

Interview with Darren and Sue Mathews
Sunday, April 10, 2022
The Hill Cumorah Legacy Project

Recorded over Zoom

Interviewees: Darren and Sue Mathews

Interviewers: Alex Haurie and Ethan Herbst

Duration: 39:57

Note: Darren and Sue's daughter Jenna, who as of spring 2022 was an undergraduate student at Brigham Young University, was also interviewed for the project.

Transcript

[0:00]

Alex Haurie: Okay, perfect. All right. Well, thank you so much for having to do this interview with us. It's actually a really big honor, especially after doing more research and seeing all the stuff that goes on in that process of creating the Pageant, and then especially hearing about what you two do. Just really quick, just for the sake of the transcript, if you could both say your names and spell them out for us, that'd be amazing.

Sue Mathews: I'm Sue Matthews, it's S-U-E, of course, and Mathews is one t, M-A-T-H-E-W-S.

Darren Mathews: I'm Darren Mathews, D-A-R-R-E-N. Mathews, M-A-T-H-E-W-S.

Alex Haurie: Awesome. Ethan, is there any particular question that you want to start off with? Or, if you want, I can start with the first set of questions that I wrote down?

Ethan Herbst: Yeah, you can go for it.

Alex Haurie: All right, cool. Perfect. So just a very simple question, just to get a little—to know a little more about you: Where are the both of you from?

Sue Mathews: Go ahead, Darren.

Darren Mathews: I grew up in Texas. Then I joined the U.S. Navy after high school, spent six years in the Navy, then I moved to Utah for 12 years and then we've been here in New York for the last 21 years.

Alex Haurie: Oh, wow. Very, very cool.

Sue Mathews: And for me, I was born in the Philippines. I was adopted by my aunt and my uncle. My uncle was in the Air Force. And I was born from a family of 10 children: I'm child number nine. And I started at the American School, the DoD school—at the military school when I was in fifth grade, and we moved to the U.S. when my father decided to retire.

Alex Haurie: Mmm.

Sue Mathews: And that's where I met Darren, in California, shortly after my father retired. So he was in the Navy; my father was in the Air Force; and we have four children; and we love living in New York, and hopefully you like where you are, too.

Alex Haurie: I actually really love it a lot. I moved from South Florida all the way up here for school just this past fall. So, it's a very jarring new experience. But—

Darren Mathews: Yep.

Alex Haurie: It's also just an honor always to be speaking with a veteran and also the family member of a veteran as well.

Darren Mathews: Thanks!

Sue Mathews: Thank you.

Alex Haurie: But, with the big military background, I'm actually curious as to how both of you got involved with the religion and what made you want to pursue working on the Pageant.

Darren Mathews: My, um—missionaries knocked on my mom's door when we lived—my mom and dad, when we lived in Texas. And she liked their message, and she joined the Church.

She brought our family into the Church. And then my parents had some difficulty and separated. And there was a time when I wasn't active in the Church. And then, when Sue and I met, the concern from her father, her father mainly, prompted us to, you know, look at religion again. And we started—we went to her Church. And then the next week, we went to my Church, although I had not been going. And—so, we went for the first time out in California, and, you know, we've been going ever since.

Alex Haurie: Oh, wow.

Darren Mathews: Sue was baptized shortly thereafter, and—as a member of the Church—and we've been going ever since.

Alex Haurie: Oh, nice.

Sue Mathews: I don't know if you want me to say anything or not?

Alex Haurie: Yeah! Anything you'd love to add. You know, it's just...

Sue Mathews: Yes, I was raised Catholic.

Alex Haurie: Mhmm.

Sue Mathews: My father and I used to carpool to work in California because of traffic, et cetera, and proximity. And, when Darren and I first started dating, he would, “Well, what kind of wedding are you going to have?” You know, all those things like that. And I would just say, “Dad, we're just dating.” And another time, he was saying, “What about your kids? They have to grow up in some Church.” I'd say the same thing: “Dad, we're just dating.”

So, fast forward. I said, “Fine. I'll go to his Church, and I'll take you to our Church and we'll go from there.” So—but, as far as me not being a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at the time—

Alex Haurie: Mhmm.

Sue Mathews: Darren and I went for the first time. There was this wonderful gentleman; I guess he was a stake missionary—oh, a stake mission leader, I guess—comparable to now, or at least a few years ago, it's a ward mission leader. He just welcomed us with open arms at the foyer, and then we sat down in this, in the chapel, and this young [5:00]—well, younger couple with a handful of children who just said hello to us, very friendly. And then later, I said, “Darren, how come everybody's so nice? What do they want?” [laughter] And that was not something I was used to, you know. The way I was raised, you go for yourself, and you don't necessarily socialize with anybody else. But again, it was very welcoming. And we've been going to that Church and congregation ever since while we were in California, and—and Darren didn't tell you that he baptized me.

