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INTERVIEW WITH PIERCE THOMPSON

by Carla Ehat & Anne Kent
July 16, 1984

INTERVIEWEE: Pierce Thompson (PT)
INTERVIEWER: Carla Ehat (CE)
ALSO PRESENT: Genevieve Martinelli (GM)
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TRANSCRIBER: Marjorie Hoffman

CE: We're on tape two now out at the Marin French Cheese Company and we're going to talk now with Mr. Pierce Thompson who is a grandson of Jefferson A. Thompson. And, as I understand from Edward, his cousin, he's the brains in the business and takes care of the office and general manager. Is that your title?

PT: That's correct, it's true.

CE: Well, tell us about your involvement and your beginnings here, would you, Pierce?

PT: Yes, I'll try to be factual. I was born in 1905 and shortly after I was born my mother and father separated, so I never lived on the ranch as a child.

CE: Well, give us your line of descent.

PT: Well, it goes back to the Pierce Ranch in Marin County.

CE: Oh, really?

PT: Yes because the Pierce family lived on the ranch and had cattle and made butter.

CE: That's up in Point Reyes National Seashore today, isn't it?

PT: No, it's on the coast. I guess it goes out to Pierce Point, doesn't it?

CE: Pierce point, yes.

PT: They had two ranches there, the Pierces did, then. The main ranch was the one they called White Gulch on the bay and half way between was Rat Island. Somebody said that during the earthquake it split and became two islands but I'm not sure how factual that was.

CE: Well, was Pierce in your maternal line?

PT: Not exactly, no. In fact he wasn't in my line at all but he's involved in it because my mother's father, they were from Schleswig-Holstein in Germany and they lived on the island on the --

CE: On the little island?

PT: On the little island. He was the boatman for my grandfather on my mother's side. Was boatman for the Pierce family who sailed the produce that they produced across to Hamlet to put it on the train to take to San Francisco.

CE: Isn't that great? Oh, gosh that's interesting.

PT: Of course Jeff Thompson, my father, as Ed already told you, was a great hunter and fisherman and so forth. So he often went over to the Pierce ranch to hunt and became very friendly with Will Pierce, son of the Pierce family. Will Pierce started the first electric company in Petaluma, I believe, and he generated electricity with steam, I think, I'm told. And my father always was interested in electricity, he left the ranch and started working with him and they were instrumental in putting in --

CE: Well, back up just a minute. Was your father the one who lived on Rat Island or your grandfather?

PT: My grandfather.

CE: Now, on the maps they call it Hog Island; is that the same island we're talking about?

PT: Hog Island, same island, yes.

CE: Okay, so your grandfather, I see

PT: My mother was born on the island.

CE: Your mother was born --

PT: Yes.

CE: Well, it's not very big!

PT: There's room for one more.

CE: Your grandfather, then, was the boatman and your mother?

PT: She was sent to San Jose to the Normal School, as they called it down there, became a school teacher.

CE: School teacher in this family, yes.

PT: Pretty smart people around here somehow.

CE: Well, I'm sorry to be thick on this, but what's the relationship again between you and --

PT: The Pierce family?

CE: No, first of all between you and Edward, your cousin.

PT: In the grandparents' family there were two sons, Jefferson and Rudolph, and we each are offspring of a different son.

CE: I see. Okay.

PT: Ed is one of the four on Rudolph's side and I'm the only one on the Jefferson's side.

CE: On Jefferson's side, okay. I see.

PT: To get back to the Pierce connection, Will Pierce and my father were great buddies and they did work naturally in the field together. In fact, Jefferson worked down at -- When the third rail trains were put into the area in Marin County, he worked on that.

CE: In the 1870's, yes.

PT: It may not have been the installation; it might have been some maintenance repair work.

CE: You mean when the trains were electrified and that was in 1903, Mr. Martin. Okay, so then what happened?

PT: Well, so then I worked variously. I went to Berkeley first, the University of California. And I was there for a year and a half, I think it was. Then being in the dairy industry, which was -- Going into because of my connection with the cheese factory, my cheese factory connection, I went to Davis. Because they didn't have the dairy industry facility at Berkeley; it was a degree course. So I spent one semester in Davis to fulfill those requirements and studied all the dairy industries propositions, ice cream and all those things. And then I came back to Berkeley and graduated from Berkeley at UC. So I got my degree there. And then --

CE: You didn't say where you went to school prior to that; did you go the same route?

