

Interview with Jennie Hedworth, Part Two
Tuesday, March 29, 2022
The Hill Cumorah Legacy Project

Recorded over Zoom
Interviewee: Jennie Hedworth
Interviewer: Madison (Maddie) Vanderpool
Duration: 19:12

Transcript

Note: Madison Vanderpool scheduled this follow-up interview with Jennie Hedworth after being unable to join the initial conversation on Tuesday, March 22, 2022.

[00:00]

Maddie Vanderpool: Did it! [laughs]

Jennie Hedworth: Okay, perfect. Got it.

Maddie Vanderpool: All right. Yeah, so, I know, when we were emailing back and forth, you had mentioned you wanted to talk a little bit more on your day-to-day, so if you'd like to go ahead and do that.

Jennie Hedworth: Oh, yeah, well, it's just—it was more of a complicated question than just, like, a one straight answer because there was so much that goes into the details of planning the transportation.

Maddie Vanderpool: Mhmm!

Jennie Hedworth: So, every day was different. So, in the beginning, we'd transfer the people. Usually, it's like about four or five hundred people coming in from the airport, so we had to collect all that data and then figure out how we were going to make our trips to go get these people. So, we'd kind of collect them in groups, and then, every day, there was [sic] trips that we'd have to make over to the dorms at the Finger Lakes Community College. So, every day,

we'd transfer people back and forth from there. And then, we had Church history site tours some days, and we also had service days where we had to coordinate with the people where we were going to do service to figure out how many people had to go where. So—then there was also fun days, where people would go do different things like bowling or swimming at the park. So, there was that coordinating, and then also we had some special tours we would do of the area, different historical sites. And so, yeah, it was just something different each day. It was just really collecting the data and trying to put that all together, so that's what made it a little hectic, and trying to coordinate and then transport all those people was a lot of work.

Maddie Vanderpool: So, how would you collect that data? Would it be like spreadsheets or paperwork, or—?

Jennie Hedworth: Yeah. So, as some—as the people would apply for Pageant, there was also a spot where they could say they're coming in on a flight, and yes, they would need transportation. And then, once that would happen, the President of the Pageant would have all that info. It's called a flight dump. And then he'd send it to me, and my son and I would go through the whole list and kind of look at the times everybody was coming in. We also had to really pay attention to the flights coming in. One year, a lot of 'em were getting canceled and put later.

Maddie Vanderpool: Oh, no!

Jennie Hedworth: That *really* [laughs]—like, when you're trying to transport that many people, it really screwed things up. So, yeah, so we would just put all that together and, you know, group up the time and try to figure out if we needed a bus, or if we just—we had 12 passenger vans we were working with as well, so we didn't have groups that were as big. We would just go in a van and get everybody and their luggage. Yeah.

Maddie Vanderpool: So, you mentioned in the previous interview and this one now that you coordinated some service activities. What would those—

Jennie Hedworth: Yes.

Maddie Vanderpool: Entail? Were those—

Jennie Hedworth: So, there was a lot of parks that needed clean-up. A lot of times, the kids would go, and they would do raking and, you know, spreading mulch or rock, or whatever they need to do in these parks. Sometimes, it would be going to a fire department and helping them organize and clean up, or they have some sort of project they wanted to put together. We also did some work cleaning up historical sites. Yeah, it was a lot of, like—we did painting at different parks, so it was a whole bunch of different service stuff that we would do out in the community. So, people would—we had one lady that would coordinate the service jobs, and then we would coordinate getting them to all those places.

Maddie Vanderpool: Mhmm.

Jennie Hedworth: Mhmm.

Maddie Vanderpool: So, you'd do like a lot of community service when you came in with the Pageant as well?

Jennie Hedworth: We did. Yep, everybody would do it. So, we all would be assigned to what was called a cast team. I did talk about this before.

Maddie Vanderpool: Yeah!

Jennie Hedworth: And those teams were assigned to go together, so, depending on how many people each service project needed—so—and they also required a certain age to it, some of them, depending on what kind of work they had, so we had to coordinate that. And so, we would

drop those cast teams off at certain places where they were needed, and then our buses would just keep going around and dropping people off and picking people up, and—

[Maddie laughs]

Jennie Hedworth: Yeah.

Maddie Vanderpool: And then, you also mentioned some fun days, so what were the most—

Jennie Hedworth: Yes.

Maddie Vanderpool: Common activities that people would do for those?