Alex Haurie: Oh, wow.

Sue Mathews: I like to kind of joke on that, you know. I was his mission, and he was my missionary.

Alex Haurie: Oh, cool. That's actually—

Ethan Herbst: Yeah.

Alex Haurie: That's a very interesting story. I have not heard of many [cases] where, like, your husband or boyfriend or whatever baptizes you themselves and all that. It's usually you have the anointed person and all that—which is very cool. So, as you said, you guys lived in California for so many years. Sorry, I forgot the number in my head.

Sue Mathews: That's okay.

Alex Haurie: I remember the 20 years in New York, but... Did you come to Palmyra at any point before then, to come see the Pageant and all that a lot?

[Sue Mathews intones in the negative]

Darren Mathews: No. No, we were living in Utah. After I got out of the military—separated from the Navy—in 1989, then we moved to Utah. My parents—my mom had remarried, and she had moved up to Utah with my stepdad. And so, we moved back in proximity with them. And we lived in Utah for 12 years, and we ended up having a home and everything there. But... I lost my train of thought about your question. [laughs]

Sue Mathews: Our children were born in Utah, in Salt Lake City, all four of them. [laughs]

Darren Mathews: We have four children, two boys, two girls. They're all grown and gone. Two of 'em are married. We got four grandkids, another one due the next month.

Alex Haurie: Wow.

Ethan Herbst: Congratulations.

Alex Haurie: Congratulations, yeah.

Darren Mathews: Yeah, we lived in Utah, but we had attended the Manti Pageant that occurs in Utah. It's a similar—

Alex Haurie: Mhmm.

Darren Mathews: Kind of a play, theatrical enactments out on the side of the Manti Temple grounds. A little bit different storyline than the Hill Cumorah Pageant. They referred to this one here as the granddaddy of all Church pageants because it was by far the largest. But we had never been out here in New York. We'd never been to Palmyra. We'd never seen any of it.

I was working; I had graduated. After I got out the military, I then went to college, got a degree in finance, and began working at a bank, did that for a couple of years, and then went to work for the Church on their IT department. And then one of my buddies working there, he left. He was recruited by Novell, a networking company years ago. He came out here to New York;

he started up a consulting branch out here in the Northeast region; and he kept calling me. And he's like, "You ought to move out here." And [I said], "I'm not moving to Boston." [laughs]

Alex Haurie: Right.

Darren Mathews: And finally, one day, he said, "Well, how 'bout Rochester, New York?" I said, "Well, where is that?" He said, "Well, it's by Palmyra." And I told him, I said, "Well, keep talking." So, he—slowly over, you know, more conversations over the next few weeks, he just convinced me that, you know, it was the right thing to do. And Sue and I prayed about it with our family and felt like that's—this is the place we ought to go, and we quit work at the Church and joined Novell and came out here as a consultant.

Alex Haurie: Oh.

Sue Mathews: And it's been a wonderful opportunity for our family, not just our children, but us as a whole. We live in a great community, family oriented. So, you know, that's a fantastic thing. And, growing up in the military, at least for me, I wanted my children to live in one place, not move around so often, so—

Alex Haurie: Right.

Sue Mathews: I wanted stability for that.

Alex Haurie: Wow, That's actually—that's very interesting. So then, what was it like, seeing the Pageant for the first time? Or were you already involved with—

Sue Mathews: No.

Alex Haurie: Working on it?

Sue Mathews: No, we went. When we first moved here, we did go. We attended as the... And you know, we thought it was wonderful. But—and I know, every year, Darren would always say, "Oh, we should apply to be in Pageant!" and for me, personally, I kept making different excuses.

Now, because the kids are too young or are—actually, our third child at the time, too, had challenges with Tourette’s [unclear] and all that stuff. So, I would kind of use that and him as an excuse because, again, it falls upon me a lot more, Mom, because my husband worked, etc. And I ... just was not interested in that. I said we will go every year if we want to, however many times, you know, in a given year, but I [10:00] really didn’t want to.

But then, fast forward to when President Bjorling—he was in the Pageant Presidency at the time. He lives in Canandaigua. I don’t know if you know him or spoken with him yet. He extended a call for me to serve as one of the counselors in the Pageant Primary Presidency. And I’m not sure if you’re familiar with Primary, but we get to serve with children, ages three to eight years old, at least in the Pageant setting, anyway. So basically, when the parent, when they’re not rehearsing, that—we get to be with them [the children]. We have lessons; we have activities. Of course, we have snacks. We... So even though I said, “No, no, no,” to my husband, I could not say no to President Bjorling extending the call for *me* to serve—

Alex Haurie: Right.

