

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Women's History

Personal Experiences

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NAOMI HESS

Interviewed

By

Beth Burr

On

November 6, 1995

NAOMI HESS

Naomi Hess was born in Uniontown, Pennsylvania on October 26, 1915. There were ten children in her good Christian family. She claims the family did not have many outside friends, simply because they did not have any room for them.

Naomi went to nursing school in Pittsburgh and after graduating she continued working in the city. She got home sick and returned to Uniontown. She worked in nursing until her marriage in 1939. She returned to her career when her oldest son decided to go to college. To help him through school, she did private duty nursing.

At the time she went into nursing, this career was considered unladylike. It was not an honorable profession. Naomi was proud to be a nurse and speaks fondly of her experiences.

Naomi attends church regularly. She enjoys sewing, baking, crocheting, gardening and painting ceramics. Once a week, Naomi goes to a quilting bee at her church. The quilts that are produced are given to charitable causes.

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INTERVIEWEE NAOMI HESS

INTERVIEWER Beth Burr

SUBJECT Women's History

DATE November 6, 1995

B This is an interview with Naomi Hess for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program. The topic is Women's History and how life has changed for women throughout their lifetime. The interview is being done by Beth Burr at the home of Naomi Hess in Conneaut, Ohio on November 6, 1995. As far back as you can remember, tell me about your childhood, where you grew up, who your family and friends were, and what you did for fun.

H I remember having a lot of sisters and brothers. There were 10 of us. My kid sister and I kind of ran around together. We had a good home life. Dad had a garden and mom always worked hard to can everything. We always had good things on the table to eat. I remember moving into Uniontown, we walked to grade school. There weren't any buses to take us there. There were six grades that attended that school. We walked two miles to get to junior high that had seventh, eighth, and ninth grade. At high school we had sophomore, junior, and senior years. Then, we lived on the next street from the high school so all we had to do was shoot through the alley and we were there. That was nice. The family lived on Pennsylvania Avenue then. We had four girls in two beds in one room. It's a good thing we all got along. I can remember the small closet that held all of our clothes. Back then we didn't have very much clothing. There were two boys in the next bedroom. There was another brother in another bedroom. Mom, dad, and the baby were in the largest bedroom. We all got along so well. We went to church every Sunday. My oldest brother decided that he'd build a little cottage out in the country. We all would go out there in the summer. We wore khaki shorts, bloomers, and khaki shirts. We ran bare foot most of the summer, but mom always had to buy us new shoes when we came back in to go to school. We would walk from the cottage to church and Sunday school.

B How did different national events, like the Depression, affect your family?

H World War was very vague. I remember one of my brothers died in 1918. I don't remember too much about him. I also had a baby sister that died about that time,

too We celebrated right in to all the national holidays I had a grandfather that was in the Civil War, he told us some good stories He also told us that he fought Indians out West As far as I can remember Pearl Harbor was devastating I was thankful that no one in my family fought in any of the wars I don't remember too much about the wars

B What about the Depression?

H Oh, yeah! There were apples sellers going around Someone asked my mother why she didn't get food stamps She said not as long as there was good food in the house to eat She was too proud to ask for food stamps We did have a wonderful garden They had a cow for milk and butter We also had chickens It was hard We didn't have everything Mom cut hair and did everything like she was a barber Dad also had work He was a carpenter We got through somehow It wasn't a pleasant time We did without rather than worry The boys worked around town and they would contribute to the family Two sisters worked and had good jobs and the rest were still in school We got through the Depression without too much trouble

B Now let's talk about your adult life I want to know about your marriage, your children, and your career

H I graduated from Uniontown Senior High I was about fourteenth in a class of about 300 and some I did have good grades I had no trouble getting into Pittsburgh Training School for Nurses, which is now Shadyside Hospital I spent three years in training I took my tests and graduated as a Registered Nurse in 1936 I did some private duty for a while Then you made four dollars for an eight-hour duty It wasn't very profitable for me, so I went on as staff at the hospital I made more money and was provided with room, board, and laundry They were good to me I loved it I worked in the operating room and the nursery I loved the nursery I had an enjoyable time I began to get homesick I came home and began to work at the Uniontown hospital After that I got a state job I worked there until I got married in June 1939 After that, I was a housewife Two years later I had my first child Three years later I had a little girl Then five years later I had a little boy I went back to nursing after my oldest son wanted to go away to college My husband wouldn't pay for schooling, so I went back as a staff nurse and worked there He wanted to go to MIT We thought that was too expensive, so he applied and was accepted into Case He decided he didn't want to go on so he joined the Air Force without even telling us He served overseas He worked with the government and got a good job from there He has a family now and is very happy Susan went into training as a nurse She graduated as a RN Peter went to Penn State on a scholarship He would work six months and go to school for six months with US Steel It was a five-year scholarship

B How did you meet your husband?

H I went to school with him We went to the junior picnic and since then we were together I had many marriage offers, but I liked my high school sweetheart He's another reason I wanted to come home I didn't want him to get away from me We were married 46 years before he died We had a very happy life

B One of the last questions is about your life What keeps you busy?

H My husband was very sick for two years before he died I didn't do anything but stay home with him I retired in 1962 When he died I stayed in that house for a year and then Susan talked me into coming here I sold the house and moved here in May I am 80 years old I go to church every Sunday I do a lot of baking for my children

B I would like to know a little bit about what has changed for women over the years What opportunities they now have that they once didn't

H I think there are more women at companies in the executive positions That wouldn't have occurred back when I was growing up Nursing wasn't a very honorable position for a young lady when I went into training I was very proud to be a nurse and enjoyed it so much Women have expanded so that they are more important, sometimes, than men

B Is that good or bad?

H I think women know more about building a house and know more about what is needed in a house that men do I would like to see more women architects I think landlords should be women

B Tell me about a role model in your life Who influenced you and your thoughts?

H My mother, my oldest sister, and my oldest brother all had more influence over my whole life than anyone else My brother was more like a father to me, because my father was gone a lot with his work My mother was a strong person, very moral I had a good life and a good family

B What do you think about mothers today?

H I think they are working and not taking care of their children Some need to stay home more And if mothers weren't trying to give their kids every last thing they want then they could be at home more Kids always have to have the latest things

B Do you want to add anything?

H I can't think of anything else

B Thank you very much

End of Interview