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## Interview with Lee Schott, Mount Vernon High School Alumnus '05; Kenyon College Admissions Officer

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Lee Schott

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Interviewer: Trudy Andrzejewski

Interviewee: Lee Schott, Mount Vernon High School Alumnus '05; Kenyon College Admissions Officer

Location: Ransom Hall, Kenyon College

Date: 2 February 2012

Topic: Public Life in Knox County, Main Street

TA: This is Trudy Andrzejewski interviewing Lee Schott. It is Thursday, February 2 at about 4:30 PM and we're in... what's this building?

LS: Ransom Hall.

TA: Ransom Hall. Um, okay so Lee, where are you from?

LS: I am from Mount Vernon, Ohio, originally.

TA: Where did you go to school?

LS: I went to school at Mount Vernon High School. Graduated in 2005.

TA: Okay, great. Um, after school, where would you spend your time?

LS: When I was in high school?

TA: Yeah.

LS: After school, I live, I happen to live right next to my best friend who was my neighbor up the street and I think the majority of the time we would, we would spend our time either at each other's houses um on the weekdays. Weekends, we would, ah, play a lot of soccer. There was a field right next to our homes where across the field our other good friend lived. The three of us often times we would go kick a soccer ball in the field. Um, I think that's probably the majority of the time we spent doing that.

TA: Do you ever spend time on Main Street?

LS: Currently, or did I in the past?

TA: Both. Uh, start with in the past.

LS: In the past, no. (*Laughs*) I really didn't. We, we spent more time on Coshocton Avenue than we did on Main Street.

TA: What would you do on Coshocton?

LS: We'd go to Wal Mart. Like, literally we'd go to Wal Mart *a lot*. Uh, we would go to restaurants and eat ice cream but no we didn't really go to Main Street ever.

TA: What'd you do at Wal Mart?

LS: You know, high school things. We'd put masks on and terrorize the patrons and uh ride on the skateboards down the aisles, pick an item and try to find it, you know, stupid things.

TA: Okay, so, what about currently? Do you ever go down to Main Street?

LS: Uh, not often but there are a couple shops I will go to. There's a "Why Not Cycling Shop" um, I go there, it's the only bike shop in town. So I go there just for odds and ends for my bike. Um, and then Sips Coffee Shop, occasionally I'll go down there with, meet a friend, have coffee.

TA: Okay. Um, let's say it's like a summer Saturday afternoon. Um, do you think you would find yourself on Main Street at all?

LS: Um, well, there's a Farmers' Market there on Saturdays occasionally that I'll go down to, mostly to socialize. I would, I very rarely just go street shopping there, just like, window-browsing. Like, that just doesn't happen, I don't do that.

TA: Does your mom?

LS: My mom? My parents... I don't think they do either, really. You know, we've been here for thirty years so the shops are, we've been there. We know what shops are there. We know what they have. You know, it's not like the inventory changes all that often so... When we do go we go to the Down Home Leather, we go there occasionally. But, that's like if our wallet, if we need a new wallet. But beyond that, not too often. Um, we will go eat at Henry's Copper Curry. That's one of our favorite restaurants. That's on the Square, so. Um, but no, we never just go down just to browse. Um, I think the only times are maybe the Farmers' Markets and the Dan Emmett Festival, we'll go down there.

TA: Will you talk a little bit about that?

LS: Dam Emmett Festival? I haven't been in a long time but, but...

TA: I've never been, so

LS: As kids we'd go down there, there's like a talent show that, you know, your classmates can enter into and, it's like a little carnival, like, you know, funnel cakes and elephant ears you can eat, so. Junk food.

TA: What about First Fridays, do you ever go for that?

LS: I've never been.

TA: Really?

LS: Nope, no.

TA: Is that, like...

LS: I did not even hear about it until probably when I was in college was the first I'd heard about it. 'Cause I know, a lot of cities do it, and when I was in college I was, I was at Ohio Wesleyan in Delaware and Delaware would do it and I had a buddy who is also from Mount Vernon and he said, well Mount Vernon does this too. And I had no idea. So that was the first I'd heard of it.

TA: Really? So, you would say people your age don't generally go down there?