Sue Mathews: In the Presidency, and that gave an opportunity for my family, for the first time, to be a part of Pageant.

Alex Haurie: Oh, wow.

Ethan Herbst: It’s interesting. I was wondering—I wasn’t entirely sure what the title of Primary Presidency entailed. But, that’s...

Sue Mathews: Yeah, so Primary, there’s a president, and there’s a first counselor, a second counselor, and at Pageant, though, we did not necessarily need a secretary, but in a regular congregation, you would. And so, my role was—my assignment was the seven—I think, six-, seven-, eight-year-olds—so that would be senior Primary, and then the other counselor got the

other, the younger group, and I—and each one's, 'cause we had our own tents, we had some Primary teachers. They [are] sometimes called—they're helpers, Primary helpers, but I like to call them Primary teachers, 'cause that's what we do. We teach each other. And... And then the President gets to do everything else that needs to be taken care of that the counselors are not able to or are not assigned to do.

So, we work well together, and we've always had fantastic Primary teachers and the children. And it's wonderful because, even though I served in that capacity for five years, we didn't always have the same teachers or—you know, coming every year, volunteering. It flows so nicely because, again, it's organized in such a way that everyone has a role to play. And it just works out nicely know[ing] we're there together. We don't have to do it alone.

Alex Haurie: Oh, it's actually very cool seeing how there's always—while you're setting up this Pageant, and all that stuff, when you don't have—when you're not doing much, you have time to be around the kids and all that, and having to take care—I could imagine that having to watch over children and take care of them while you're setting up this really big Pageant can get a little hectic and stuff. So, to have that free time to just be with them for a little bit is very nice.

Sue Mathews: So, there is one, I guess, caveat for being a Primary Presidency. A majority of the—I guess I should say, we're one of the few staff members who can be—who are allowed to be in the Pageant as also cast members. And that was a wonderful opportunity.

Alex Haurie: Really.

Sue Mathews: Because most staff members are behind the scenes, busy doing everything else that nobody else in the audience knows about, right? But since we're in the Primary, we get to be—we get to have a part in the Pageant if we wanted to. We chose to do that. So—but Darren, did you say something?

Darren Mathews: No, I was just—you were mentioning about how you were one of the callings that allows you to be in the in the show as well. In my particular position, you know, I was strictly behind the scenes.

[Sue Mathews says something indistinctly]

Alex Haurie: Right. So, then, the very obvious follow up question to that was, did you ever decide to participate in the Pageant? Did you play a casting [sic] role?

Sue Mathews: Yes, matter of fact, again, our first year. And since our youngest—she was actually almost eight—she was actually in my senior Primary tent with me, and so I took that as an opportunity to be with my daughter. She's the youngest. And we were able to have—the children have the best scene, my personal opinion—

Alex Haurie: Right.

Sue Mathews: In the Pageant. They get to be with the Savior Jesus Christ, in the descension scene, and that was my favorite part. And for me and my daughter, we had the special opportunity to be part of the small court and the circle right before the Savior ascends. And it was just so beautiful. It was so spiritual, even though we knew it was just a portrayal of the story. That was fantastic. I will never forget that. And I know it was a very wonderful experience for our daughter, Jenna, who actually was also interviewed for the questions that are being asked for what you're doing.

Alex Haurie: Oh, wow! That's amazing.

Sue Mathews: [15:00] Yeah, so she's out at BYU, but she's had the most—well, the longest experience out of all our children, so I'm glad she had the opportunity to also to be able to share her thoughts. But yes, I did choose to be a part of it. I think towards the end, though, I—there might have been one year I chose not to so I can actually see my own family on stage. [laughs]

[Alex Haurie says something indistinctly]

Sue Mathews: Because, you know, with four children, I'd like to see as a parent, to be able to see—watch my family. Because my husband, because of him being the prop master, he was doing everything behind the scenes, so he misses a lot of the shows. So...

Alex Haurie: Right, oh, I can imagine having to work on all that stuff.

Sue Mathews: So, I spent five years in the Primary Presidency. And then I, after five years, because again, wanting—the Presidency wanted—the Pageant presidency wanting to continue with Darren being the prop master, I'm sure they had to find something for me to do.

Alex Haurie: Right.