Jennie Hedworth: The most popular one was going to a park called Onanda, just—kind of on the outskirts of Canandaigua, and they would go there and [05:00] swim. They could play volleyball. There was a huge space where they could just play frisbee on the grass or picnic. That was one of the big ones. The other thing was our younger kids liked to go over to a community center, and there was swimming there. It actually was kind of like an indoor water park. They had all sorts of—like, a whirlpool type of thing they could go in, and so it was fun for them. So—

[Maddie says something indistinctly]

Jennie Hedworth: We just didn't work all the time. Sometimes, we played.

[laughter]

Maddie Vanderpool: That's awesome.

Jennie Hedworth: Yeah.

Maddie Vanderpool: So, what was your favorite part about working in the Pageant?

Jennie Hedworth: I got to meet a *ton* of different people, like, so many people from different countries, which was one of my favorite things, and I made a lot of really good friendships, lasting friendships. I still talk to many of them today, and when I travel, I pretty much know

people in every corner of the Earth, it seems, [laughs] so you can always contact somebody.
Yeah. So, it's really neat.

Maddie Vanderpool: Yeah, I was actually going to ask a question, which you kind of just answered. I was going to say—

Jennie Hedworth: Ah.

Maddie Vanderpool: Did you ever meet anyone who you probably wouldn't have met, had it not been for the Pageant, and do you stay in contact with them? So...

Jennie Hedworth: Yeah, I don't really stay—well, actually, that's not true, 'cause there was one guy who—he's an artist for the Church, and I got to meet him. And, you know, I'm friends with him on Facebook, but I don't really talk to him, but that's kind of cool. I met a lot of people that have really interesting jobs. A lot of the people, we would friend on Facebook. I still have a ton of phone numbers and contacts for these people just because, as they were coming in, I was putting numbers into my phone—

[Maddie laughs]

Jennie Hedworth: To try to keep track of everybody, and they'd be calling me after I would just call them.

[Maddie laughs]

Jennie Hedworth: But I was calling so many people, I couldn't keep track of who was who, so... [laughs]

Maddie Vanderpool: Yeah.

Jennie Hedworth: You know, if you just plug it in, it just makes it easier, so...

Maddie Vanderpool: That makes sense.

Jennie Hedworth: Mhmm.

Maddie Vanderpool: Um, let's see. Is there anything similar to the Hill Cumorah Pageant, and have you attended such an event?

Jennie Hedworth: Well, no, I've never attended anything like it. It's pretty amazing. You know, we would have about 5,000 or more people every night—I think it was 35—35 *thousand* people annually—and it was amazing. I'd been going since I was a little kid. Like, since I can remember, I used to help my mom make all the—we used to make the food for the people in the Pageant—

Maddie Vanderpool: *Oh.*

Jennie Hedworth: When I'd go with her, and she would make all the sandwiches along with tons of other ladies. And so, things have changed a lot over the years, but I've never attended anything like it, yeah, nothing that could come close to it.

Maddie Vanderpool: That's really cool. So—

Jennie Hedworth: Mhmm.

Maddie Vanderpool: How long have you been going to the Pageant? Has it been forever, or—?

Jennie Hedworth: Yeah, well, my mom started taking us when we were little. I think that was probably about five; and maybe I was even younger than that. But we would go every year, and sometimes we would go for *the whole week*, because we could see so many people that would be traveling out that we could just go visit with there before it started. We would go a couple of hours early and have some dinner there. And so, it was pretty fun. Yes, I've been going all my life, pretty much.

And then, we were actually in it—let's see—from 2007, and then we only skipped one year, and—we were actually—we started out being in it, and then my stepdad was the transportation director before I was. And so, I was helping him out quite a bit, and they caught

wind of that, and they knew that I also drive a school bus. And so, that's how I ended up getting that calling—is what they—that's what they call it, is a calling—

Maddie Vanderpool: Mhmm.

Jennie Hedworth: When you're asked to do a job in the Church, you know, to donate your time. And so, that's what I ended up doing, was taking over his job, and then I had that until we closed shop.

Maddie Vanderpool: That's incredible.

Jennie Hedworth: Yeah, it was pretty amazing.

Maddie Vanderpool: Okay. Let's see... Oh, I lost my spot. [laughs]

Jennie Hedworth: That's okay.

Maddie Vanderpool: Um—oh, there it is. What's the most powerful thing you've witnessed while attending the Hill Cumorah Pageant?

Jennie Hedworth: Oh my gosh. There was a *lot* of things.