LS: Uh, not in my class they didn't, but you know, I can't speak for the current Mount Vernon students.

TA: After you went to college, did a lot of your friends come back to this area?

LS: Um, yeah. Yeah, there's a good percentage of students who are back here. Although to be fair, I'm a pretty recent graduate of college. Graduated in 2009 and a lot of the reason is just students come back because they come live with their parents before they can find jobs, so. It's maybe not out of their own decision.

TA: So, like on weekends what kind of (sorry, I'm getting into your social life) what kind of things do you do?

LS: No, it's fine. Here?

TA: Yeah.

LS: Currently or in the past?

TA: Both.

LS: Okay. Currently on weekends, uh, I mean right now I work on the weekends, um, however, if I had a free weekend I'd take advantage of, depends on the weather I guess but um, I usually go bike riding or uh I have a couple friends who I'd call up and hang out with or, you pick up hobbies, you know, you find things to do, just, occupy your time. Um, I'm still a human, I still watch movies and play video games, uh, but, um right now I'm pretty busy with work so my weekends are pretty taken up by that. Uh, in the past my weekends, again, I was lucky in that I had a really good group of friends on my soccer team. We all, you know, we hung out during school and then we hung out on the weekends together. We were uh t was a good group of kids. Every single weekend, every

Sunday, it was Paintball Sunday so we played paintball every single Sunday at the field I was talking about before where we play soccer. And Saturdays we'd usually play football or we'd play pick-up soccer. Um, it was very, our whole high school pretty much revolved around sports. Paintball, and you know, childish prank things that we would do on each other but uh, you know, I think that's a good childhood. I wouldn't change, I wouldn't trade it for anything, so.

TA: Um, okay back to current times. Do, do the bars down there attract you at all? Or, if you drove down Main Street, like on a Friday night, would you see anyone like out and about?

LS: You would see, there would be a lot of people standing outside of, well, it used to be called Banana Joe's, now it's changed it's name, changed ownership, I forget what it's called now. But it's, there's a bar that people stand outside of, but I would never be attracted to it. Um.

TA: Why?

LS: It's, uh, just because... Well, personally I'm just not attracted to bars in general. If I were to go to a bar I'd want to go to a low-key, um, where people aren't just getting trashed. And this bar is a place where people just get trashed. And so, and you know it just from driving by. You see people standing outside they are all like yelling and just like hanging over each other and stuff and so I'm not about to go into that bar. But there are a few that are nice, um, Flappers, I know, that's one people go down to occasionally. But I don't go down unless it's like Thanksgiving weekend. That's when everybody goes. And I see all my old friends and stuff, but. Other than that, unless I make a point to go down there with friends, I won't just go to the bars to hang out. Maybe because I know most everybody in Mount Vernon already, so. I'm not gonna meet new people. (*Laughs*).

TA: Um, I don't have very many more questions, but. This, this one might sound funny but. If I were to like, say, Main Street, can you explain the picture that comes to your head?

LS: Yeah, yeah. Okay so Main Street, in my opinion, I don't go down there but it's not because I don't like it. Like, I think Main Street's a great thing. It's, it's very much a special, like it's a... there's no chain restaurants down there. I mean, I think there's like a Wendy's on the far side of it. Um, but, for the most part it's family-owned shops and restaurants. Um, you know there's like the leather shop I was talking about, there's the bike shop, um, there's a couple Mexican restaurants. But they're all family-owned and they're not, they're not chains. Um, I should spend more time in those restaurants, uh, and I hope, I wish that more people would but I just... I'm not explaining it anymore. Uh, to explain it, it's a, it's the local shops. Verses main, you know, chain, chain restaurants and things like that, franchises. There's no franchises. Want me to talk more about it?

TA: If you want. (9:44)

LS: Um (*pause*), yeah. I don't really have anything else to say actually. (*Laughs.*)

TA: What do you, can you imagine something else that would draw you down there?