Sue Mathews: They asked me to serve as a resource where, basically, we provide activities for the cast when they're not rehearsing, so, whether it's games, crafts, whatnot. [laughs]

Alex Haurie: Okay.

Sue Mathews: So that was my job. I oversaw that with some assistants, also, for another five years.

Alex Haurie: Oh, wow. But that actually sounds like a fun job to do.

Sue Mathews: It is because that one actually allowed me to not be there all the time, because I had my assistants.

Alex Haurie: Mhmm.

Sue Mathews: So, I think—and plus living locally, that was another perk for me. I could work part-time if I wanted to because, again, I could, and I did. And it worked out nicely, because we got to go home every night and, you know, be clean, have showers, et cetera, and not have to worry. But you know, the sacrifice has been so great by a lot of the Pageant—the cast members who were not locally, you know, in proximity to do that.

Alex Haurie: Right.

Sue Mathews: So I think the sacrifice is greater for them, even though we all did our own.

Alex Haurie: Right. So then, yeah, it's—that's very interesting. And I'm actually curious, for Darren, how did you get involved becoming a prop master since Sue—

Ethan Herbst: Yeah.

Alex Haurie: Was called on to do [this]?

Ethan Herbst: That was my next train of thought. I was gonna pop in and ask basically ask that.

Alex Haurie: Okay, cool.

Ethan Herbst: Good transition!

Alex Haurie: [laughs] Awesome.

Darren Mathews: The first year we were called, Sue was actually, you know—she mentioned [she was] called to be in the Primary Presidency. And me, I was just assigned that first year, 2008. We were in it from 2008 to 2018. And that first year, I was just assigned to one of the adult cast teams. And during the day, the first week, everybody's often rehearsing, and so I'm just kind of sitting around, doing nothing. She kept trying to recruit me to come in and help with the kids and stuff. And, you know, I raised my own, but I don't necessarily thoroughly enjoy being around so many other kids. [laughs]

Alex Haurie:s Right.

Darren Mathews: So, I'd watch my kids, you know, do their thing and so forth. And then, one of—there were two guys in the prop shop. Eric Trescott was the prop master at the time, and the other was Bishop Morgan, and he was he mentioned that he was moving. He notified them that he was gonna move out of state, and so they were looking for somebody to be in an assistant. And so, I think in February of 2009, we got a call from the Pageant President, and he extended a

calling to me to serve as an assistant in the prop shop. And so, then, for the next three years, 2009, '10, '11, I was an assistant to Eric Truscott, as he was the prop master. And then he—they released him. And then I took over as the prop master for the next seven years. And it was—I mean, I could talk—I can answer any question you have about props and things like that in great detail, but not sure how much how much you want to know. [laughs]

Ethan Herbst: Oh, for sure. Yeah. Did you have any prior experience in, like, working with [props]—like, woodworking or just, like, whatever, whatever processes, you used to make props, that you have, like, prior experience going in?

Darren Mathews: You know, it's interesting. My wife had always mentioned—we would be out shopping in stores or something, and she'd come across a table or a chair or whatever, and she's like, "Can you make that? Can you make that?" And I didn't—sure, but I just don't have the tools at the time. And so, when I came into be an assistant, Eric Trescott, he had a graduate degree in metalworking, and he taught me a great deal. I didn't have any prior experience. My career is in information technology. But, you know, I'm very much a do-it-yourselfer [20:00] kind of guy. In fact, my daughter, she kind of compared me to Tony Stark, who had a—you know, his [workshop]—his hobby shop, and he makes stuff and, and I've got a hobby in microelectronics and things, and so I could fix and make little things tinkering around the house, you know.

But when I get started in the prop shop, Eric taught me kind of— this is—the props that we made for that particular stage were larger than they would be on a normal movie set or, you know, in movies and films and on [a] Broadway stage or something like that, because our stage was so much bigger, and the audience was so much further away. So, everything we made had to be bigger and flat—you know, showier—and some of the banners and the things that we would

make with colors and sequins and bright and shiny, sparkly paint and stuff like that, it just had to be so much bigger. But, you know, I credit Eric for really, really teaching me the ropes and how things work, and then that carried me on for the next seven years after that. That was good.

Sue Mathews: May I add to that, the—it was unrealized talent that Darren would not have had the opportunity to pursue, had he not served as prop master or even an assistant in Pageant.

Because he—that’s one of his talents. He likes to tinker. He makes beautiful things. And, I mean, he’s slowly invading the garage as his workshop. So... [laughs]

Darren Mathews: Yeah.