[Maddie laughs]

Jennie Hedworth: Um... I think the coolest thing was, one night... It's a very powerful Pageant, and especially when people really feel the spirit of what we're trying—the message we're trying to get across. I remember one night, some—groups of us had to go out to do—
[10:00] we have different things, jobs that we would do out in the audience. So, some people would welcome, and some people at the end would say, “Thanks for coming,” and go out and talk to the people and see if anybody wanted to chat. And we were waiting kind of on the outskirts, like, right where it was dark, and the lights came on, and this really soft music played, and Pageant was over, and not *one person* moved. [laughs] It was dead silent for a good few minutes before people really started moving, and it was like—I think they really felt the spirit of

what was going on there and just—what they had just witnessed. It's a—it was a pretty amazing Pageant.

Maddie Vanderpool: Yeah.

Jennie Hedworth: Yeah.

Maddie Vanderpool: *Coughs* Sorry.

Jennie Hedworth: Have you ever seen it?

Maddie Vanderpool: I haven't.

Jennie Hedworth: Did you ever see Pageant? [responding to Maddie's answer in the negative]

Oh, oh.

Maddie Vanderpool: I grew up mostly in New Hampshire, so I had actually—

Jennie Hedworth: Oh, okay.

Maddie Vanderpool: Never even heard of it until a couple of months ago, when [laughs] I started taking this class.

Jennie Hedworth: Oh, my gosh. It was pretty amazing. If you ever have a chance to watch it online, it was pretty neat.

Maddie Vanderpool: Yeah, we've seen clips of it, and it just looks like—just the production quality and value and all of that; it's like—I'm coming from a photography background—

Jennie Hedworth: Oh, okay.

Maddie Vanderpool: And my mom was a theater major at college, so I can appreciate it just purely from the stage presence—

Jennie Hedworth: Yeah.

Maddie Vanderpool: And how it would actually be to, like... 'cause that many people!

Jennie Hedworth: Well, if you can imagine a crowd of 5,000 people on this lawn, just completely—

Maddie Vanderpool: Yeah.

Jennie Hedworth: There's kids on blankets and people in chairs, and some people in their lawn chairs. And it's just an amazing feeling to be there with all those people and experience it, a huge Pageant on a stage, you know? It's just—there's nothing like it. It's amazing.

Maddie Vanderpool: It must be kind of like when performers are up onstage, and they do such a great job that—to have the audience take a breath before they realize, like—

[both laughing]

Maddie Vanderpool: “Oh, wait, it's actually over. We don't have to be quiet anymore; we can applaud.”

Jennie Hedworth: Yep, yeah.

Maddie Vanderpool: It's like, “Wait, did we do a good job, or is everyone going to hate us?”

Jennie Hedworth: Yeah! Yeah, it's pretty amazing.

Maddie Vanderpool: Yeah. So, that kind of leads into my next question as well.

Jennie Hedworth: Okay.

Maddie Vanderpool: Did you ever meet anyone who is not involved in the Church directly, but was attending the Pageant as an audience member?

Jennie Hedworth: Oh, yeah.

Maddie Vanderpool: And do you know how this changed their view of the Church?

Jennie Hedworth: Yeah, we had many people come, many that were members, and many that were non-members, but people would come from all over because they would hear of it and just want to come and see it out of curiosity. But, you know, we had a chance to talk to many people

once it was over, and... I think, especially when there were a lot of our—the people, the cast members, would go out and talk to people beforehand to answer any questions they might have about what Pageant was all about—but to go out afterwards and talk to people, they were just amazed. And I think everybody has questions about life: where you're going, what's going to happen, is Christ real?

Maddie Vanderpool: Mmm.

Jennie Hedworth: And then, to witness that, and kind of see his presence on stage and to be in it, is almost lifelike. It's amazing. It's almost like you're truly sitting there with Christ, and I think it just kind of brings a realization to people, and I had people say that to me that weren't members—that, "I really felt something here. There was something different, something I needed in my life," and they want to know more. And so, they start asking the questions. And there have been many people that have joined the Church over it from what they felt, you know, by being there and experiencing it [themselves]—for themselves.

Maddie Vanderpool: So, would you say there's a—not a large population, but definitely a population in the Church that probably joined because of the Pageant?

Jennie Hedworth: Oh, yeah. I know some people, actually.

Maddie Vanderpool: Hmm.

Jennie Hedworth: I had a friend who came and asked me about Pageant, and he was very curious about it. And, you know, he had asked to get a Book of Mormon, and I wasn't able to get him one before the show because we were just lining up—

[Maddie laughs]

Jennie Hedworth: So, he ended up finding one for himself online. And he watched the Pageant, and he said he knew that it was definitely real, what he was seeing and feeling, and he researched

it for himself. I honestly didn't have to do anything. I did talk to him about it afterwards, but yeah, he basically researched it for himself, and he joined. So, it was pretty cool to see that. It *does* change your life, for sure.

