

Kahler Wiebe

Interview by Jordan Roane

November 11, 2014 in Lawrence, Kansas

Transcribed by Jordan Roane

Abstract: Oral history interview of Kahler Wiebe conducted by Jordan Roane in Lawrence, Kansas, on November 11, 2014. Kahler is 15 years old and the youngest member of the Wiebe family. The Wiebe family regularly attends Grace Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) in Lawrence, Kansas, so Kahler has grown up going to church and learning about Jesus her whole life. Along with this, Kahler was raised in a family that very much values their faith, hard work, and putting others before themselves. She attributes much of this to her dad's Mennonite background. Kahler discusses her experiences growing up in the Wiebe household, attending church, and having strong Christian beliefs instilled in her. This interview was conducted for the Religion and Kansas Project as a term project for Professor Tim Miller.

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J: Alright Kahler, thanks so much for coming in today and agreeing to meet with me. I'm going to read this oral consent form really quick and then we can get started.

The Department of Religious Studies at the University of Kansas is conducting a research project that seeks to preserve and provide a publicly accessible record of the history of various churches and other religious organizations in Kansas. We seek to collect as many stories, information, and documents as possible, with the goal of creating, over time, a major repository of information on all kinds of religious bodies in Kansas, past and present. We would like to record your memories of your experiences in religious organizations. We expect that each interview will take about one hour. We assure you that you are not obligated to participate and may discontinue your involvement at any time. Since we are trying to create a public record of Kansas religious history, we are primarily interviewing persons who agree to let their interviews be available to the general public through the Religion in Kansas Project Website and to be identified by name as the person who was interviewed. Should you have any questions about the project, please contact Melissa Fisher Isaacs or Professor Tim Miller.

Awesome. Kahler, thanks again for coming in. I guess I just kind of what to start this off by asking a little bit about yourself, about your family and about your childhood. So if you want to begin with that.

K: Um ya, I grew up uh the youngest of 5 children, um my Mom and Dad, so total of 7. Um you know and they just kind of grew, loved and nurtured us into great adults and kids. Funny story about 5 kids, our Dad is super simplistic so he um

he got, okay sorry this is funny to me I don't know it might not be funny to you but we had since there was 5 kids he numbered us by age so the oldest was 1, the second oldest 2, I was number 5 so everything that was ours he labeled our number. So if we had special food no one else could eat it he would put our number on it so I always, 5 was a lucky number for me cause I always put that down as me in the family, oh that's blah blah blah's number and so we always had those as labeling. Funny things.

J: Awesome, so what was that like growing up the youngest of 5 kids?

K: Um I mean it was kind of, it was great because living in a big family and being the youngest you have 4 other people to learn from their mistakes and hopefully not having to make those same mistakes again. That's why everybody in the family jokes that I'm way older than I am which I'm very still immature but it's because I've grown up in um talking around the kitchen table things that people in middle school were doing and what I was doing it in kindergarten like so I was being put into older situations or like conversations in our house. It just kind of like matured me.

J: Awesome. What about your parents, what kind of things have they taught you or values have they instilled in you that you carry with you today?

K: Um, you know they always taught us to love the Lord and that is was a major thing um that they'd always talk about and related to something that happened or whatever that goes on in life, they'd have just Bible verses ready at their hand so you know just living the good Christian life, you know having that relationship with the Lord. Even when I was 13 years old, I'm 15 now, but they'd always pray that when we were growing up, giving a bedtime prayer, they would always say that I hope that you be with Kahler you know the kind of usual thing, and they would say that you would show yourself to her heart and that she would like realize you as um her Father. You know something along the lines of that and it was like I already committed myself to knowing that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and that he loved and I knew that and believed that but I thought it was great because they still always said that and that's why we didn't do communion until they made sure that we believed that so I didn't do communion until I was like 12 no maybe 11 something like that but they always wanted to make sure cause it's a big deal you know and not something to take lightly. Yeah loving the Lord is something that they definitely taught us and just to be a hard worker and like moral values, um yeah.

J: Awesome, Awesome. So um would you say you grew up going to church then?

K: Yeah, yes I did.

J: And do you still go to church now?

K: Uh huh. I do. And it's cool to see how much I've progressed and throughout the church, like I started in children's church and now I'm in the youth group and in high school, and it's cool to see um like the church and how you progress into it and stuff, um and it's just yeah.

J: What kinds of things has the church taught you?