Alex Haurie: So, when you were going through being the prop master, was there—like, is there—did you have to follow a certain set of [instructions], like, “These props need to be made this very specific way”? Or did you—was there a little bit of creativity, like, did you—were able to bring, like, a lot of your ideas on how stuff should be made, or maybe like you saw, “Oh, we can make it this way, it’ll be a little—it’ll lot [sic]—it’ll be a lot easier to move around and do this, this, or that”? Or were there, like, very specific things that you were, like, told to do as you made these props?

Darren Mathews: You know, it’s interesting. They gave us free rein to do just about whatever we wanted. And so, Eric and I really had a symbiotic relationship of ideas. We could—he and I worked extremely well together, and I really cherish those three years. Because the directors—every year, you’d get—sometimes, you’d get a new director for a specific scene. Many times, the directors were there for five, six, seven years, as well, and so they would be with us the whole time. But some years, they’d come and say, “You know, I want to change this scene. I want to get rid of this; I want to change that; I want to get rid of the fabrics or use something that’s a little flashy; or, let’s get some different baskets.” They had—might have given us a little bit of a,

you know, an idea: “I’d like this.” And—like King Noah’s chair: We replaced his throne chair, and the technical director came in and said, “I want a chair that’s kind of like this.” And he just kind of quickly sketched something out on paper, and after that, it was just left up to us.

And so—I’ve been—a lot of people mentioned how I’m just kind of like an idea hamster. I’ll generate ideas, and then they just percolate and, you know, I’ll run on a treadmill, you know? I’m just—the ideas are just constantly going. And so, the creativity between Eric and I was, you know—it was really, really fun to work with him. And then, you know, I think in great—in many great instances, you know, the Spirit prompted us what to do and how to make things. Because it was, you know, for a religious pageant, and we were steered and guided in some of the directions that we took. And we didn’t realize that at the very moment, but later on, we can see how we made something and developed something, and how it would last and hold up, and show on stage and stuff. Yeah, we were guided in some of the stuff that we did, certainly.

Ethan Herbst: So, kind of working off of that, was there any special meaning to you spiritually, that working in the prop shop, working as the prop master, provided?

Darren Mathews: Yeah, you know, when we first started, and I was learning (and kind of as an assistant), I felt from Eric this kind of overall theme that he owned the props. He was the prop master at the time, and so I kind of adopted that mentality. And I didn’t really have an enjoyable experience at some level over the next couple of [25:00] years. And then, after he left, in the very next year, I had an assistant, Merrill—John Merrill—

Sue Mathews: Mmm.

Darren Mathews: from Utah, and he was my assistant for five years. And I kind of adopted that same mentality, the—“Hey, these are my products; you need to take care of them and everything.” And it just didn’t sit right. It didn’t feel right. When the Pageant was over, I didn’t

feel good about it. I didn't feel like I had a great experience or anything. And then that very next year, months before, I started praying and said, "Okay, what can I do better? What, how can I..." And so, I kind of adopted a different mindset and thought, you know, we work in the prop shop. We make props because props *hold up* the support of the actors that are on stage. We're here as a *support* for them. Everything *I* do, all the *props* that we make, is, you know, for the fulfillment and enrichment of the character that's being portrayed on the stage. And so, without that prop, you know, Lehi just—you know, without his staff, or without a set of gold plates—so, without the arc, the tent, there's palm trees, and there's all kinds of things in that stage—all the weapons... You know, [if] you had a whole stage full of Lamanite [and] Nephi battle men, and they didn't have any props, it would look kind of silly up there, fighting. And so, the props are there to help bring the richness of their character to life. And I kind of adopted that mindset. I prayed for it long and hard about, you know, "What can I do? Let me get out of the way. These aren't *my* props. Let me just get out of the way. I'm just here to take care of them because they belong to the show and those characters." And so, it really turned me 180, and the next several years after that, it was just fantastic 'cause I kept that same mindset every year.

Ethan Herbst: So, what is your favorite prop that you've made, if you have one?

Darren Mathews: Um, I just took it apart yesterday, actually.

[unidentified interviewer laughs]

Darren Mathews: It was the last prop I ever made. It was a... Have you seen *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* and *The Raiders of the Lost Ark* and that?

Alex Haurie: Yes.

Darren Mathews: And you know that ark that had the dogs sitting on top of it that's called the mercy seat, and they had the long poles and everything? [*Editor's Note: Darren is referring to the depiction of the Ark of the Covenant in the film.*]

Alex Haurie: Right.