LS: That's a good question. Um, I mean I go down there for special occasions, you know. When it's a birthday meal. We'll go eat at, like I said, Henry's or we'll go to the Bay Leaf. Um, and again if I want to get a nice wallet I'll go to the leather shop. I've said that like three times now but still, it's like, literally it's like the only place I'll go, so...Um, and then, and then Why Not. So I have like, I'll go down there for specific reasons, I have something in mind that I want to go do and I go to Main Street for that reason. Um, when I just want to get something quick to eat, uh, I have to admit I go to Coshocton cause it's full of the chain restaurants and I think like most people, especially most people in Mount Vernon, I think a lot of people come from a low, lower-middle income families and uh, you know, I think they grew up that those are the restaurants that you go to because it's cheap and it's quick, you know and people are usually working long hours or if not two jobs and uh they have very little disposable income, so, as opposed to going down to Main Street where, yes it's probably healthier food and it's supporting a local family, I think a lot of families in Mount Vernon, they choose to go with the drive-thru dollar menu because you can get a whole meal for a family under ten dollars and you can have it right now. You know that's how, that's how I was raised as well, so, um, I still do that. Just for sake of convenience and um, uh, price. I wish, I wish I wouldn't, I wish I would change but it's still cheaper and quicker, so.

TA: Do you think that Main Street serves any positive purpose?

LS: Yes, yeah, well, yeah it does. There's still, I mean, you know, overall the majority of Mount Vernon probably obviously goes to Coshocton as seen by the explosion of fast food restaurants, we have every single fast food restaurant down there, but there is still a population who appreciates it and I still appreciate it even though I don't go down there as much as I'd like I still can appreciate the, uh, you know, every meal I have there is more enjoyable than any meal I have on Coshocton. Um, so, it's, Main Street's like the cozy part of Mount Vernon. It's the, like, you feel like, you know you're in a specific city when you're in Mount Vernon, when you're on Coshocton you could be anywhere. And so I enjoy that part of it, that aspect. Just having lived here and grown up here I no longer take advantage of that as much as I, you know, used to. Um, so. (*Laughs*) I forget what I was saying. (*pause*) Does it serve a purpose, right? **(13:09)**

TA: Yeah.

LS: (*Whispers*) Can you cut this out? (*Laughs*)

TA: Yeah, yeah yeah. I mean, I'm not gonna use everything.

LS: Okay, wonderful. Okay, good.

TA: But you're doing great, you're awesome.

LS: I'm thinking. That was a good question; I want to keep going on this. Um. *(Pause)* Maybe we could come back to it?

TA: Okay, good. Um, I think that a lot of the time people say they like Main Street because there's like this nostalgia associated with it, it's like an old time-y kind of thing verses modern development like we've been talking about.

LS: Mhmm.

TA: I don't really know if this is even a question. But it's hard for me to differentiate whether it's just that nostalgia that people are trying to hold on to or whether like it's actually...

LS: Like, appealing for other reasons?

TA: Yeah.

LS: I think. I mean, the nostalgia I think, you know, historically speaking, restaurants they weren't franchises so if you're going back it does feel like an old time-y type Main Street of a city however, from my lifetime, there was no, I don't have any nostalgia of that because as long as I've been alive I've been surrounded by the modern franchises and stuff. But I think there's always going to be an appeal and there's always going to be an appreciation for family restaurants, home-cooked meals, personal service where you know the managers' names, you know their families. Um, in an ideal world, we could all, you know, every time you go out to eat you could have the time, you could have that additional money to spend on a nice meal with your family, and you know, I hope to be able to do that some day. And Coshocton can be no more eventually. But I think there will always be an appeal for that little niche. I hope so anyways, I hope they don't disappear. There was a restaurant called Suzie Sweet & Spicy that was on Main Street, and it was Korean food by this lady that still does catering for us. She's just the sweetest lady, she'll cater an entire party for minimal fees, because she just loves to cook. And she opened up this sweet and spicy place, it was a BYOB place, and just very cool and there was this little, small faction of reliable clients who would go there all the time and but, like I said you know, it was a new business on Main Street. And I feel like the businesses that do well on Main Street are the ones that have been there a long time and have a dedicated client base who know it and go there all the time and they don't turn a huge profit but they make ends meet. And they continue to work. But nobody's gonna turn a huge profit on Main Street and she didn't and she closed down because she just couldn't afford to keep it going. And that was just sad because that was our place, that was where we went to eat when we went out to eat, there especially. And so, I don't want it, well, that appeal will always be there, that's basically what I'm saying. And, um, I wish there was a way we could advocate for that more and you know, now that I'm thinking about it maybe I'll start doing that more. Uh, so, maybe you should just interview every single person in Mount Vernon and make them think about this every now and then. But (16:59)

TA: Is there a big turnover in the businesses on Main Street?