PT: No, my mother lived at McNear's Point, after the divorce. The school superintendent, she had taught school, I guess, over at Pierce Point or something, I'm not sure. Her name was -- I can't remember the name of the superintendent. He helped my mother; he got her the job down at McNear's Point, for the -- at the old brickyard. School house there at the brickyard.

CE: Oh, yes, yes.

PT: So we lived at the little enclave over the bay where the quarry place, the --

CE: That's interesting. You know some of the McNear family? I imagine you do.

PT: Oh, I knew all of them. Oh, yes, because they were very close. As a matter of fact, my mother would baby-sit for the McNeers. As the young kids grew up they were very friendly with my mother. And my mother finally built a house at Bay Side Acres and then the McNeers wanted to rent a house. That's Lawrence McNear, so she built a little cabin for herself up above it, and the McNeers lived in the big house. We've been very closely related.

CE: I'm trying to think of the McNear family we interviewed. John McNear.

PT: Oh, yes, John McNear was I think half-brother of --

CE: And Lucretia.

PT: Lucretia. Is she still living?

CE: Yes.

PT: I saw her four or five years ago here. She came up here, looks just the same as she always did. A very beautiful woman, always a beautiful girl. Amazing. That's great.

CE: So then you went to Berkeley, and then you did come back then and enter this or try some other businesses?

PT: My first job was actually the old Western Meat Company, putting butter into tin cans. Takes a lot of degree work to get that figured out. They churn the butter and put it on a table in front of you and you take your two hands and slice off of it. There's a hopper over the can; you slam it down in the can so it will fill it up. Of course, if it was too much it would come out of -- You'd wind up you were ready for a shower when you got through with that job.

CE: You had to start at the bottom.

PT: Then I got a job in the laboratory at the old Producer's Milk Company in Berkeley, in Oakland, I guess it is.

CE: Okay, then what happened?

PT: Well, following that, it was taken over by a Turnbaugh of the Foremost Dairies. They bought the company and they had it -- An expansion into Hayward and I was sent down there to sort of manage the market milk business of it down there. And I did such a bad job that they finally let me go. They didn't have anymore place for me. He didn't really fire me; he just told me he didn't have a place for me anymore. So then anyway, I was on leave, on call so to speak, and I came to the cheese factory then. Not to work in the cheese factory but to work on the construction of the RCA Receiving Station over there on the Point, on the --

CE: Would you stay here then when you worked?

PT: No, I drove back and forth in the car that I had. And so that lasted for about, I guess, a year and a half. Then the Marin Dell Milk Company was looking for a laboratory technician. At the same time one of the radio stations, I can't recall what the call letters are now. They were wanting an announcer for a spot in Idaho, Boise, Idaho, and so I was to try out for that. So I did try out for it.

CE: Did you like that? "Speak up," they said, "speak up."

PT: Yes, I think that's what they said.

CE: His voice is so soft.

PT: They told me that I was selected for the job and about that time the two came in together and I had a young lady that I was very friendly with in Petaluma, so I didn't want to give her up and I was not too sure. The job entailed a lot of salesmanship too, which I've never been very good at. And so I took the Marin Dell job much to the disgust of the operator out at Point Reyes because he was the one that pushed me to get the job with RCA. So that was the windup of my so-called "dramatic career," which I had had a little of.

CE: And what brought you finally here?

PT: I was working at the Marin Dell Laboratory, of course, and suddenly the cheese factory, he was having a very difficult time with green mold on the cheese. They had done everything they could think of to get rid of it, and they didn't have any luck getting anything changed. So my father came down to the Marin Dell Laboratory and wanted me to come back and work here. He thought he --

CE: Your father was Jeff?

PT: Jeff Thompson, yes. So, after lots of consideration I finally told the manager down there that I was going to go home. I said they were having trouble with mold and I felt I could help. He said, "I'm sure you can."

CE: Had you been particularly interested in lab work while you were at UC or Davis or is this something --

PT: Oh, yes, we always take all the lab work.

CE: And this appealed to you in a way? You liked this work?

PT: Well, I thought I could help out. I knew nothing about making Camembert cheeses specifically, except that I knew they were making it here because I had visited here summers.

CE: When was this about?

PT: 1941, I think it was.

CE: And you've been here since then? You've been here a heck of a long time.

PT: Yes, I have.

CE: Forty-three years.