Darren Mathews: Years ago, we cut down some trees in our yard, and one of them was maple, and I had it slabbed up, and it dried for several years. And I made out of that maple tree an *ark*. And... I've got a CNC [Computerized Numerical Control] machine my wife gifted me years ago as part of my growing tool and shop collection. And so, I sat with my youngest daughter, who'd been in Pageant for many years, and I said, "Okay, Jenna, I'm making an ark. Help me—how it's gonna—you know, how do we put this together? Give me some ideas." And we sit down in the basement, and we just kind of sketched some rough draft[s] and some ideas and everything.

And so, I ended up the—I made the whole frame and the legs and in the staffs that they carry it with out of that maple tree. And then, on my CNC machine, I carved the top of that ark. I couldn't make the doves that sit on top of it. Because of the way it's used in the show, they put the scriptures on top of it, so it needed to be flat. And so, what I did was, on my CNC machine, I carved out a sun with the rays of the sun—there's 12 rays of the sun—and in Hebrew, I carved in all the names of the 12 tribes of Israel—

Alex Haurie: Wow.

Darren Mathews: Into that, and then I carved in some doves that you can see on there. They're just laying [sic] flat. But that was the last prop I ever made, and they used it in the show.

Most of the time, we don't make new props every year. Most of the time, it's just repair and upkeep and things like that. But that was one that they—that we needed to replace the old one that was just breaking down. And...

Alex Haurie: Mhmm.

Darren Mathews: I think the last two years I was in it, and then the next year that we weren't. But they gifted that to me when they tore down the Pageant and hauled everything away and got rid of it. They let me keep that one.

Alex Haurie: Wow.

Darren Mathews: And I just took it apart yesterday, and I'm gonna save the top only. [laughs]

Alex Haurie: Oh. Huh. [laughs]

Sue Mathews: Let me get—you want me to show it to 'em, Darren? I can get it.

Darren Mathews: Sure! Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Alex Haurie: No, we would love to see it.

[Sue says something indistinct in the background]

Darren Mathews: It's just been in the garage.

Alex Haurie: Oh, and also, any pictures you'd love to share, or anything, with us, to—just send through the email, so we can put it in the catalog for people to see. Because I know that we—for our project, we're also uploading, like, pictures and stuff like that to the website.

Darren Mathews: I'll put them up put a bunch of them together. I'll probably send it in multiple emails.

Alex Haurie: Yeah, that works.

Darren Mathews: Okay, so I'll just zip 'em up and send them to you as an attachment or put them on the Google Drive or something like that. You can just download the link.

Alex Haurie: Yeah. Sounds perfect.

Darren Mathews: Yeah, good.

[30:00]

[Sue returns to the room with the ark prop]

Darren Mathews: There she is.

Alex Haurie: Oh, wow.

[Sue holds up the top covering of the ark]

Sue Mathews: I don't know if you can see it?

Alex Haurie: Yeah, we can.

Ethan Herbst: Yeah, wow, that's beautiful.

Sue Mathews: It is.

Darren Mathews: I don't know if you can show it—

[Indistinct; crosstalk by Sue and Darren]

Darren Mathews: Star up so you can see the carvings that are in there.

Alex Haurie: Yeah, I can [unclear].

Ethan Herbst: Yeah, I can see that...

Alex Haurie: That's so interesting.

[Unclear words by Ethan].

Darren Mathews: The Star of David there in the middle, and then the 12 tribes of Israel carved in Hebrew.

Ethan Herbst: *Yeah.* It's very nice lettering.

Sue Mathews: And then, we tease him about this when we tell him it looks like a Harley Davidson thing.

[laughter]

Alex Haurie: It looks like on the back of a biker's jacket.

Sue Mathews: Well, Darren also had a Harley at one time anyway, too, so... [laughs] But, you know what? Darren also was behind the scenes and photographer for Pageant. He took some beautiful pictures under the stage and everything, and... So, as far as pictures go, he *has* pictures. [laughter]

Alex Haurie: Oh. Perfect. We'd love to see them.

Darren Mathews: I don't know if you heard him, Sue. [We were] just talking about that when you ran up [from] the garage, because he was just asking about pictures. That's why—

Sue Mathews: [Unclear] Okay.

Darren Mathews: Yeah, I—because I knew that stage, you know, extremely well, crawling in and around it, when the show would go on, I would grab my camera, and I would climb in *under* the stage. And it's a big multi-level, seven-layer, ten-[level]—seven-level?—stage, something like that. And so, there's places in there that you can crawl up in—under the stage that you can't see from the audience because the audience is down in the bowl, and the stage is up on the hill. And so, it's flat up here, so I can hide back in these little nooks and crannies and things, and so I could take pictures that no other photographer could take.

Alex Haurie: Right.

