

**Interview with Kimberly Sorensen
Thursday, May 5, 2022
The Hill Cumorah Legacy Project**

Recorded in person at the Pittsford Community Library, Pittsford, NY

Interviewee: Kimberly Sorensen

Interviewer: Daniel Gorman Jr.

Questions developed by: Trevor Kamen and Joshua Kanofsky

Duration: 19:25

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Transcript

Note: Trevor Kamen and Joshua Kanofsky were initially slated to record the interview with Kim Sorensen. Due to scheduling conflicts, Dan Gorman ultimately conducted the interview.

[00:00]

Dan Gorman

Alright, today is Thursday, May 5, 2022. This is Dan Gorman, and I'm talking to Kim Sorenson. Thank you for joining me after some technical snafus to talk a little bit about your experiences working at the Hill Cumorah Pageant. To begin, one of the questions we've been asking everyone as a matter of demographics is, did you convert to the Church, or did you grow up in it?

Kim Sorensen

I am a convert to the Church. I was baptized in 1995 up in Niagara-on-the-Lake in Ontario, Canada.

Dan Gorman

Okay, and if you don't mind me asking, did you have a religious affiliation previously?

Kim Sorensen

You mean with the Church or—

Dan Gorman

Oh, just in general?

Kim Sorensen

Yeah, growing up, my family went to church, but not that Church.

Dan Gorman

Okay.

Kim Sorensen

Not the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, no.

Dan Gorman

Okay. And then, how long have you been down here in the States?

Kim Sorensen

Since 2000.

Dan Gorman

Okay. And based on the initial information that was sent to me, you worked in costuming, specifically on wigs for the Pageant, correct?

Kim Sorensen

Yes.

Dan Gorman

Did you have, before you worked on the Pageant, any background with theatre costume work?

Anything related to that?

Kim Sorensen

No, I had no—[laughs]. It was kind of like on-the-job training that was...

Dan Gorman

So, I suppose the better question, or the bigger question, to take a step back, is how did you get roped into this in the first place? How did you first hear about the Hill Cumorah Pageant?

Kim Sorensen

Well, when I joined the Church, I had come down, I think once or twice, when I lived in Canada. And then, when I moved down here, I actually lived in Palmyra, so we went every year from, like, 2000 on. Then, when I—when we had kids, the kids wanted to go every night, so we probably went every night for many years. [laughs] And I don't look at it as being roped into. [laughs]

Dan Gorman

That was perhaps a bad choice of words. But just from speaking to some of the other people on the project, who've talked about [the fact that] this would be a significant amount of work for people who live locally every year...

Kim Sorensen

Well, I was a stay-at-home mom for a while, and that enabled us to go over all the time. I was—the kids and I were on—were in Pageant in 2015, and then, in 2—I think it was June—May—end of May or June of 2017, a friend of mine, Katie Maxwell—she was already in wigs—

Dan Gorman

Mhmm.

Kim Sorensen

And the lady that was supposed to work with her had gotten sick, so she couldn't come, so Patti Randall is asking her, "Who can we get to come in and help? Because you need someone else in there." And that's basically how I got in, was through Katie Maxwell.

Dan Gorman

So, this was entirely word of mouth.

Kim Sorensen

Mhmm.

Dan Gorman

You know, it's funny—this is an aside—but this is actually the first interview for the project I've done in person, not over a computer. So, it's a little different to actually be facing someone face-to-face. I'm used to having a question document next to me. Um... one moment... [scrolls through the questions document on his computer] Because, originally, you were supposed to speak with two students, and I have their notes here, so I'm putting them here—

Kim Sorensen

That's fine.

Dan Gorman

As a reference.

Kim Sorensen

And I work in a school district, so I have summers off, so there's never—

Dan Gorman

Oh, perfect.

Kim Sorensen

An issue. And my kids are always excited, you know, "Oh, we have the whole month where we're just gonna be doing Pageant stuff? This is awesome!" So...

Dan Gorman

Were you still living in Palmyra at that point?