K: Um, I mean just certain Biblical knowledge you know, facts and history. That's definitely what we do in Sunday school. Um now we are looking at how to defend our faith and looking at um evidence that isn't in the Bible like uh Tacitus all those old scholars and archeology of how it like explaining why this like actually truth and all the evidence that points towards it but um huge like when we were children um we would go to Sunday school in children's church and um you know you just learn the history and you know sing those songs like "Jesus loves me yes he does for the Bible tells me so", I don't really know the song that much anymore but you know you just grow up singing that and you kind of just you believe it and um I think that a major thing why our church is different from other churches um I mean I've never been to other churches but you can just see a difference in some people who say they're Christians um how people from Grace their relationship is lot more um evolved kind of and deeper um where in others you don't see that kind of that they bring you up knowing you have a relationship with the Lord and that's something to have and to hold and stuff so.

J: Awesome, so would you say your family is pretty involved in the church?

K: Um ya, super duper, um so my dad um is an elder at our church and so that means he um helps make decisions um kind of runs it, it's like um it's not like president but um like just the head people of the church um so he does make decisions and then he's on the mission team so they decide where the money will be given to like which different missions it will be given to um and he uh loves working with children, he's been a huge deal with the kids in our children's ministry. He works in he is a teacher for the, I'm trying to think, for Sunday school right now and he's just done that ever since I can remember. He was my teacher in Sunday school when I was in 5th grade, no 4th or 3rd grade but my mom and my dad were my teachers. My mom always runs our vacation Bible school, she's one of the head people with that and um they are definitely involved and they are a big part of church um considering their positions and stuff um everybody like, everybody just knows us and sometimes it's annoying but I mean it's nice not having to explain yourself but sometimes you just get a lot of questions and you're like I don't want to explain anymore. Ya so they are well known and they are just a huge part of our church and everybody always just loves them and um and we love them too. Um and a huge thing that happened, my Dad just recently, should I explain this? Okay so he had cancer, they found it like a month, 2 months ago maybe and they had his left eye removed. Um and so having to go through that struggle and stuff we saw a huge part of the church family and you,

a lot of times, you just don't, we wouldn't be having, like reaping so many benefits from the struggle if you didn't have the church family. I mean if that makes sense. You just see so many people giving, asking, and praying for us, bringing us dinners, um cause I mean they like us I guess. I'm not trying to be snotty but they just, since my parents have helped out with all of them, for 20 plus, 25 years or so, since like the church has been opened, you know they just get around and people know them, they came to say thank you for doing this for us by helping us.

J: So would you say that um your church has a strong, like community life?

K: Ya. Definitely. I mean I kind of talked about that, sorry I didn't answer your question but uh ya so I mean with what happened with my Dad uh you just you see all the people coming and you know that our church is, it seems, we just got a new addition, a new huge sanctuary and it makes our church look huge. It's kind of weird cause people are like, "Ya I know that church, it's a pretty big church", but to me it's not that big at all 'cause I know everybody there. I've grown up with a lot of them and like all the adults there and their families, we are just great friends and like I have a mom group that are moms from our church that are friends with my mom and they are like my second mom, like I could go to them with anything and that's great to have. Um ya you just see it by, you see this huge family because ya I mean, sorry I just lost my train of thought but um here we go, so because of like our church seeming big, it's really not cause you just, it's a huge family. I kind of re-said what I said earlier.

J: That's awesome. So um, before this interview we had talked about how um how you have obviously grown up in a Christian home, um but tell me a little bit about your Dad. Um, you had mentioned that he um went to a Mennonite church and um I'm going to talk to him later but tell me a little bit about that. Did he instill any values in you that maybe he learned as a kid growing up in a Mennonite church or did you guys learn about Mennonites at a young age? Like tell me a little bit about that.

K: Ya, um so my Dad, um growing up in a Mennonite church he was taught to, you know, they are hard workers so you get your work done and that was instilled into him and I'm just going to go with the hardworking thing. That's the main thing that I learned I guess 'cause it's so generic but so ya, growing up my Dad would always teach me to just be a hard worker and get your work done, like you are not going to be known, we are not going to let you be known to be a slacker. And so ya he would always, like 2 years ago maybe I was suppose to do some job but I forgot about it and because I mean I procrastinated, it was late at night, and my Dad started, I think it was mowing somebody's lawn or something, so like he started mowing it and I come out and said "Dad why are you doing this?", well actually it was after he did it, and he was like "I'm not gonna let the Wiebe name be known for slacking off or like not getting their work done", so ya definitely being like um not lazy. Oh here's another story. Okay so awkward

stages of 7th grade but I was, it was like when I wore sweatpants um, like one day of the week, and so I called that my lazy day and I told my Dad about it and he was like, “No you are never allowed to say the word lazy about yourself”, and I said “Oh, okay, I won’t!” and so I was just like oh, he’s serious, man. I cannot make the Wiebe name be put down. So ya, um and I grew up learning stories about my Dad’s ancestors um and how they came over from I guess it was kind of around Russia, Prussia, it was Prussia! But that’s not a country anymore but um, so they like um ya so I would just hear all these stories and I’d do these projects in school and I just loved learning about them because it was like, I’m connected to this, this is where I came from and so I learned how they didn’t like wars so they moved to different countries. And this girl, she was a woman, she was the Great Katherine, allowed them to stay but then the war came their way and they were allowed to, I mean they didn’t want to be a part of it and Katherine said that they had to, so then they moved away, then they brought the red turkey winter wheat, I don’t know which adjective goes before, is that an adjective? I don’t even know, wheat’s the noun, okay never mind. (Laughs) This is what you get for interviewing a teenager.

