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Title: LGBT Oral History: Clarke Hess and Lee Stoltzfuss

Date: August 14, 2013

Location: LGBT Oral History –Hess, Clark and Stoltzfuss, Lee—048

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Interviewee: Clarke Hess and Lee Stoltzfuss

Interviewer: Mark Stoner

Date: August 14, 2013

Location: Unidentified

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Abstract:

MS: Alright. Let me start. We'll go left to right on my side.

Lee Stoltzfuss: Alright. Sounds good.

MS: So, could you just give me your name, first. And what your birthday—the day you were born.

LS: My name is Lee Stoltzfuss and I was born October 19, 1954.

MS: And, Larry? [laughs] Clarke? Sorry.

Clarke Hess: [laughs] My name is [laughs] Clarke.

LS: [laughs]

MS: We can start again if you want. For posterity, Larry is Lee's twin brother. [laughs] So you do look like the Posse [ph] twins.

LS: See, we do look like the Posse twins [laughs].

CH: I look like my twin sister.

LS: Yeah, he has a twin sister.

MS: I didn't know that!

LS: I'm glad you didn't call me Cheryl [ph] 'cause that's his twin sister's name.

MS: Well, just wait! It's OK. Alright, could I have your name and you date of birth and place where you were born.

LS: Sure, Lee Stoltzfuss is my name and I was born October 19, 1954. And I was born close to Honeybrook. Honeybrook in Chester county.

CH: My name [laughs] is Clarke Hess and I was born June 16th, 1954. In Lebanon, Pennsylvania.

MS: And Clarke, who were your parent's names?

CH: Walter and Ruth Hess.

MS: And how about other siblings?

CH: I have eight siblings. You want their names or?

MS: Sure.

LS: That's a lot of siblings. [laughs]

CH: My older sibling was—or is, W. Roy Hess. Next is Robert L. Hess. Followed by John P. Hess. Followed by James B. Hess. Followed by C. Richard Hess. Followed by Ruth Ann, and then Earl K. And myself and my twin sister Cheryl.

MS: Spoken like a real genologist.

CH: Yeah. [chuckles]

MS: And Lee?

LS: Okay, I forgot what the question is now. Oh, siblings.

MS: Siblings.

LS: Okay. Actually, it's very similar to Clarke's. Just different names. My parent's had nine children. His had eight.

CH: Nine.

LS: Nine. And I'm in a multiple birth just like he's in a multiple birth. I'm a set of triplets, just like he's in a set of twins. And we triplets were born when my mom was in her forties just like he and his sister were born when she was...

CH: My mother was...not quite, 39.

LS: So, we're both the last in our multiple births. So I don't know if I can remember all the names of my siblings, but there's Sherly Stoltzfuss, Jay Stoltzfuss, Mary Lou [ph] Stoltzfuss...Jimmy [ph] Stoltzfuss, Calvin Stoltzfuss and then the three of us triplets are Lee, Larry and Linda. They were going to name us Esther, Chester and Lester. But they came to—

MS: [laughs]

CH: [laughs]

LS: ...Lee, Larry and Linda. For which I will be forever grateful they changed that name.

MS: So, my next question is why you're both here. Have either of you been married, or?

LS: The answer is no.

CH: No. Never.

MS: But, both of you have been together a long time?

LS: We have, yeah. It's...I guess depends on when you start counting. We don't really have an anniversary because we were friends before we became partners. So, we can't really have an official anniversary date unlike some people.

CH: We've been together almost 26 years.

LS: Yeah. It's been a long time.

CH: We knew each other for awhile before we started living together, so.

MS: And, neither of you have any children?

LS: That's right.

MS: How long have you been living in this town?

CH: I moved to Liddus [ph] in 1985. I bought this property. I didn't move into this property, I moved to a temporary [chuckles] housing in town.

LS: Yeah, I been here that same amount of time. Well, actually living in Clarke's family's homestead. It was built by his family in the 1740's. They were farmers. A farm family. And it was in his family till the 1920's. His farm. It left the family and then he purchased it in...

CH: In '85.

LS: In '85. Started restoring it. Took about two years to restore it. Meanwhile, I was—my brother and I were living in the summer kitchen which is right across the patio here. Then, after about two years of being restored he moved in the big house and then shortly after that I moved into the big house too. So, it's been a long time. Yeah.

MS: And this house is kind of unique. The size of it being a family house, almost everything in it is period or from your family.

CH: Pretty much. I've been collecting antiques since I've was 12 so it's kind of an obsession of mine.

LS: Clarke is very modest but he's actually the—one of the leading historians of Mennonite material culture here in Lancaster County. One of the leading historians in Mennonite Folklife in Lancaster County in Mennonite history and has been...well, he wrote a book called Mennonite

Arts and Mennonite Antiques. So this house was sort of a museum of Lancaster County of Mennonite history. I have often referred to it as the Hans Her House North.

MS: [chuckles]

LS: Hans Her House of course is the oldest house in Lancaster County built in about 1710.

CH: 19.

LS: 1719.

CH: 1719.

LS: And this—this house, at least the first floor was built in the 1740's and actually pre-dates the town of Liddus. So it's, sort of like living in a museum really. In a museum of Mennonite in Lancaster County history.

MS: Hm. So you both have deep Lancaster County roots?

CH: Oh yes.

LS: Yeah. Mine are Amish and his are Mennonites. And Amish and Mennonite never marry, so. I guess we're still following that tradition I don't know.

CH: I have Mennonite, primarily Mennonite ancestry. But, I do have a little Lutheran and Reformed and some Church of the Brethren also.

MS: Just to spice it up a little.

CH: Right. For rioting [ph].

LS: My ancestry's all Amish. My father was from Lancaster County Amish and my mother was from Somerset County Amish. So, I always say I have a hybrid vigor—East Coast and West Coast thing going on. But, I don't know if it's true or not. But both my parents had been Amish until they were teenagers, and then they decided they wanted to have cars and electricity so they joined the (___?) so I grew up Mennonite instead of growing up Amish. Which I'm glad for. I don't think I'd make a very good Amishman.

CH: [chuckles]

LS: For some reason.

MS: Where did you grow up?

LS: In Morgantown area. My father started—helped to start Rockville [ph] Mennonite Church which was an offshoot of Conastoga [ph] Mennonite Church. So, I grew up in the Morgantown

Honeybrook area. Which is an ancestral area for the Amish community area there so it's like an Amish stronghold, that whole Eastern end of the valley I should say.

MS: And when did you move here, then?

LS: I had been living in Harrisburg teaching school for awhile then I moved back to Lancaster.

MS: Okay. And Clarke, where did you grow up?

CH: My family lived on the farm in Lebanon County till I was five. Then, we moved to Mana Township, Lancaster County. But all of my ancestors lived here in the county. My family had only lived out of the county from 1943 to 1960. So, I was born in Lebanon. [bell tolls loudly in background].

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