Kim Sorensen

No, I was in Fairport—um, Pittsford.

Dan Gorman

The reason I ask is, I was curious if you were commuting from home every day, or if you ever camped, actually, there or in the dormitories at FLCC [Finger Lakes Community College].

Kim Sorensen

No, we commuted from home every day.

Dan Gorman

Okay. Did your students—[laughs] Your students. I'm sorry... [corrects self] Did your *children* (or students)—

[Kim laughs]

Dan Gorman

Did they ever—were they ever jealous of students who got to camp out at the site? I've heard stories about, you know, ice cream socials and things that would go on at night.

Kim Sorensen

I don't think so. They just they were glad they could go home in their own bed. [laughs]

Dan Gorman

That's understandable.

Kim Sorensen

And their own shower.

Dan Gorman

So, what were the logistics involved in your job? So, you were working with wigs, and as you said, you hadn't had a background in costuming.

Kim Sorensen

Mhmm.

Dan Gorman

What kind of training did you have to do before the Pageant to do your work during it?

Kim Sorensen

Katie Maxwell—I'll just refer to her as Katie—she and I would open up the entire room. There was two sides of them the room; it was wigs, and there was costumes, and there was a —just a door in-between. And so, we would go up and open up everything. The training was like—it was kind of like on-the-job training for me.

Dan Gorman

So, you were really thrown into it.

Kim Sorensen

Katie would say, "Hey, you know, this is how we're gonna do it," and I'm like, "Perfect." You know, I'm pretty—I can catch on to things pretty easy. It wasn't—you know— It's not like I'm operating or anything [laughs] like that, but [5:00] you know... Yeah, I had no experience with wigs at all, and—

Dan Gorman

Mhmm. Mhmm.

Kim Sorensen

Katie helped me out a lot.

Dan Gorman

Some of the people who worked on the Pageant have described being officially “called.” Was your work described as a calling, or was it—

Kim Sorensen

[in the affirmative] Mhmm.

Dan Gorman

More of a—? It was. Okay.

Kim Sorensen

Yeah.

Dan Gorman

I was wondering if it was more of an ad hoc [arrangement]. Well, maybe you could talk about that a little more. Who makes these decisions, and what roles at the Pageant are considered callings as opposed to just, sort of, a regular service job?

Kim Sorensen

It’s to my understanding that we’re all called—

Dan Gorman

Mmm.

Kim Sorensen

That it’s all a calling.

Dan Gorman

Okay, I wasn’t sure if that only applied to people in leadership positions or how that worked.

Kim Sorensen

Hmm, that’s a good question. Because I know, when we’re at Pageant, we were all set apart as missionaries, and—

Dan Gorman

Mhmm.

Kim Sorensen

You know, this is going to be our work that we're going to do.

Dan Gorman

That's interesting. I'm trying to see what else the students wrote here on the question sheet.

[laughs] What would you say was the most difficult aspect of your job working on the Pageant?

Kim Sorensen

Probably the late nights and early mornings.

[laughter]

Dan Gorman

So, did you have to be on-site pretty much all day?

Kim Sorensen

Yes, mhmm. So, we'd get there about 7:30, 8 o'clock, maybe? And we would be there, like, till 11:30 at night, 12 sometimes, yeah.

Dan Gorman

And then, specifically with working with the wigs, can you talk about what a sort of typical day on the Hill would look like for you?

Kim Sorensen

Sure. We'd get in there in the morning, and the girls who had wore the wigs, they'd have them all on the headstands. So, we'd come in, and we'd have to brush—comb and brush 'em all out so that they'd look nice for the next day's performance, and that probably took—you know, it probably... The two of us. Sometimes there were more people, like some people always, you

know, maybe just came over and helped us from the other side; there were two ladies. So, we would do that. First, we'd have devotional, and then we'd go back. We'd go to a meeting, kind of figure out with Patty Randall, which—I think somebody interviewed her.