LS: Yeah. I think there is. There's a couple locations that I think people think are cursed because a new restaurant will come in every eight months, um, I think right now there's one across from Southside Diner. It's an old pizza buffet, it was a Chinese buffet, it was an Italian restaurant, it was like Porkie's BBQ, and it's like every eight months it switches new management and some other little shop dies, so. Yeah, like I said, people who open up shops on Main Street, they're not gonna, you know, become millionaires. They're doing it because they enjoy it and because you know, they're barely like hanging on most of the time. But, there are very few places that have been there consistently for an extended amount of time.

TA: This question will be a little more abstract if you don't mind but, thinking kind of hard, do you have any memories on Main Street?

LS: As a kid?

TA: Any memory. Even like the last time you went there. Just explaining, describing your day.

LS: Any memories... Yeah. (*pause*). It wasn't a day.

TA: Your hour? Your five minutes.

LS: (*laughs*) Yeah, I was going to say... Yeah, I guess I go to Sips. And, I go to Sips and Why Not? But there's nothing that special to describe. I can't think of any, of any neat experience. (*pause, cough*) Like what are you looking for? Like, what are you thinking – I don't really have any stories, so.

TA: Like going down for a birthday dinner.

LS: Yeah, so my family would go down to Bay Leaf for dinners. We'd walk in there, they both know the managers so they'd say, Hey, Mr. and Mrs. Schoot, hey. And then we'd sit down, we'd have a meal, and (*laughs*) we'd say we love this green dipping sauce. I don't know what it's called but it's this green dipping sauce we'd get with the naan and um, then our waitress described that she's the one that makes it, she grows it in her garden, and so she makes this green sauce. And we say, that's amazing, can we buy some from you? And she actually brought us this pretty sizable portion. And just gave it to us, for free. And that was cool. So that was our last birthday dinner at Bay Leaf and then we say, goodbye, and they're like, Bye Schotts, and we get in our car and drive away (*laughs*)

TA: That's perfect. ... When you go to the bike shop do you know the people that work there?



LS: Yeah, so I talk to the guy there. I haven't had the courage to ask his name cause I don't want to come off as, like creepy, but we talk every time I come in , um, and so last time I went in there actually I was preparing for a little bicycle trip I did and so I asked him just his advice for what I need and what I would need to be prepared and I was, actually, it was a turning point in our relationship because I of course want to be friends with this guy. I mean we always talk but it's very, uh, kind of surface stuff about bikes and products and things like that and we were talking about this trip. And he started telling me about this trip he did, and he even started like joking and laughing when he was telling the story and I was really excited because it was this guy, I still don't know his name but, now he's gonna know who I am cause he's telling me this story and, uh, I also remember thinking (*laughs*) I remember thinking like, it wasn't that great a story and he was really laughing at it really hard and so I like him now, I like him even more because I feel like he shared this story that was big for him and I don't know why I like him even more because of this or where I'm going with this but it wasn't that good and, it made me feel kind of bad for him but now we're friends because of it and so that was really fun. And he got me completely set-up. And I'm 99% sure that if I could go in there with a flat tire or something he would fix it like, no charge. I can't say that for sure but I'm 99%. Almost sure. (22:10)

TA: Do you know the people at Leather Shop?

LS: No, I don't.

TA: How about at Sips?

LS: Cause I, well, the leather shop I'd say I don't know much about their, I don't know them, cause I don't know anything about leather. Um, so I think when I have a shared, like – the bicycle guy we can talk about bikes. The leather stuff, I can just say this is really cool or this is really neat, um, and we just – there's never any shared, there's nothing we can talk about really. So, I've made like minimal attempts but, again. I'm sure she'd be open to it but I've probably only been there probably three times so, when I said earlier that I go in there a lot... it's a complete lie. (*Laughs, laughs, laughs*) As far as like Main Street shops go though! As far as that, I've been in there a lot! Like compared to the other ones. Probably three or four times (*laughs*).