J: It’s okay, this is great.

K: Okay, well anyways, they brought that wheat over and they brought the best wheat, they had their children go and like pick out the seeds, saying pick out the best ones so they could bring the best to make the best crop over here, and that’s why, my Mom would always say that’s why Kansas is known for their wheat production because of the Mennonites bringing this over um, ya I mean, can you reiterate the question?

J: Um, what kinds of things did you learn about the Mennonites as a kid? So about the red turkey wheat and about them coming to Kansas. Any stories your Dad liked to tell you even about growing up in Hillsboro?

K: Ya, okay so man I love Hillsboro. We would always go visit them cause that’s where my grandparents live um, and I would love just going through the town and just seeing, like I mean it was a small town and my Dad would tell stories of things he did in this certain spot and there was a park right across the street um from my grandparents’ house and we would always go and play and um my Dad, there’s a little pond there and my Dad told me this one story, there was this one summer he had to paint that bridge that went across the pond um, and whenever I see that bridge I’m like, my Dad painted that and I’m just so proud of him. Ya, and just cool stories of him in high school and teenage things where they did dumb stuff but they were so cool um, oh and here’s one, one of his friends, he was the person who delivered milk throughout the town, so he had to get up early, and in the winter, my Dad told the story that he got up early and he went to go to the truck and to get the deliveries and the truck didn’t go forward, like it started and could back up, and being instilled in the community of Mennonites he’s like I have to get this done ‘cause this is my job, you know you gotta do it

and so he backed the whole truck all the way around the town delivering the milk, ya I mean just, what? Like that's not real, that didn't happen and my Dad's like no it did! So just cool things about just old times there and it's so interesting and cool, oh I just thought of this, I was thinking of the Mennonites in Prussia, and I was doing this thing in 4th grade about them and we were looking up our name, like the meaning of our name, and so I looked up Wiebe and it meant war. I don't know if this is actually true but I'm pretty sure it was some official thing. But I don't know if it's official, it said Wiebe meant war and so I was like Oh that's so cool and then I later learned that you know they were away from, they were trying to get away from war like that makes sense, like war. I was like this is so cool, I know this meaning because they were trying to get away from war, war was a big thing in their lives, War, Wiebe. Ya.

J: That's awesome! So it sounds like you've been to Hillsboro then, your grandparents still live there now, um did you ever get to go see the church that your Dad grew up in? Or a Mennonite church in Hillsboro? What was that like?

K: Ya, I went to, um I went to their church once but I don't think it was like a Mennonite church but it was a lot of um, there wasn't a lot of old people that still had, who could speak low-German and like were very modest and stuff but there was a lot of new people, but I mean it still had that small town feel you know, it was really new. So it was kind of different but you can kind of see um, ya you can see Christian lives and their faith being filled out or whatever. If that makes sense, but it was kind of old 'cause their music, it wasn't like contemporary music like we had at our church, it was like old like hymns that was sang by the choir and I was not used to it at all. But um, the church that my Dad went to when he was a kid um we would always drive by where it was because it burned down, I never got to see the church but he would always talk about the church and like things that happen there um oh can I tell another story so um one Christmas we weren't in Hillsboro, we were here but my Dad was telling a story of him after the children's program, the Christmas program at his church, the one that burnt down, so after that they would run back to their houses and what would be waiting for them, there was bags waiting for them with one orange, a little peppermint candy, and some other thing that wasn't like a candy so it was very like low, not what you could expect today like you get these huge presents or whatever um so they'd get these bags and they'd run to their homes to get them like trying to beat each other to their houses to get them cause they had to run to get their bags. And so then he'd always talk about how his grandparents spoke in low-German and um, sorry I lost my train of thought, so they'd be speaking low-German and talking about them and he didn't know what they were saying and like he made us do it, he made us run up the hill by our house and come back to our house and we got this bag and he didn't tell us at first what was in the bag, he told us after we got it and we were like what is it and it was kind of weird we aren't used to that simplicity.

J: So you're saying your Dad when he grew up he lived a pretty simple life in terms of possessions, would you say?

K: I mean ya, it wasn't like they were poor or anything but you just don't have a lot of like, back then nobody had a lot of um excess of what we have today.

J: Would you say that your Dad tries to like simplistic now?