Dan Gorman

Right. Yes. And she kind of gave us the logistics for the day. And then we'd go to our rooms, and we'd work on the wigs, combing them out, just kind of seeing if any of them got slightly damaged. Like, there was a time—there's a scene where there's, like, a fire scene, and one of the girls hair was [laughs] a little singed. It was basically—yeah, brushing the wigs out, just checking them, any accessories that they had—we wanted to make sure that they were all set to go because some of them wore, like, headdresses and stuff like that. There was always laundry to fold. Yeah, and then we'd just help out wherever else they needed help in the Pageant. I saw the Pageant three times, and—obviously, the audience sits back in the bowl, away from the stage.

Kim Sorensen

Mhmm.

Dan Gorman

It wasn't easy for me to tell how many actors had wigs compared to natural hair. Do you have a sense of how many wigs you were responsible for?

Kim Sorensen

Hmm...

Dan Gorman

Just a ballpark figure.

Kim Sorensen

Probably—let me think. Six... twelve... I would have to say about 40, maybe 30 or 40.

Dan Gorman

And I'm assuming these would have been for primary roles like King Noah [and] Abinadi?

Kim Sorensen

No, that was all upstairs because there was—we were in the women's wigs.

Dan Gorman

Oh, I see.

Kim Sorensen

Upstairs was the wigs and beards and then the men's dressing room. There were several dressing rooms. I think it was like [counts quietly] one, two, three, four, five, six—like there were seven or eight, probably, dressing rooms, and we were in the one lower dressing room.

Dan Gorman

Mhmm. So, you were working with women's wigs, specifically.

Kim Sorensen

Mhmm. Yep.

Dan Gorman

And then, within that, I'm curious, was it mostly for adults, or did the children have any special costuming or wigs?

Kim Sorensen

We were just with adult—like, some of the youth, maybe, were there, like probably 14 and up.

[indistinct]

Dan Gorman

But not—no one [in] Primary?

Kim Sorensen

No, no, only if, like, a mother was there and she needed to have her daughter with her to change, or something, and— Stuff like that. We did have the angels. That's who we did have, if you wanted to know [laughing] who we had. We had the angel wigs. [laughs]

Dan Gorman

Mhmm. From the—do you mean from the beginning [of the Pageant], with the trumpets?

Kim Sorensen

Mhmm.

Dan Gorman

The opening fanfare?

Kim Sorensen

Yeah. Mhmm.

Dan Gorman

Yeah, we spoke to—several of my students spoke to Bryan Bywater, who had worked on props for a while—

Kim Sorensen

Yeah.

Dan Gorman

And he mentioned how the trumpets were all made of PVC piping, not metal. [laughs]

Kim Sorensen

Yeah. Well, I think the practice ones are PVC. Some of them were—hmm—not to—I can't remember now.

Dan Gorman

I just remember him saying that, from a distance, you can't tell. [laughs]

Kim Sorensen

No, you can't, no. Yeah, they're not—yeah. Oh, he's right. He's the prop guy. [laughs]

Dan Gorman

During the performances—now, I know for some of the prop people, they would have to be backstage [10:00] if there had to be a quick repair. Was that—this—also true for people in costuming and wigs?

Kim Sorensen

They would come to the dressing room. If anything went wrong, they came back to the dressing room. So, you would have to be on call, in other words? Yeah, we just stayed in the dressing room the whole time during Pageant. There was a TV; we could see what scene was on and when the girls are going back. There was—sometimes, we had girls that would come; they'd be in two scenes, like almost back-to-back, so they would be running down, quick change, and back out again.

Dan Gorman

Okay. And did you ever have to make mid-show repairs?

Kim Sorensen

To the wigs?

Dan Gorman

Yes.

Kim Sorensen

No. Costumes? Yes, I know they did.

Dan Gorman

You had also mentioned how Katie Maxwell was instrumental in—

Kim Sorensen

Mhmm.

Dan Gorman

You know, bringing you onto the job and to—showing you what to do. Were there any other pointers or guides that they had, or was it entirely word-of-mouth? Was there anything written out that you had to study, a manual or anything?

