had a second line of authority, if you will, to President [Neil] Pitts.

And I was responsible to him for the care and feeding of these 28 young men and making sure they didn't get into trouble when they weren't— [laughter]

Kathy Hess: Yeah—

Jeff Hess: When they were...

Kathy Hess: That was the 24-hours-a-day job.

Jeff Hess: Yeah. [laughter] So, that was kind of a dual... dual responsibility type of thing.

Kathy—

Kathy Hess: Yeah, I basically handled the caterer. We had a caterer who came three times a day and fed these boys. They were well-fed, and that's good because they worked really, really hard. And if there were ever medical emergencies or something, I would be the one that would take them to the E.R. or to the Pageant clinic and get them taken care of. But together, I think we were really—we felt our biggest responsibility was as a spiritual support for them, and we provided... They never had any real *free* time. I mean, they did off and on during rehearsal week, but for the most part, we kept them very busy and engaged and pre—I don't know if you're familiar with the Church, but a pre-mission kind of experiences [sic], where they had a companion, and they studied the scriptures every morning, and they did prayers together, and then, in the evening, we would have a devotional at night, where we'd have other members of the staff come and speak to them on whatever topic they spoke—wanted to, and then had a closing devotional and “wrapping up the day” kind of experience with the boys each night.

So, we put a lot of energy into that, preparing for that, and... [00:05:00 → 00:10:00] The four—we have four boys that would come back for a second year as leaders of a group of six.

So, they were kind of our support in—within the boys themselves, they were organized into

these—we call *districts*. And, um... So, we worked closely with them that whole year prior to them coming, those four boys. We met with them over Zoom or over a phone call, three or four times a month, spiritually preparing *them* to be leaders, and helping them develop those qualities and what scenarios that they might run into with the boys, and how they would handle them, and those kind of things. So, it was very, very much a full-time job from the time the Pageant ended to the next time it started in June the next year or so. But it was very rewarding, very rewarding.

Liam Guthrie: Well—and speaking of the boys who are on the work crew, in that video you shared with us, it seems like you're very selective in the process of choosing who would be on the work crew. Why was it so selective, and what was kind of the ideal person you were looking for to be on the work crew?

Jeff Hess: I think the biggest thing we were looking for was for guys who had diligently prepared to serve missions. If they, in their... It's a process. There's an application process, and there was a selection committee, if you will. And the thing that—if they didn't mention that they were preparing to go on a mission, they kind of went on *this* side of the pile, you know? So, that was the biggest thing. Were they diligently preparing to serve a mission, and had they done other things in their lives that indicated that preparation? We would typically get at least two, if not three times the number of applications that we needed. We took applications from all over the world. Mostly, we got guys from the United States and Canada, but we had a guy come in from Thailand once, and I think one came from Germany. So, it—but it was a fairly competitive [proces]. We had lots to choose from.

Kathy Hess: And it was a very prayerful process, too. We would all get their applications. They had to write a letter explaining to us some things about their family, their Church experience, their other things that they felt qualified them to be a member of the work crew—kind of a

resume, if you would. And so, each one of 'em—us on the committee—there were five of us on the committee—would read these applications and spend a couple of weeks really digesting them, and then we had a scoring system where we would score them based on what we learned from their letters, but also what the—it was a very spiritual process—what we prayerfully felt like their score should be, and almost without exception, we all pretty much scored them the same, the ones that got selected. There would be a couple of maybes that we have to go back a second time and review that again, but that was a very, very *cool* process to be a part of.

Liam Guthrie: Cool, and what do you think—with all these applications, what you think drove all these young men to make this big commitment? You know, getting there a week before everyone else in the Pageant, staying the week after, it's quite a big commitment. What do you think was the driving force that motivated all these young men to want to work on the work crew?

Jeff Hess: So, I'll answer that by saying we got a lot of brothers of former work crew members, so—

Kathy Hess: And friends.

Jeff Hess: And friends. These guys would have this experience in—I don't—parents maybe sometimes would have an influence, but mostly these guys would have this experience. They would say that was the best thing that I'd done to this point in my life, and they would go home, and—these guys would go home after four weeks, probably having stayed up the night before without any sleep, and they'd [00:10:00 → 00:15:00] get off the airplane at home and get in the car, and they start talking. And—you know, we'd hear these stories later from their mothers—that they started talking, and they did not stop talking until they got home. It was such a good

experience for them, and their younger brothers, who probably went to the airport to help pick them up, too, are in the backseat, listening—

Kathy Hess: [laughing] Right.