Maddie Vanderpool: That's really cool.

Jennie Hedworth: Mhmm.

Maddie Vanderpool: Do you think there is a most important part of the Pageant? If so, what [15:00] was that? Would you say it was important overall?

Jennie Hedworth: I probably keep saying this, but it was the one that affected me the most was when Christ came to America, and when he's talking to the people, and also when he's with the children, [sighs] I [mean], it just really—I mean, even now it touches me because it's, like, just to sit onstage... When I was first in Pageant, my son was young enough where he was among those children that got to sit down along the side of the stage—

Maddie Vanderpool: Aww.

Jennie Hedworth: And Christ would come walking down and touch all the children. And it really got me just because it was almost like you were sitting there, even though it was somebody else portraying Christ.

Maddie Vanderpool: Hmm.

Jennie Hedworth: It was almost like I was truly sitting there, and I gasped, I remember, because I was like—I had to keep myself from crying, and I heard one of the other mothers do the same thing. And we talked afterwards, and it was like, "Yeah, I truly felt that." And I think it's the most important thing for people to know that he is real. Anybody that's questioning life right now or, you know, if there *is* a God or Jesus Christ, that he is real, you know? And I think that

part right there was one that really affected people that came. If they were going to understand anything out of Pageant, it would have been that, so we can all relate—

Maddie Vanderpool: Yeah.

Jennie Hedworth: You know? Anybody that questions could relate to that.

Maddie Vanderpool: Okay. Um, let's see... And then my last question is, is there anything you want future generations to know about the Hill Cumorah Pageant?

Jennie Hedworth: Hmm... I just think it's amazing that, when God has his hand in something, anything that he wants to see move forward, it's going to happen because, when you have that many people... You know, we had probably—I mean, it was eight—about seven, eight hundred cast, but we also had people that worked there also. So, when you have that many people come together, and you put something together that fast, it's a miracle, really, and we all had a job to do, but there were so many hiccups sometimes in trying to organize all of that, and things looked like they were about to fall through, and everything came together. It always came together, amazingly. And so, I think, you know, when God's hand is in things and he wants it to happen, it's going to happen.

Maddie Vanderpool: Just a quick question. You mentioned—

Jennie Hedworth: Yep.

Maddie Vanderpool: There were a couple times that it felt like it wasn't going to happen.

Jennie Hedworth: Yeah.

Maddie Vanderpool: Is there one that sticks out prominently in your mind where it came down to the wire—

[Jennie laughs]

Maddie Vanderpool: And you guys are sitting, like, “Oh my gosh, I don’t think we’re going to make this,” [Jennie laughs] but somehow you pull through?

[Both laugh]

Jennie Hedworth: Uh, *yeah*. Well, because I was over transportation, it’s hard to get that many buses when the school districts are also dealing with all their summer runs and... You know, it got to be a little hectic for my—I work at a bus garage—and so it was getting to be too hectic for them. You know, they were having a hard time keeping up with it every year. And so, we ended up having to switch to a different school district, and it was a smaller school district, and trying to manage... To even have them sign a contract for me was—they had to put a lot of thought into it, like, “Are we going to have these buses?” And so, we really got down to the wire one year, and I was, like, praying that *somebody* is going to sign a contract for us. And it happened! Ha! Like, I don’t even know; it was amazing; but we—they signed it, and it all worked out, and it was hectic, but it worked, you know?

Maddie Vanderpool: Yeah.

Jennie Hedworth: So yeah, it can be pretty scary when you have all these people coming in and no transportation. [laughter] So, yeah.

Maddie Vanderpool: Well, thank you so much for talking to me again!

Jennie Hedworth: Yeah! Me, too.

Maddie Vanderpool: I again apologize for [laughs] missing our first interview.

Jennie Hedworth: Oh, no apologies necessary; you’re fine.

Dublin Core Metadata for the Interview

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Subject: A follow-up interview with Jennie Hedworth about the Hill Cumorah Pageant to ask more questions and expand on some topics from the first interview.

Description: Maddie Vanderpool interviewed Jennie Hedworth for the second and final time to follow up on topics such as the day-to-day activities of being a transportation coordinator for an event of this size, as well as expanding on topics such as activities done during the Pageant and Jennie's personal feelings about the Pageant.

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