TA: Have you ever been to G. R. Smith?

LS: Yeah.

TA: I went in there for the first time today, I'm in *love* with that store.

LS: Yeah, they're amazing. That's where we go, we go there instead of Lowe's and Home Depot and stuff.

TA: I was going to say! You can get so much that you would get even at Wal-Mart, there.

LS: And they're specialists. They know their stuff there better, a lot more. (23:23)

TA: And being realistic they do not charge higher prices.

LS: Right, right. No.

TA: They know their stuff, will you go on with that? Sorry I cut you off.

LS: Um, I don't really have anything... uh, I mean we go in there because it's completely personal attention, the one guy, I think his name is Eric or something, I mean he's married to a Kenyon professor so we've had them over for dinner and stuff. And, but I've heard that everyone gets like, the personal attention, that's like, the you know – that connection there, and it's just, that's the small town feel. When you walk in and have, you've seen them outside of their work place. We go there just because I think it's supporting good people and they love what they do. You can go in there and tell them about a project and they'll tell you everything you need to do and like how you should do it, and they're phenomenal. (*pause*) That was stupid (*laughs*)

TA: When you go down to, say you're at Sips, would you see anyone you know?

LS: Yeah.

TA: Yeah? Like who?

LS: Like people from my class or, any, I mean anybody from Mount Vernon. You know, teachers, you see people from I don't know, just anybody. Anybody from the city.

TA: Okay I just wanted to remind you of the one questions we...

LS: Oh yeah, I forget what we were talking about.

TA: Um

LS: It was something I wanted time to think about. Benefits?

TA: Yeah, there were two I guess. If there is a certain benefit, you can talk about that. Or if there is anything you think would help attract.

LS: Oh, okay. I think with the benefits, you know, every time I go down there, whoever it's with, it's a much more, it's an experience, verses I think where, like I said – and I'm speaking mostly about the restaurants now, but um, it's much more of an experience. You sit down, you chat, and it's a little bit more memorable as opposed to, well I mean you're at Kenyon but, as opposed to Coshocton. Where you just drive through and it's just business. Drive through, get your food, eat, and you survive another day sort of thing. Um, so... benefit in the sense that I mean it brings people together. (26:11) And you feel good when you buy something at the leather shop you feel like, well, there you go, I

supported this struggling business, maybe. And for Mount Vernon's sake, it gives them a character, an identity where they wouldn't have if they didn't have Main Street. It's a place for the Dan Emmett Festival, it's a place for the Farmers Market. If you think of shops in Mount Vernon I hope that people don't think of Coshocton, I hope that they think of a Main Street, a downtown. I hope they think of G. R. Smith & Hardware, and not Lowes. You know, so.

TA: If you were trying to convince one of your friends to move around this area, where would you take them? You don't have to say Main Street. Where would you show them around?