Jeff Hess: And they're saying to themselves, "Man, I want to be on the work crew when I get that old." So, we got a lot of brothers, a lot of families and cousins and stuff that would hear from the parents about how great an experience it was. And it was! It was a great experience. I—

Kathy Hess: Or from families that had participated in cast, who had boys that age, would pay attention to what the work crew did. I mean, the work crew, it was really an elite group to be part of because of the selection process; because of the recognition that the directors gave them for the work they did; for the Presidency, who acknowledged them for being, you know, good, righteous, worthy young men being there and the example they set, and... We did; and we told the boys from day one, you set the tone for everything. Your demeanor, your behavior, your response to what goes on at the Hill directly impacts everyone else that's going to show up in a week. And it's so true. If the boys were really well behaved and really respectful and everything, the entire cast would be that way as well, and they really held a high responsibility in my book, and we told them so, and I think they saw that. They saw that the respect that they got by the way they behaved. So, that was enticing to kids that are sitting there in this study shelter of a thousand people, watching these boys sitting up front as a group, all dressed in the same shirts, you know, like I'm wearing, and they *knew* of something special to be part of, so... It was cool.

Lee Goodrich: Mmm.

Liam Guthrie: So, Lee, do you have anything to ask?

Lee Goodrich: Yeah, so, you mentioned that there were 28 workers. Were there certain roles that had to be filled, or did the numbers vary by year?

Jeff Hess: Yes, there were certain roles that had to be filled. In other words, the 16 guys who were—I mean—12 follow spots, so there are 12 spotlights that, once you're assigned and learn how to respond to the cues from the spotlights, that's *your* spotlight. You can't move from one to another. And then the 16 that served on the ground crew, they had specific assignments every night as well. It was a real show; I mean, it was a real Hollywood production, so yes, they had specific assignments.

Kathy Hess: So, it was always 28. When we started out, when we started, it was 26. But there were two extra beds in the bunkhouse, basically, that they lived in, and the directors got wind of that, and they figured out, "Oh well, we could use two more." So, it was maybe two years or a year after we started that they bumped it up to 28, so we had a full house. But—

Lee Goodrich: Okay.

Kathy Hess: It worked out great.

Lee Goodrich: Awesome. Speaking of that, what was living as a work crew member like, and what did they do in their off-hours when they weren't doing the stage work?

Jeff Hess: So, they...

Kathy Hess: They didn't have off-hours! [laughs]

Lee Goodrich: Oh, okay.

Jeff Hess: There's no off-hours. They slept in a—

Kathy Hess: Metal building!

Jeff Hess: *Metal building* that we affectionately called the Wind Tunnel because it had a garage door at each end, and so, when it got hot, you could open up both garage doors and turn on this big fan. At some point, they *did* install an air conditioner that was...

Kathy Hess: Way too small. [laughs]

Jeff Hess: Grossly inadequate to cool the building.

Kathy Hess: There were 13 sets of bunk beds, and... Triples.

Jeff Hess: And we set up a tent outside the Wind Tunnel that was the dining— [pauses; laughs]

[Kathy says something indistinctly]

Jeff Hess: It was a 20-by-40 tent. We called it a dining fly, but it was a big tent. And so, we had picnic tables [00:15:00 → 00:20:00] inside the tent that—so that's where we ate all of our meals. They're attached to the metal building with all the—so there were 13 sets of bunk beds, and two of the bunk beds—two of those sets had a third bunk, so that's 28. There was a room attached to the Wind Tunnel that we called a Day Room where we could set up 28 plus two or three chairs at night and have these devotionals. There was a bathroom that had—

Kathy Hess: Four stalls and four sinks. [laughs]

Jeff Hess: Four stalls and four sinks,

Kathy Hess: Four shower heads. [laughs]

Jeff Hess: And four shower heads in the shower, which they labeled the Garden of Eden, I think.

Kathy Hess: Yes, *right!* [laughs]

Jeff Hess: Then they—so...

Kathy Hess: So, a laundry room; they had to do their own laundry.

Jeff Hess: Laundry room, right. So, they would get up in the morning—oh, I wish I had the book here—well, they would get up in the morning—

Kathy Hess: 6:30.

Jeff Hess: 6:30, okay? They'd wake up at 6:30; they would have breakfast at 7:00, so they got a half an hour to get ready. After breakfast, they would do some—have some study time, so they studied the scripture.

Kathy Hess: They were paired in companionship, so they would have scripture study with their companion for half an hour.

Jeff Hess: The two of 'em together. And then, we would—the first shift was 9 to noon. So, when we were building the stage and taking down the stage, we had shifts. We worked from nine to noon, and we came back to the Wind Tunnel for lunch, and then at 1:00 we were back out—

Kathy Hess: Till 5.

Jeff Hess: Until 5. And we'd come back for dinner. And then at—

Kathy Hess: 6.

Jeff Hess: 6, we'd go back out for our last shift till about 9. And that—so, that was every day while the state was going up and the stage was coming down.

Kathy Hess: And that was the easy part, [laughs] other than putting up the stage, because the hours got a lot longer once the show started.