K: Oh ya, yes. He definitely living in that small town and having Mennonite parents and stuff um, ya he is a tight wad with money. He does not let us spend a lot money at all. And when we have extra junk in the house he just hates it so much, even with when our fridge is full of food he will sit by the fridge and take everything out, he does this like sigh, like a groan sigh, I don't know how to explain it, he does that noise all the time when he's talking about money or excess (sighs to demonstrate) my goodness. He doesn't say my goodness, that was my part. Ya I mean, we were raised up and my Mom always jokes how she does a lot for what she's given. Um and you know there are other families that they like buy dresses for like their daughters every year for like holiday things like they'd get pretty dresses, they just have dresses and nice clothes and a whole closet of essentials most girls need um but we never got that (laughs). And so my mom always blames my Dad because we don't have these clothes cause my Dad just doesn't want to spend money on them.

J: So you'd say that's probably something he learned from growing up?

K: Ya, they weren't going to buy a lot of extra clothes and stuff but, ya.

J: Would you say your Dad's still pretty hard working now?

K: Super duper, um but when he works he goes from early in the morning, when, like I get up for school at 6 and leave by 6:30, and he's leaving about the same time and then he comes home at like 7 or 7:30. Like how do you go that long and you can see it when he's helping other people and like doing jobs around the house, he wants to get the things done. He's very compassionate for other people and so he gives up a lot of his time helping them and you just see how, I don't know how, he doesn't sleep that much and he does a lot of things it's like how do you do that? I do little, I don't do anything, well I do stuff but not that much and I still have to get a lot of sleep and he doesn't and I just don't get it cause he just does a lot of things for us and others and puts his time into putting others' needs before his. And that's one major thing, one characteristic of him, being humble that way and not uh not wanting not taking things for himself. He always looks out for others. So that's one thing I definitely learned from him too, is not being all about you. And I definitely see that going through high school its like, I don't want to talk about myself right now, I'm not used to everybody asking me how I am after my Dad's surgery cause it's like I'm not used to, I don't like

having attention on myself. Even though it was my Dad who had the surgery, everybody still asks me. Sorry that kind of went off topic.

J: That's great. Um looking back, you're 15 so you still have a lot of life to live, but um are you thankful for your upbringing? Are you thankful to have grown up going to church and learning about Jesus and also with your Dad's background, maybe the values he's instilled in you because of that? Are you thankful for that? Do you wish it was different?

K: I uh I am very thankful for it and I don't want to change anything about it because you know the Lord tells us that this is my plan for you and I know that, I'm trusting the Lord that this is going great and it is, and I love that I was brought up this way and I had a huge family that wasn't super extravagant and fancy cause I just, I don't want that. And I love being simple in life and just caring about relationships and talking more than being stuck up on an iPhone like my parents are never gonna buy me an iPhone. That's just not gonna happen (laughs). And I'm very glad for that cause I mean I just bought myself an iPod but I have a jank phone and I like having a jank phone cause I don't like texting and I don't, just they always tell me like you're wasting your life on that and like growing up now, when I was younger I didn't think that at all, but growing up and seeing this and being able to use technology I definitely see it and I can see and feel myself getting away from other people. So being able to um grow up with a mindset of we aren't gonna have an excess, we're not gonna put, I'm trying to think of the right word, we're not gonna spend money on other things so I've definitely learned to uh, spend money on needs and not wants, but ya and like growing up on a tight wad dad not wanting to spend lots of money, he always would teach us to count our money and I know now to save my money and not like spend it on stupid things. So I've learned, I'm trying to recap, money, I've learned about like how to spend my money, not the excess of it, and um I'm trying to think. Talk about the question again and I'll get more ideas about it. Can you repeat the question?

J: Ya, I was just asking if you're thankful with the way you were raised.

K: Ya, and ya being a Christian um really helps just going through the struggles of life. I always ask myself, I don't get why, like how other people can go through life and not have Jesus you know. I just I don't get it at all. How do they calm themselves down, how do they see that life is gonna be okay, like I know I have a life after this whatever happens. And I know that if I make mistakes or anything that I'm forgiven, and that's, I don't know how I wouldn't be able to know that. Like how do people um go through life, like making mistakes and, you know do they forgive themselves? Or, I don't get it, does that make sense? I know that life is good and the Lord has plans for me so that's a huge basis of me being able to get through life. Um, ya.

J: Awesome. Well do you have anything else to share, um, just about any of that?

K: Um not really, not much, I'm just keep wanting to say I'm so thankful for this cause I'm just, right now I'm just like thank you Lord for giving me this, especially like giving me you cause you're a great and important part in my life. I'm trying to think of adding more stuff.

J: That's great. Well thank you so much again for meeting with me and telling me a little bit about your story, so thank you.