Darren Mathews: Because if—

Sue Mathews [talking simultaneously with Darren]: Yeah, only if you are allowed to be in the backs—in the, you know, behind the scenes—like Darren, so he was able to do that.

Darren Mathews: Yeah. So... I'll send you a bunch of pictures.

Alex Haurie: That's really cool.

Ethan Herbst: Yeah.

Alex Haurie: Ethan, do you have any particular questions that you want to ask before I shift to the next topic?

Ethan Herbst: No. Basically, everything that I was curious about, got covered.

Alex Haurie: Really cool. So, then, the—because, you know, the last three years, it's very important to ask this question of how it was—you know, [how] the Pageant [was] affected with COVID and all those, and how everything, you know, really changed when all that kind of started.

[Darren and Sue begin to speak simultaneously]

Darren Mathews: The Church—

Sue Mathews: Yeah.

Darren Mathews: The Church announced in 2018—no, 2019 [*editor's note: the announcement was in 2018*]*]*—that the last year of the Pageant would be 2020, and so they were going to shut it down. And I think it was originally and always had been a missionary tool, you know, to bring people some exposure to the Church and coming forth to the Book of Mormon, and tell of, you know, scenes from its story—the pages of the Book and different scenes and things. But they had announced that the end of pageant was going to be 2020. And then, when COVID hit, they—we already had—you know, 2019 had already come, and so they had the Pageant that year, and [said], “Okay, it's just gonna be one more year.” And then, they just announced [in 2021] that, yeah, we're not gonna do it. It's over.

And so then, interestingly—so Sue and I are members of the Fairport ward here in—uh, locally. And Kurt Jurgens was the technical director when I first started. And he was called to come back out here to... He ran a production company in Utah—technical crew and making large stage props and things like that. He was the technical director, and so he came back out

here. He and his wife were called to come out here and dismantle the entire scenery, all of the buildings and all of that, so he was overseeing that as a service missionary. And so, this last year [2021], when they basically bulldozed all the buildings and re-landscaped and things like that, he was out here, and he came to our ward. And so, I got to spend a little time and chat with him again. So, that was good to have that kind of reunion.

But, you know, it was sad. There's a lot of people that were a little bit kind of hurt by—

Sue Mathews: Or upset. [laughs]

Darren Mathews: Oh. Yeah, or—I'm sure some people were upset, but there's lots of Facebook groups out there for you know, Pageant reunions and pageant alumni and things like that. So, we still—you know, you make—it was interesting because it was two weeks every year, we'd go out there and serve. And for, you know, 11 years that we were involved, there were some people that would be in the Pageant one year, and then they would come back maybe two or three years later. They would apply, and they were in it again. And every year you—when you would see them like that, even though it'd been three or four years, you—it was like you—those years hadn't gone by. It was like a little [35:00] family reunion again because—

Alex Haurie: Right.

Darren Mathews: They don't change that—people don't change that much. And so, we've made just dozens and dozens of friends through Pageant, serving with them as staff, and some of them just come and be in it, so—

Sue Mathews: Right.

Darren Mathews: A lot of fun [best guess].

Sue Mathews: Right. And it was, you know, bittersweet, and it—but it was good closure for us—again, we live close—to see the change after everything was dismantled, et cetera, to

basically bring it back to its natural state. And it allows us to have—be reflective, and how fortunate our family has been to have the opportunity for 11 years. I mean, that's not—that's unheard of. Our—basically, our children grew up in Pageant every year. That was our summer vacation, our vacation, because 17 days, you know, it's a long time—

[Alex says something indistinct]

Sue Mathews: If you think of taking time off from work and going on vacation. It was just the hardest, and yet most rewarding, experience we've ever been a part of. So...

Alex Haurie: That's actually really wonderful. And I can imagine why people would be very upset saying that 2020 would be the last year, and then you don't get the opportunity to do the final year. Just...

Sue Mathews: Right.

Alex Haurie: And it's really unfortunate 'cause a lot of stuff because of COVID—things happen[ed] like that, you know.

Ethan Herbst: Yeah, it threw off a lot of people's closure on the whole thing.

Darren Mathews: Yeah.

Sue Mathews: Sure.

Darren Mathews: And then they had purchased T-shirts and memorabilia that said, you know, 2020—

Sue Mathews: Mmm.

Darren Mathews: But there was no 2020 Pageant. [laughs]

Alex Haurie: Yeah, what do you do with that?

[Darren laughs]

Alex Haurie: Was there any work that either of you did, going into the 2020 Pageant before it was cancelled, or just—?

Darren Mathews: Not at all.

Alex Haurie: Not at all?