Jeff Hess: 'Cause the show went late, you know. It started after dark, so, it went late. So, we would get done

Kathy Hess: 11, 11:30.

Jeff Hess: At midnight.

Kathy Hess: Yeah, we would get back to the Wind Tunnel at 11:30.

Jeff Hess: During—so, we did have most of their—so, they don't *drive*. They don't bring their cars. I mean, they're on the Hill for the whole experience, so we—

Kathy Hess: They don't have a cell phone.

Jeff Hess: No, that's right. We took away their phones—

Kathy Hess: Their phones get given—

Jeff Hess: [overlapping] And their computers.

Kathy Hess: To us when they get off the plane at the airport.

Lee Goodrich: Wow.

Jeff Hess: And then, so—we had to find things to do, but there were always things to do. Always—there were always things to do. So, there really wasn't... And then, we had a specific schedule. It started about 7:30 or 7:00 at night before each performance. So, yeah, there was—and if we did have free time, we did have *three vans* that we'd load them into and go to...

Kathy Hess: Other Church historic sites and...

Jeff Hess: Church history, and then Chill & Grill.

[Kathy laughs]

Jeff Hess: We went to Chill & Grill once or twice, and—

Kathy Hess: Yeah.

Jeff Hess: Yeah.

Kathy Hess: Mostly Church history sites and things we'd take them to.

Jeff Hess: The—those follow spot operators, you can only practice spotlights when—at night—

Unclear interviewer: Mhmm.

Jeff Hess: When it's dark. So, those guys, to learn their parts, they had to stay up sometimes later, so they—after breakfast, they might go back to bed [laughter] to catch up on some sleep. It's pretty intense.

Kathy Hess: Yeah, he would call the cues for the ground crew. There was another gentleman that was called to call the cues for the light towers. He was a professional; he *really* knew what he was doing. And during the daytime, after they'd slept all morning, after lunch, he would meet with them and do some training and some spiritual training with the light crew until we got back for dinner or midday. And then they'd do some service activities with some of the young kids in the cast, and—we'd find things to keep them [00:20:00 → 00:25:00] busy, you know? We have a Bishop's Storehouse just across the street, and we'd send them over there to help out if it was needed, or if other cast teams—I don't know if you're familiar with the cast teams, but they would go and work with the nine-year-old boys and play volleyball and do some other things, just keep them out of trouble. So—and it worked. They were good.

Lee Goodrich: Right.

Liam Guthrie: With that—

Lee Goodrich: It sounds super-busy.

Liam Guthrie: I was gonna say, with that pretty busy schedule, did any of them find that incredibly challenging? Or, were there any issues with those many weeks, of those long days?

Jeff Hess: Were they homesick?

Liam Guthrie: Yeah, like homesick, or did they ever get burnt out from working all day dawn to dusk, it sounds like?

[Jeff laughs]

Kathy Hess: That first week, you know, it'd be a little tough to get some of them up in the morning, but you got a lot of peer pressure going on, so... [laughs] It's like, "I'm not going to be the slacker!" And they really had—it was amazing to me. They would work so hard in the heat and the humidity and the rain. Unless there was lightning, they worked on the Hill, putting up the stage, and they'd come back at noon and just—they were *happy* and *dancing* and just—*giddy*, you know? It was like, "Aren't you guys *exhausted*?" "Nope!" And then they get right back out there at 1 and keep on going until 9:00 at night, and it was just amazing to me. But the brotherhood that they created within 24 to 36 hours was just remarkable, just remarkable.

Jeff Hess: 'cause very few of them knew each other before they came.

Kathy Hess: Yeah, yeah. Most of them are perfect strangers to each other, but I was always impressed. I told them, usually somewhere in the first couple of days, how impressed I am with young men. Because I worked for a long time with the young women of our Church, as their leader, for many, many years. And so, coming and doing boys was kind of foreign to me. I have

five girls and two boys, but my boys are 11 years apart, so they didn't have their typical boy experience as brothers. But coming and watching these boys bond and help and serve and look out for each other was just so impressive to me. They really did. They bonded as a brotherhood, and it was powerful. I—it really was a powerful experience for me to watch that happen. And then, when they left the airport on the last day, it was just, you know, tears and hugs and, you know, nobody wanted to leave; they wanted to stay. It was hard in that way.

Lee Goodrich: Huh. With the training that they received and the qualifications they had to earn to obviously put up the stage, was that anything that they could use outside of the Church and, like, a trade skill or anything like that?

Kathy Hess: It wasn't rocket science; it was just hard work.

Lee Goodrich: Right, yeah.

Jeff Hess: I mean, yeah, I suppose you could.

Kathy Hess: I mean, maybe some skills.

Jeff Hess: I suppose, but...