Kim Sorensen

They did have binders, and it had all the costumes, like, what they were supposed to look like.

Dan Gorman

Mhmm.

Kim Sorensen

You know, the headdresses. They had wrist things and anklets, and some had beaded... There was a—yeah, there were—there was a binder for wigs and a binder for costumes, and we just—we had them both so we could look at them—

Dan Gorman

Mhmm.

Kim Sorensen

And see.

Dan Gorman

And then, can you recall any—well—unusual or memorable things that happened during a performance, at least in your department?

Kim Sorensen

Hmm.

Dan Gorman

Or interesting; doesn't have to necessarily be negative. But any nights that stand out to you.

Kim Sorensen

I just remember every night, with the trumpeters, like at the end, because they would be in the destruction scene. And they had all the little Primary kids, and they had to run every night, I remember, and we would time it. Okay, three—they had to be back out there, I think, in, like, four minutes or something; they had to come down, change out of their clothes, put the trumpeters—like, the angels—on, and then run back up. And I remember how chaotic that was every night. [laughs] But it was fine, you know. It wasn't—and they all made it there every night. Every single night. There wasn't one that was lagging back. They all made it there. So, that, to me, was, like, "Wow."

Dan Gorman

And then, you mentioned—obviously, you were working on wigs, but how much interaction did you have with people working on other aspects of costume design? For instance, I know there was a pretty large sewing/seamstress shop on-site.

Kim Sorensen

I wasn't down—I really didn't have much to do with that. Because we were—the way our building was, like, we were in one building, and then there was the Hill—

Dan Gorman

Mhmm.

Kim Sorensen

And then they were over there, on the side. So, I really—like, I might have been down there to get, maybe, supplies to sew beads for the braids the girls might have—

Dan Gorman

Mhmm.

Kim Sorensen

To wear, or if they needed any help doing stuff, we would go down. But as [in] the sewing part of it, I did not partake; I didn't do any of the sewing.

Dan Gorman

Mhmm. Shifting gears a little bit, the Pageant depicts 10 (approximately) sequences from the Book of Mormon. Were there any portions of the plot that resonated particularly with you?

Kim Sorensen

Hmm. Obviously, when Christ ascends. I think that's probably—

Dan Gorman

Mhmm.

Kim Sorensen

What everybody has said.

Dan Gorman

You could say it again. That's fine.

Kim Sorensen

That's probably the one that really resonates with me, because I always think, "Wow, this is what it's gonna be like when he does come. And I want to make sure I'm there. I want to make sure I'm ready."

Dan Gorman

A related question is, are there any parts of the Book of Mormon that *weren't* put in the Pageant that you wish had been? Any stories—

Kim Sorensen

Hmm.

Dan Gorman

You would have liked to have seen featured.

Kim Sorensen

Hmm. I can't... That would be a very long Pageant.

[laughter]

Kim Sorensen

Well, I think they did a good job. Yeah, no, I'm good. I'm good with, you know, everything [in the Pageant].

Dan Gorman

Mhmm. And looking back now, the way the Pageant ended was obviously quite abrupt. The pandemic prevented the final performances.

Kim Sorensen

Mhmm.

Dan Gorman

Were you involved with the dispersal of all the Pageant materials?

Kim Sorensen

Yes.

Dan Gorman

Could you talk about that a little bit?

Kim Sorensen

I was the one [laughs]. Because I was the only one that lived locally, I had to... Like I said, there was two, four, six—like, eight dressing rooms, and we had to bring everything from those eight dressing rooms to one dressing room, so we had, like, over a thousand costumes in this one room. And—because [15:00] I was the only one local—they kind of asked me if I would help disperse all the costumes, because some of them went to Nauvoo; some of them went to Arizona. Some of them to the—I think Albany history has—a history museum in Albany—

Dan Gorman

Mhmm.

Kim Sorensen

I think. I think they have some. So, it was a big undertaking. And I was—I feel really blessed because I think that brought closure for my girls and I to be part of that, you know, [to] be able to pack stuff up. And it was a good closure for me, where I don't think a lot of people got that.