PT: Yes.

CE: I worked 30 years for the Navy. That seemed a long time, but you've got me beat.

PT: Well, it's been very nice, very pleasant. There were some challenges here.

CE: Well, what were these challenges? First the green mold on the cheese.

PT: Green mold, that was the first challenge and it was something that I couldn't put my finger on for a long time and I was making the cultures for inoculating the cheese. They didn't have a culture. They were having just random inoculation of the surface of the cheese, growth wise. So suddenly, one batch came through one day and it was all covered with little white mold of some kind. So I took it to my father and said, "What's wrong with this cheese?" He said, "That's what we are trying to get!" And it was a contamination of the mold that was around but never had appeared before in any volume because I was trying to exclude all the green mold and it finally made it with this one culture. So I had --

CE: You must have felt like Louie Pasteur.

PT: Something like that. I had some of the culture left and so I went back to the culture and I've been carrying that on ever since. At the onset it was not too satisfactory, it was still subject to on occasion to green molds. We're finding the process of making this culture. It's coming along pretty well now and I know what to look for and how to purify it if we do get contaminations, to put it back together again.

CE: Okay, so that was your first challenge. Now what was your second challenge?

PT: The second challenge was, this is a family corporation. Fortunately it was a corporation when I came into it, but I still haven't convinced everybody completely that's it's not a family anymore.

CE: It isn't?

PT: It's a family corporation but the family doesn't own anything, they own stock in the corporation.

CE: That's hard to convince.

PT: It's hard to put across. But I know people who got into that situation, couldn't control it and --

CE: You mean you've got too many chiefs and no Indians or what?

PT: No. You tend to consider everything in the place is yours and if you want a piece of cheese, you go get it.

CE: Oh, I see.

PT: Not only cheese but --

CE: Anything.

PT: Anything, gasoline. It all has to be accounted for now.

CE: So you really set up an orderly accountability of all of this.

PT: As well as necessary, yes.

CE: Had you had that training a bit, too?

PT: A little bit, but not really bookkeeping and no typing and all that kind of stuff. But I did know that you had to do that thing if you were going to be lasting because

you can generate the best arguments in the world when the family is helping themselves to all kinds of --

CE: Yes, well, "Tom got some; why can't I get some?" You know, that type of thing.

PT: Yes that happens too, so you have to be very strict with it.

CE: Well, how many members of the family are in the business? Is that a fair question to ask?

PT: Well, at the time I came in my Aunt Martha was living, Jeff's sister. She was the bookkeeper; she never married. She looked into our family tree and, of course, the --

CE: Is she still around?

PT: No, no, she died many years ago.

CE: What did she find?

PT: She -- The story was when she got to the horse thief she dropped the whole thing.

CE: Every family's got that. Who was she again?

PT: Martha was Jeff's sister. She was my aunt.

CE: Oh, your father's sister.

PT: My father's sister. And she was working in the office. And Ed's mother, Lila Thompson, who was a Tomasini to begin with, Tomasini family out of Petaluma.

CE: Tomasini?

PT: Yes, out of Petaluma. She was a cousin of the man who started the hardware business there.

CE: She was in the business?

PT: She actually was a housekeeper out here. We had a Chinese cook, had many Chinese cooks. They came and, came and went pretty frequently. And she managed that. And she loved to garden, so she planted most of the trees you see around up there now.

CE: And who else was there?

PT: Douglas Thompson was Ed's brother.

CE: This Ed here?

PT: Yes.

CE: And what was he doing?

PT: He was the cheesemaker. They changed off once in a while. Originally -- This is more story about the fact -- All getting all mixed up now --

CE: Well, that's okay.

PT: He had sheep on the ranch. After they sold the cattle in 1925 they put sheep on; they had about 2,500 head of sheep, I think. They bought the ranch across the road which belonged to the -- Oh Lord, I can't think of that.

CE: That's okay, we don't have to go into that detail. But did the sheep work out?

PT: They didn't. The cheese factory carried them. They also went into the chicken business, raising eggs for hatcheries, out on the fields.

CE: That didn't work out.

PT: And the cheese factory carried them too.

CE: Why didn't want to stick to your last, as they say the -- Cheese is your thing?

PT: I don't know why. Of course, they had the large ranch and Rudolph was the ranch manager and Jefferson was the cheese factory manager in those days.