Lee Goodrich: I was just curious if they had received any like official training or anything like that.

Jeff Hess: I did—I mean, we trained, and that was the first thing we did—

Kathy Hess: More safety training.

Jeff Hess: Getting off the airplane. We trained them how to do it. But yeah, the stage went together with—

Kathy Hess: Nuts and bolts. [laughs]

Jeff Hess: Nuts and bolts to some degree, but to some degree it was just setting a beam with a pin on it into a pole with a sleeve on it. So—I mean, there was—I guess—there were some quality-control issues—

[Kathy laughs]

Jeff Hess: That I suppose could be handy, but no. And it was a pretty unique stage. There is not another one like it. It was—

Kathy Hess: The boys in the light towers, now: They got training from professional lighting people, so maybe they could go on then to college and work in some kind of lighting thing.

Jeff Hess: And stage—I mean, stage crews are—

Kathy Hess: Yeah.

Jeff Hess: Yeah, I suppose.

Kathy Hess: I mean, you don't see a stage that big very often outside of Pageants.

Liam Guthrie: Mhmm.

Jeff Hess: But, I mean, those skills, the training we were really giving them was—

Kathy Hess: Life skills,

Jeff Hess: Yeah, life skills, living with each other and living with 28, 27 strangers in in a bunk house with four—

[Kathy says something indistinctly]

Jeff Hess: Toilets, yeah. [laughs] There is [sic] all sorts of stuff, but...

Kathy Hess: And yet, they had fun doing it. [00:25:00 → 00:30:00] It was... I rarely ever heard complaints, ever. We just worked it out.

Lee Goodrich: Huh.

Liam Guthrie: Would you—

Lee Goodrich: Can you—I'm sorry; go ahead, Lee.

Liam Guthrie: And then what do you keep in contact with any of the boys after the Pageant was finished? I mean, you mentioned the four for the coming year, but even following that, did you keep in contact with people after they had finished being in the work crew?

Jeff Hess: Yes. Again, most of them were preparing for missions, so most of them go on missions, so we get emails from most of them, especially during those two years. So, we have 250 people out there we're juggling names of and trying to remember.

[Kathy expresses agreement]

Jeff Hess: It's crazy. So, yeah, they—you know, we're all Facebook friends. [laughs]

Kathy Hess: We get wedding announcements and graduation announcements and baby announcements [laughs] and all that stuff. It's fun. It is.

Jeff Hess: Yep.

Lee Goodrich: Can you talk a little bit more about the preparation assignments before going on missions that you worked on while the [work crew]—the young men were there?

Jeff Hess: So, there's a verse in the Doctrine & Covenants, section 4, verse 6, that mentions Christ-like characteristics.

Jeff Hess: Faith. [laughs]

Kathy Hess: [prompting Jeff] *Virtue*.

Jeff Hess: Virtue. [laughs]

Jeff and Kathy Hess: [overlapping] Knowledge.

Jeff Hess: Temperance.

Kathy Hess: Patience.

Jeff Hess: Patience. Brotherly kindness.

Kathy Hess: Godliness.

Jeff Hess: [remembering] Godliness?

Kathy Hess: Charity.

Jeff Hess: Charity.

Jeff and Kathy Hess: [overlapping] Humility.

Kathy Hess: Diligence.

Jeff Hess: Diligence! So—

Kathy Hess: They have to memorize several things, and that whole section is one of them, but—the whole Section 4 is one of them—but we focused on the Christ-like characteristics for our preparation assignments out of verse six.

Jeff Hess: So, starting in about February, towards the end of February—

Kathy Hess: First of February.

Jeff Hess: We would address one of those—yeah, I guess it was the first of February—we would address one of those characteristics for two weeks. I'd given—I'd give them an assignment regarding—you know, faith: Tell me what you think that is—and then we'd ask for a response. And then, we go on to the next one, so by the time they got there, they got through—is that eight or ten characteristics?

Kathy Hess: Ten.

Jeff Hess: Ten. They'd got—they'd spent 20 weeks and got through ten Christ-like characteristics. And many of the characteristics are kind of challenged in that process of living with 27 strangers, brotherly kindness, stuff like that.

Kathy Hess: Humility.

Jeff Hess: [laughing] Yeah, humility. So, I would ask them to apply those characteristics to certain situations or whatever, kind of getting them ready. There's a couple of things you've got to overcome. You've got to somehow get it to where those 28 guys can work together as a team within twenty-four hours of arriving at the Hill, in order to be able to break up into four groups and start working on four stages. There were seven stages. The stage is composed of seven separate—if you will—stages that then are connected, so we could... That's why we had a district leader who had been there before, who knew how the stage went together, and we'd send him off and tell him to do stage one, and tell another one to do two and three, and four, five, six, seven. And so, we needed them to be ready to go within twenty-four hours after they got to the Hill, because that's when we started. They came in on Friday, and we're out there Saturday

morning, putting the stage together. So, the preparation and taking those preparation assignments seriously were important.