Sue Mathews: No. Darren was asked to help with something, a platform for the visitors' tent, but again, with COVID, everything was cancelled. But he is still trying to finalize something that will go in the stake center, though, that's part of the Pageant. You tell them that, Darren?

Darren Mathews: Yeah, the new stake president—well, he was a counselor in the Pageant Presidency that last couple of years, and he's now the Palmyra stake president. And he approached me, and he wanted to make some sort of a—he wants to make a picture frame that has a collage of pictures and things. So, his wife and daughter put together this very nice picture frame, kind of a shadowbox look to it. And then he brought over a sword and one of the angels' trumpets, and he wants me to polish and clean and mount those on a—kind of a wood backing, so that they can take his picture and hang it up in the stake center, and then have this horn and sword mounted on either side of it, and—as well as a sign, so I'll carve up a little sign on my CNC machine that will go above the picture. So, I'm—actually, I have a deadline of next month to get that in.

[laughter]

Alex Haurie: Very cool.

Darren Mathews: I'm still working on Pageant. [laughs] So...

Alex Haurie: That's... That's absolutely wonderful. I do not think I have any more questions, honestly.

Ethan Herbst: Yeah, I think I'm pretty much set, too.

Sue Mathews: Wonderful. Well, thank you for the opportunity. And—

Alex Haurie and Ethan Herbst [simultaneously]: Yeah.

Sue Mathews: I'm not sure when you're wrapping this up.

Alex Haurie: Mmm.

Sue Mathews: If you need other—help from other Pageant people, let us know, because we know a lot of them. [laughs]

Alex Haurie: Yes, I—from what I heard, you've made a lot of friends.

Darren Mathews: Yeah

Alex Haurie [best guess]: Yeah.

[Sue laughs]

Ethan Herbst: Yeah, thanks for talking to us.

Sue Mathews: Oh, thank you.

Darren Mathews: You bet.

Sue Mathews: It's our pleasure. And we wish you both well in your endeavors, and—

Alex Haurie: Thank you so much

Sue Mathews: [unclear] locally, if you ever need anything, we're good for it. So, you have our email addresses now and such. So, please don't hesitate. We're—it's open for you anytime.

Alex Haurie: Thank you so much.

Ethan Herbst: Awesome. Yeah, thank you.

Sue Mathews: You're welcome. Please stay well.

Darren Mathews: I'll put some pictures—

Ethan Herbst: You, too.

Darren Mathews: [and send] them your way.

Alex Haurie: Awesome. And then, just in case—'cause we have to, like, type out this whole conversation and do all that, which is going to be a *lot* of work, but just in case, I will definitely email you—either of you—about just, maybe, a clarification of, “Oh, I don’t think I heard properly. Could you spell this out?” For a name or whatever. So, we’ll still keep in touch in terms of that, probably.

Darren Matthews: Okay.

Sue Mathews: Wonderful.

Darren Matthews: Glad to help.

Sue Mathews: Thank you, both of you.

Alex Haurie: Thank you so much.

Darren Matthews: Alright.

Sue Matthews: Thank you.

Alex Haurie: Stay safe and be well. I hope you—

Ethan Herbst: Yes.

Alex Haurie: Recover quickly.

Darren Matthews: Yeah.

Sue Matthews: Yes. Thank you.

Alex Haurie: Thank you so much.

Ethan Herbst: Have a nice evening.

Darren Matthews: All right.

Sue Matthews: Bye-bye.

Alex Haurie: Bye. Pretty cool. I think that was—

Ethan Herbst: Yeah, that went really well.

Alex Haurie: Let me—

[recording ends]

Dublin Core Metadata for the Interview

Title: Interview with Darren and Sue Mathews, Sunday, April 10, 2022

Subject: Hill Cumorah Pageant, Manti Pageant, Utah, Philippines, Theater, Props, Carpentry, Primary, Education, Childcare, Family

Description: Alex Haurie and Ethan Herbst conduct a joint interview with Darren and Sue Mathews. Darren is a veteran of the U.S. Navy. Sue was born in the Philippines and was adopted by her uncle, who was in the Air Force. The couple lived in Utah for many years before relocating to the greater Rochester area. Sue discusses her experiences in the Primary Presidency of the Hill Cumorah Pageant, while Darren discusses his experience as a prop master. Particular attention is given to Darren and his daughter Jenna's work on an Ark of the Covenant prop.

Creator: Darren Mathews, Sue Mathews, Alex Haurie, and Ethan Herbst

Source: Hill Cumorah Legacy Project

Date: Sunday, April 10, 2022

Contributor: Alex Haurie, Ethan Herbst, and Daniel Gorman Jr.

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