[indistinct]

Dan Gorman

Mhmm. When you say “girls,” do you mean your coworkers?

Kim Sorensen

My—no, my two girls.

Dan Gorman

Okay. [laughs]

Kim Sorensen

Sorry, my two girls, Rachel and Julia. [laughs]

Dan Gorman

No, I figured I should clarify. [laughs]

Kim Sorensen

Yeah. Yeah, 'cause, I mean—it was lucky for them, because they only went to school every other day, so they could come out and help me.

Dan Gorman

Mhmm. This was last summer, '21?

Kim Sorensen

Mmm.... It started in April—I think April '21, we started? April or May '21, yeah. It was just—it was—you know, and I had to have everything organized because, then—did you talk to Chris Bjorling at all?

Dan Gorman

We did.

Kim Sorensen

Yeah, so he would bring people in—I'm sure he told you he brought people in—to look at the costumes and stuff like that, local theater groups, and—so it was just managing to keep everything separate and organized—

Dan Gorman

Mhmm.

Kim Sorensen

and everything. It was quite a chore [laughing], but it was like a—it was good closure for me, and I don't think a lot of people got that closure, and I feel really bad that they didn't.

Dan Gorman

Looking back now, what do you find the most meaningful part of the experience—the relationships? The uniqueness of the work you were doing? Something else?

Kim Sorensen

I would say the relationships and knowing that I was involved in something that, you know, thousands of people came to see, and it might touch one of their hearts, that they might, you know, read the Book of Mormon, you know, join the Church. I think that was it, that knowing that, while we might just have the thousands of people that come through every night, there might just be one that we reach. And that was important to me, that even it's just that one, it doesn't matter, you know. We've got, you know, somebody who's come back or come to us.

Dan Gorman

The last question I have is a silly one. We've heard from Patricia Randall and some others that there were frequent runs to Chill & Grill for ice cream and fast food, so I was curious if that extended to the wig department—

[Kim laughs]

Dan Gorman

As well as costumes.

Kim Sorensen

Well, the four of us—there was Yvette Sampson, Nancy Osbourne, Katie, and myself. We probably brought more snacks in [laughs]—like just from, you know, chocolates and chips, [laughs] just things like that. We didn't go on as many ice cream runs. We may have—I know Katie and I took our—because Katie had her kids in Pageant, too—we may have taken our *kids* to Chill & Grill. But we didn't go with the staff because we kind of just brought stuff in. We were always, like, *busy* all day doing stuff. So, we didn't—we did go to Chill & Grill, probably more so with our kids and the family than with a lot of the staff.

Dan Gorman

And I will say [that], after listening to a bunch of these interviews, I didn't appreciate (before I began this project) just how much of a summer camp feeling there was, in some ways, at the Pageant.

Kim Sorensen

Yeah. It was. The—my kids loved it. They loved it because, when they were there, everybody had the same morals, the same standards. There wasn't gonna be any drinking. There wasn't going to be any drugs. You didn't have to worry about anything like that. It's a nice—it's a good family atmosphere, definitely.

Dan Gorman

Well, I think that's all the questions I have. Thank you so much for meeting with me—

Kim Sorensen

Yes [best guess]!

Dan Gorman

And for putting up with my Zoom mishaps yesterday.

Kim Sorensen

That's okay. I'm glad I can help.

Dublin Core Metadata for the Interview

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Description: Kimberly Sorensen is a Canadian immigrant and convert to the LDS Church. She attended the Hill Cumorah Pageant many times with her children in the 2000s–2010s. In 2015, she was called to assist with the wig shop for the Pageant. Kimberly had no prior experience with wig making, but she learned on the job under the supervision of her colleague Katie Maxwell. During this interview, Kimberly recalls the workflow in the wig shop, her children's participation in the Pageant, and memories from performance nights. She also comments briefly

on the Pageant dispersal process in spring and summer 2021, when all the props and costumes were given away.

Creator: Kimberly Sorensen and Daniel Gorman Jr.

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