Kathy Hess: Well, there are also physical preparations like “make sure you know how to do your own laundry and take care of your personal belongings,” you know, because, with 28 guys living in this bunk house, you can’t just throw your stuff everywhere, you know? You got to keep it taken care of, and... How to iron a shirt, you know, so you can have a clean white shirt because you wear those plenty of times [00:30:00 → 00:35:00] there. It was good, and we had a handbook that we sent them kind of outlining the expectations, the packing list, the rules, if you will. And the parents also got a copy of this handbook, as well, for themselves so that they had an idea of what their sons were going to be doing, and maybe to help them in that process, and with the preparation assignments, they could do Family Home Evenings, you know, once a week and center around that characteristic, maybe that we were studying and help them in growing in that as well, so... We tried to involve the whole family in the process, and... I don’t know. I never got a lot of feedback on how that went, or whether they were doing that as a family, but we certainly gave them the opportunity to do that.

Jeff Hess: But we had—we did nothing in advance on how to build a stage.

Kathy Hess: No.

Jeff Hess: That was Friday night. Showed ’em some slides on, “What—this is what the pieces are going to look like, and this is how you put them together,” and then turned them loose on Saturday, like I say, with the district leaders.

Kathy Hess: Well, except for the safety. Safety training was a big part of Friday night, too, because they had to wear a hardhat, and they had to wear gloves, and they had to be smart [laughs] and not do stupid things.

Lee Goodrich: Right. Liam, did you have any other questions?

Liam Guthrie: Yes, I was about to ask, so—you say that the process of working on the work crew for the boys was very much... Did it strengthen their faith by taking part in this process and very much connected them even closer with their faith?

Jeff Hess: Yes.

Kathy Hess: That's the report we get.

Jeff Hess: Yes.

Kathy Hess: We have them evaluate the experience at the end; we have sent them with some questions and have them fill those out the last night. And by far, I think that's what brings—it brings the four back, for sure—that experience, and... I mean, we were privileged to see literal miracles happen. Not every year. Not to the magnitude that we had seen them—you know, healings and things like that that took place. Those are hard to forget, and the feelings—when you are surrounded by—doing devotionals with a thousand people every day, and having spiritual experiences with them, and experiencing just being part of the show, because it's such a powerfully spiritual experience... Many of them have shared that their testimony started and grew from that point at the Hill and from the preparation. So, it's—*that* was our basic goal for them. It wasn't to feed and house them and whatever; it was to have them go home a different person, a better person, more committed to their testimony and to their missions. And it's been evident from the emails we get from their missions that it was a success, so that was awesome. It

was fun to watch some of the ones that would hold back a little bit. By the end, you know, [they] were just...

Jeff Hess: Gregarious. [laughs]

Kathy Hess: Well, they had figured it out. They had figured out what the opportunity really was there and jumped in and were so happy when they left, you know? You could tell. Their whole countenance would change. It was, yeah, it was kind of a cool opportunity.

Liam Guthrie: Mhmm. Do you have any particular favorite memories from working on the work crew?

Jeff Hess: No.

[Jeff and Kathy laugh]

Kathy Hess: I have favorite pictures in my head of moments I will never forget, and just the joy of being part of something that changed lives like the work crew experience did for these young men was all the reward I needed. That was—it was awesome. But my one picture is, they all rode on a tractor—a trailer, flatbed trailer, behind a tractor that—Brother Hess [00:35:00 → 00:40:00] would drive this big tractor with the trailer hitched up to it, and they would all be sitting on this trailer, singing [laughs] Church songs, as they went up and down this quarter-mile road to get to the front of the Hill from the back of the Hill, where their bunkhouse was, every morning. Just hearing them singing these songs as they're going to work at 7:00 in the morning, or 8:00 in the morning, was... Yeah, you won't see that in a high school [laughs], I don't think. They got comfortable enough to just be genuine. And it was really—it was awesome, for them and for us.

Lee Goodrich: Wow.

Jeff Hess: So, it might be handy for you to understand *our* history with Pageant. We—Kathy said—we have seven children of our own, five girls and two boys, and the boys are the bookends. The boys are on each end. And—so, we had heard about how great a thing it was to be in the cast at the Hill Cumorah Pageant for years, and we'd apply, as you applied to be on the cast as well. We had applied for years, but just like the Bible, there are more male parts in the Bible than there are female parts, and the Book of Mormon is similar, so the Hill Cumorah Pageant is similar. They need more males than females. And I had...