LS: Probably bring them to Gambier. I, my friends and I probably spend most of our time in Gambier. Besides, we would go to the Mount Vernon soccer fields. But more often than that we'd go to the Kenyon soccer fields. And so, um. I'm a big advocate of just like, open spaces. What am I trying to say here? I would probably take them to the Kokosing River. I think that's a huge attraction, it's like one of Ohio's few scenic rivers and it has completely changing scenery from the Millwood area to the Layman Bridge area. It goes right through Mount Vernon. You can fish, it has multiple fish species, it has – you can canoe it, you can kayak it. That's a huge attraction for me personally. I would take them, where else would I take them? I would probably take them to the fields because that's where I spent most of my time and I think that's a great place. Just to hang out, and, I don't know who I'm trying to convince to move here. If I were trying to convince my buddies I'd probably bring them to this field cause I mean we can just kick a soccer ball and they're beautiful fields and there's like nothing anywhere you look so it's a very pretty spot and kind of secluded, and you can be totally focused on like, just playing soccer with each other and nothing else and I love that. Yeah, I would take them to Gambier. Just spots in Gambier probably. I'm trying to think of like... I'd probably just bring them to my house and just hang out, show them how fun it is just to hang out and do nothing. Cause that is like the appeal of Mount Vernon and Gambier to me. You don't have to have like, actually buildings or actual services to just enjoy where you are, I think. And that's kind of when I was growing up, our friends would just go to this field with like nothing and I don't even know how it would start every week but we would have the best time every single weekend. Just because there's nothing there, and we would just like wrestle and just talk and laugh and the next thing you know it's eight hours later and you just had the greatest day ever. And, uh, I think that's something a lot of people miss out on when you're in a city where you immediately kind of default to going to a location to have a good time and I don't think that's necessary. I think you can just, you know, from past experiences I think you can just go and be with each other and you don't need to have anything. You know, so. My vision, my past, when I think of my youth in Mount Vernon growing up, I don't think of any of these locations. I don't think of Main Street, cause I didn't spend much time there. I don't think of any specific building or location. I pretty much think of hanging out with my buddies and like the field, at the neighbor's house, and at the soccer fields. That was like, I can't even tell you what we did, you know. I know we played paint ball. I know we'd kick a soccer ball around. But that doesn't account for all our time. So. But it was great, I absolutely loved it. So where I would bring them to in Mount Vernon, I would probably bring them

somewhere where we can just be at ease and not think of all of the distractions of the rest of the world. We can just be ourselves, and hang out.

TA: So the project is called “Rural by Design,” and really what we’re trying to figure out it was makes a rural community, *this* rural community in Knox County, unique in its public spaces. And I think that after hearing you say that, I think it’s really interesting that, I mean you definitely think of the *rural* part of it. And I think that all of us who come from urban, pretty urban settings, have strived to like look for these institutions to attach things to.

LS: Mhmm. Yeah, maybe. Do you want me to say something?

TA: No, it’s just really interested. Maybe we got it all wrong.

LS: (*laughs*) Should I say something? (32:20)

TA: One of the places that I really wanted to go onto the list that didn’t make the cut was just like, parks. You think a lot of people spend time in parks around here?

LS: Mm, no. And I think because - like I said I love the outdoor spaces and things, but I don’t spend a whole lot of time in the parks. Because I don’t like, I mean I think parks are great, but I think for a place like Mount Vernon and Gambier and Knox County, I don’t think you need parks. There’s plenty of, you know - when I was growing up I didn’t need to go some place quiet and just relax, um, to like stop and think. You just don’t do that as a kid. So I never like, went to parks. And to me they were full of rules and stuff. Stay on this trail, don’t pick up anything and take it out of the park. And to me, the outdoors are exciting and fun because there are no rules. You’re not, like driving in a car lane and you have to follow a speed limit, you have to stay in your lane, like when you go to the park. And when you outside you can do whatever you want. That’s the appeal of the out-of-doors to me, and I think a lot of like the parks and stuff, it’s very, you pretty much know what you can do in a park. You can have a picnic, hike the trails, or you can go take pictures of things. And that’s all good and well but for me, I like kind of the freedom of going into the woods behind the Environmental Center and you can just run off trail. I still think you’re not really supposed to do that at the Environmental Center woods, but that’s the appeal to me. Is that there is no, you don’t have to follow these different guidelines. And so I think a lot of people are turned off by the parks here because it’s very much just like the rest of the world only green and trees, which to me is better than the rest of the world but still I think there’s a better, you can still go one better. And just be in like, nature and do what you want. To me, that’s the biggest appeal. And like, this field we would go to, it was just woods and there was a big open space. There was like a hilly part and a flat part and so we had a place to play soccer, we could run around in the woods, and there was pretty much anything we wanted to do, and we would just get completely creative because there were no limitations. And so, we would never choose to go to a park over this place. Because there are limitations, that steals away some of the fun.

TA: Anything else you want to say about...?

LS: I don't know. I don't think so.

TA: Thank you.

LS: Mhmm.

TA: Stopping the tape.

POST – INTERVIEW: “I never really stop and think about it.”