Kathy Hess: Five! [laughing]

Jeff Hess: I had [laughing] five girls—let's see, five, plus she [Kathy] was six, versus the three of us males. And so, we weren't set up as a family [laughs] to be sought after by the cast selection committee! *But*—our older son served his mission from 1996 to '98 in New Mexico, and he was coming home in '98—like, June, I think, in '98—and we—I think we were aware that the Pageant *loved* returned missionaries. So, we sent in our application with the returned missionary on it in 1998 and were selected to be on the cast, and we came and—as a family, then, all—

Kathy Hess: [*faintly*] Nine of us.

Jeff Hess: Nine of us, and camped in the campground and had a wonderful experience. It was a wonderful experience for our family. And then, the next year, we applied, but now we didn't have our—

Kathy Hess: [laughing] Missionary.

Jeff Hess: Our ticket. [laughs] He was gone, married—married a girl he met at Pageant. And so, we were politely told no for a year or two and then—you know, after a couple of years, it doesn't matter how polite you're told no; you're still being told no!

Kathy Hess: Our girls did come as young single adults. When they got old enough after they graduated high school, they could come on their own. And so, for many years, I think all five of them eventually ended up for at least one year, if not multiple years, coming in by themselves as young single adults, so...

Jeff Hess: So, then, 2008 rolls around, and our younger son is on *his* mission in Mexico, and *he's* returning in June, and I turn to Kathy and said, "You know, if we're going to go be in the cast of the Hill Cumorah Pageant, this is the only other chance we have." And so, we put the three of us in an application, and we were accepted in 2008. And then, in 2009, we did *not* come because we didn't—we knew we didn't have that—

Kathy Hess: Golden ticket.

Jeff Hess: That golden ticket again. But we did have friends of ours who were in the cast, so we went up to see it. And while we were there, one of the Presidency members recognized us and said, "Why aren't you here in the [00:40:00 → 00:45:00] cast?" And I said, "Well, because we don't have a returned missionary [laughs] anymore." And he made it clear to me that couples were...

Kathy Hess: [*faintly*] Taken all the time.

Jeff Hess: Yeah, taken all the time. So, we applied in 2010, just the two of us, and were accepted, and we were assigned to an adult task team. It was kind of strange. The left hand and the right hand [claps] weren't talking to each other. We'd been cast team leaders, so we'd been

assistants, so we were expecting to be casting leaders, but we were stuck in this adult cast team, and those people just drove us crazy!

[Both Kathy and Jeff start laughing.]

Jeff Hess: And so, we went around—Kathy went around, asking people on staff to give us something to do! [laughing]

Kathy Hess: Yep.

Jeff Hess: And they finally did. They found us something to do. We did a water activity for some of the young kids or whatever.

[Kathy says something indistinctly]

Jeff Hess: And the Pageant President at the time heard that there was this couple that was asking for things to do. And so, he came and said, “Why don’t you guys come over to my office after you’re done with this water activity?” So, we did, and he interviewed us, and he said “I don’t know what we’re going to have you do, but we’ll have you do something!” And so, that’s what led to then in 2011 being called as a work crew director and work crew mom, and we were told five years. It would be a five-year calling. And after five years, there were some organizational changes, and the new guy needed us. And so, we said, “Hey, we’re fine. Use us as long as you can.” And so, we did it for 10 years. We rode it out to the very end.

No qualifications to build a stage—except I am an engineer—but the guy before me was a lawyer. He had absolutely [laughs] no qualifications. But he was a young men’s leader, you know, so he knew about young men. I suppose I knew how to put posts and beams together. So,

it was a learning experience for both of us, in my case young men, learning to—'cause I have girls, most of them. [laughs]

Liam Guthrie: Mmm.

Jeff Hess: But the memory I shared when I was asked this question before, though, was not as a work crew director, but as a member of the cast. In 2010, I was cast in the role of John the Baptist, and in the Pageant, the Savior comes to John the Baptist to be baptized. This is a vision that an American prophet named Nephi is having of the Savior being baptized. And John the Baptist baptizes the Savior. Then the Savior goes on his mission, and the spotlights are on him.

[A computer notification interrupts Jeff's train of thought]

Jeff Hess: And—why is...? I don't understand. Anyway—oh, now, my Internet connection is unstable. Hopefully you're hearing this! [laughs]

Liam Guthrie: Yep, still got ya!

Jeff Hess: But the spotlight goes completely from being on John the Baptist to now being on the Savior, and—then John the Baptist kind of slinks off the stage, you know? In the dark. And every night I did that for, like, eight nights of the performance, and it became very clear to me the role of a support person, which John the Baptist was. And that's a memory—you ask about memories—[00:45:00 → 00:50:00] that's a *very* strong memory in my mind of learning the importance of being a support person, and how to be a support person and not have this ego that requires, you know, constant strokes. That was it. That was...

So, then—the work crew is support. We—you don't see us at night. If you're watching the show, if you see us, then there's something wrong, you know? I'm constantly telling them,

“You’re not to be seen. You *are* support. You’re putting up those sets. You’re not supposed to be seen!” You’re not...” You know? And we did have guys that were dressed in costume who weren’t...

Technical Difficulties

Jeff Hess: I don’t remember where I was...

Liam Guthrie: Uh, I guess when it cut out for us, you were talking about learning how to play as the support to the cast while you were cast as John the Baptist.

[Editor’s Note: Due to the audio trouble, there may be errors in the ensuing transcription of the Hesses’ words.]

Jeff Hess: Anyway, that’s kind of my favorite memory of the whole Pageant experiences, the personal lessons you could learn as a member of the cast, not just as a member of the work crew.

Liam Guthrie: Mhmm.

Jeff Hess: The work crew, we were lucky to work here for ten great years. And...

Kathy Hess: Yeah, actually, [we’re] heading to a point where our assistant in ’19, and then he stayed on for ’20 and ’21, and so it was totally canceled after that—

Liam Guthrie: Mhmm.

Kathy Hess: He was a district leader prior to being our assistant and went on a mission.

Liam Guthrie: Speaking of the end of the Pageant, what were your guys’ feelings about the Pageant coming to an end? Do you disagree with the decision to end it? Do you think it was a good idea? How did you guys feel about that?

Jeff Hess: So... I'll tell you that we were—I think we were bummed because the boys, these guys, stuck with it for two years. Most of the guys selected for the 2020 crew stayed with us and were preparing to come in 2021. So, we were bummed that they didn't get any real opportunity, *but* we—personally, the two of us—you know, we volunteered for this, to help with the facilities management crew move their boxes, because when they closed the Hill, they decided to [unclear], or when they closed—maybe it was the Church that decided to take *everything* off the Hill Cumorah, and then it's over, basically! So, yeah, the Wind Tunnel no longer there, and facilities management was no longer there. We had moved a couple miles away to the other facility, and they needed help moving, so we went and helped them moving. As a result of that, we were privy to some of the briefings [as to] why the Pageant—why the decision was made to end the Pageant, and I have to tell you, I agree 100% with the decision.

My view is that the Hill Cumorah is a sacred site. We ought to be able to go there and have a sacred experience. And while believing that the Pageant was a—it could be a sacred experience, if you ask the director how he wants it... I was talking to the director, and I said, “Why did we stop putting on the Pageant?” And he had said, “Well, if you look over here, from the road, it kind of looks like a carnival is going on.” And, you know, he was right. It kind of did look like there were colorful tents all set up for these [best guess] cast teams, and—

Kathy Hess: Red tent. [best guess]

Jeff Hess: [unclear] Really, people were dressing up—

Kathy Hess: As all sorts of characters. [laughing]

Jeff Hess: Anyway, it *did* kind of look like a carnival atmosphere, and frankly that's not the ideal [representation?] the Church's position of what the Hill Cumorah is.

Liam Guthrie: Mhmm.

Jeff Hess: And so, we should be able to go [00:50:00 → 00:55:50], you know [best guess], and visit the Hill and have a different experience than you would have than if you had gone and seen the Pageant. It needs to be a very personal, spiritual experience.

Kathy Hess: I mean, it was—it was very disappointing for the boys who had two years of preparation, basically, as opposed to just one, which I'm sure will bless them going forward. I don't feel like that was wasted effort at all. But they didn't get the actual brotherhood experience—

Liam Guthrie: Mhmm.

Kathy Hess: To the extent that they would have if they'd been at the Hill. But we did things differently those last couple years. We had them organize their districts normally; we had them zooming with their districts, so they got some brotherhood that way. But, after our experience of helping the facility's management, we were leaving the Hill, knowing we wouldn't—that, next time we came back, it would be totally different. I was surprised that my overwhelming feeling was gratitude. And to have those ten years—ten to eleven years—that we did have to serve there, and to know these 280-some young men, and have them be a part of our family. So, it was a lot of mixed feelings, but overwhelmingly, it was gratitude.

Liam Guthrie: Mhmm. Alright, that's all the questions I had. Anything else from you, Lee?

Lee Goodrich: No, I think I got everything that I needed.

Liam Guthrie: All right. So, guys, thank you so much for coming to talk to us, especially since this was all pretty short notice between you guys—

[Kathy says something indistinctly]

Liam Guthrie: Hearing about this and coming to talk to us. So, we greatly appreciate it, and thank you so much for doing this interview with us.

Kathy Hess: Also, I'll just tell you, if you have a desire for any of, like, the handbook or any of that kind of stuff with our information, I have it all electronically. I can send whatever documents you might—it might be helpful. If not, then that's fine. I just wanted you to know those were available—the daily schedule, what that looked like, and those kinds of things.

[Lee and Liam speak simultaneously, so the sound is garbled.]

Kathy Hess: Yeah, just let us know. And I can forward those documents to you.

Lee Goodrich: I think that would be super-helpful since we're trying to create an online archive of all this stuff, anyways. So, if you want to go ahead and send them, that'd be great.

Kathy Hess: Okay. And we have pictures of all the work crews from the 1990s [best guess] right up to when I was working [unclear speech], so we can certainly share them with you if you want them.

Jeff Hess: Church History has those pictures.

Kathy Hess: Yeah, Church History has the pictures, but if they want them for their project, then...

Liam Guthrie: Yeah, that would definitely be great.

Kathy Hess: Okay, well, we're just letting you know you can discard whatever you don't like [laughs] [unclear speech].

Liam Guthrie: Mhmm.

Kathy Hess: You know, I've got lots and lots and lots of files. [laughs]

Liam Guthrie: All right, yeah, sounds good. We'll definitely email you about that stuff, so...

Kathy Hess: I'm just curious—

Liam Guthrie: Yeah?

Kathy Hess: How does someone with the two very varying degree paths that you guys are on end up in this project?

Liam Guthrie: Um, so we actually both became double-majors—and I think you as well, Lee—we both became double-majors in history this year.

Kathy Hess: Mhmm.

Liam Guthrie: And so, as part of that, we're taking a class called Digital History that's all about, kind of, history on the Web, and how it's presented and preserved on the Web.

Kathy Hess: Mhmm.

Liam Guthrie: And our professor has kind of a focus on religious history, so he kind of initiated this project to preserve the history and memory of the Hill Cumorah Pageant.

Kathy Hess: Mhmm.

Liam Guthrie: Yeah, it's been a fascinating project to work on. Very, very interesting.

Kathy Hess: Good, good.

Lee Goodrich: Yeah, I've been going to school in Rochester for four years, and I didn't even know the Hill Cumorah was even there until we started this project, truthfully.

Kathy Hess: A lot of people don't. It's just crazy. I mean, it's the largest pageant in the country.

Liam Guthrie: Mhmm.

Lee Goodrich: Yep.

Kathy Hess: So, you guys are right down the street and didn't even know it. Well, it's a—it was an amazing pageant. Changed a lot of lives, let's just put it that way.

Liam Guthrie: Mhmm.

Kathy Hess: [indistinct dialogue] It was a lot of work. [laughs] I'm not going to lie; it was a lot of work.

Lee Goodrich: Definitely.

Jeff Hess: Alright. Good.

Lee Goodrich: Well, thank you so much again for talking to us. It was an honor to talk with you.

Kathy Hess: Okay, do you want me to send files to both of you, or send it to—?

Lee Goodrich: You can send it to both of us.

Liam Guthrie: Yep.

Kathy Hess: Well, we'll work on that during this weekend and get those to you.

Lee Goodrich: Okay. Awesome.

Liam Guthrie: All right.

Jeff Hess: Good talking to you.

Kathy Hess: Yeah!

Jeff Hess: Nice to meet you!

Liam Guthrie: Thank you. All right. Thank you.

Kathy Hess: Good luck with the project.

Liam Guthrie: Have a good day.

Kathy Hess: Will there be a final result?

Liam Guthrie: We can definitely send you guys the link when it's all completed. It should be in the next few weeks, I think.

Kathy Hess: Oh, wow. Okay. Awesome.

Lee Goodrich: We can send you a recording of this interview as well as the transcript that we're going to type up.

Liam Guthrie: Yep.

Kathy Hess: Ah, using up my history, okay.

All: *Laughing*

Kathy Hess: Well, good luck with everything.

Lee Goodrich: Thank you so much, again.

Liam: Yep. Have a good day.

All: Bye.

Dublin Core Metadata for the Interview

Title: Interview with Jeff & Kathy Hess, Work Crew Manager and “Mom,” Thursday, April 21, 2022

Subject: Hill Cumorah Pageant, Religious History Interview, Oral Interview, Religious Pageant, Youth Camps, Summer Activities, Community Involvement

Description: Jeff and Kathy Hess were “work crew supervisors” for the work team tasked with setting up the stage and other various Pageant props from 2011 to 2019. This hand-selected group of 28 young Mormon men lived, ate, and slept on the Hill Cumorah site for over a month. They worked around the clock to ensure the Hill Cumorah was ready for the summer Pageant in addition to operating the lighting effects that occurred during the performance. Through a series of applications to perform in the Pageant themselves, and through other odd jobs around the Pageant, the Hesses were finally selected to lead this high-performing group of young men.

Creator: Jeff Hess, Kathy Hess, Lee Goodrich, and Liam Guthrie

Source: Hill Cumorah Legacy Project

Date: Thursday, April 21, 2022

Contributor: Liam Guthrie and Lee Goodrich

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