CE: Rudolph was the ranch manager and --

PT: Jefferson was the cheese manager.
CE: Your father -- Was the cheese -- Well, how many today, roughly, how many members of the family are involved in the corporation?
PT: Well, Douglas has sold his stock to a group of doctors in Los Angeles.
CE: Swell.
PT: And in the meantime, Ed's father divorced his wife and married a lawyer.
CE: This Ed?
PT: Ed's father.
CE: Divorced?
PT: Not Ed but Ed's father divorced his wife, Lila. Rudolph divorced Lila.
CE: Well, it gets too complicated, sold stock to a group of doctors. I've got that. And they are all shareholders.
PT: They are all shareholders.
CE: Anybody else in the business? There is you and --
PT: Ed and myself.
CE: And who's this man I met earlier, Dave Brooks?
PT: Dave Brooks is family. He's Ed's nephew.
CE: Dave Brooks is in the business.
PT: And Jim, his son, is office manager.
CE: Dave Brooks is a nephew.
PT: And Dave Brooks' son.
CE: Nephew to Edward. And his son is what?
PT: Dave Brooks' son, Jim, is office manager.
CE: Okay, got it.
GM: Who did his father marry?
PT: He married -- I can't think of her name now. An attorney down in San Rafael -- You must know her.
CE: Well, all right now, all totaled now you have --
PT: What happened then, the three doctors bought the stock.
CE: How many people are now involved in this operation, in the cheese factory itself?
PT: The cheese factory itself, we have -- I've given you all the names of -- so far. And then we have a daughter of Brooks'. Let's see, what's her -- Jill is her name, Jill Brooks. Jill Brooks is Dave's daughter. And Chris Brooks is his wife and she also works at the cheese factory. They live in the big house up here.
CE: And you don't live here?
PT: No, I live in Petaluma.
GM: Whose children are they?
PT: Dave Brooks.
CE: And he's a nephew to Edward. He's in the business. And his wife is Chris. They sell, too, or --
PT: No, they -- Well, they do the whole thing. All the people in the packing room, especially pack cheese, sell cheese and takes tours. It relieves the monotony of the job. People say, "Why don't you get a machine to do that?" Well, what kind of machine are you going to get to sell cheese to people? And you've got to have that.
CE: Sure. Well, you've got about ten people doing this operation?

PT: Do you mean the whole thing?
CE: No, the cheese, in the cheese.
PT: Oh, our people ourselves, our family, yeah, about that.
CE: About ten family members. Any more then? Strangers?
PT: Forty-two employees, total.
CE: Total of 42, okay.
PT: Of course, those include some part-time employees. Weekends during school sessions the girls from school come out and work in --
CE: Okay, now what I want to know is, do you make cheese everyday?
PT: No we make it usually six days a week, usually we don't make it on Saturday.
CE: Make the cheese six days a week.
PT: We have to use one day for washing.
CE: But today you're making cheese?
PT: Yes.
CE: How many kinds of cheese do you make? You have this famous -- And I want you to explain this Rouge et Noir. That's your --
PT: That's the brand
CE: That's the brand. Oh, so then you have --
PT: That's not ours.
CE: No, this. That's a camembert. okay, and this is your name? Is this trademark --
PT: That's a schloss, Rouge et Noir is our name, trademark name.
CE: Okay, so under that trademark you make camembert?
PT: Camembert, brie, and breakfast cheese, and schloss cheese.
CE: That's "castle" in German isn't it?
PT: That's right, that's why we put the name under it there. See.
CE: I love it.
GM: What is it in German?
CE: Castle. See, I've a German background.
PT: Most people don't know this.
CE: And so there's four kinds of cheese, that's it?
PT: That's it.
CE: You don't get involved in Monterey Jack or Cheddars or any of that stuff?
PT: No, they're highly competitive and we don't have the facility to produce them here. We've standardized on -- As you thought earlier, perhaps you have to standardize in something, making cheese. We finally standardized on making cheese, and special cheeses.
CE: Special cheeses, a very good idea. Well, tell me a little bit about the history of -- Isn't there some connection with Napoleon and the name of this cheese?
PT: Well, that's the fable that goes along with it. Yes, the story is, and we have run into this just recently because we're now making the same cheese, brie, as they were labeling camembert. And it is identically the same cheese. And people won't believe it but --
CE: Explain that.
PT: Douglas Johnston was over to a food show in Paris not long ago. A family --
CE: Yes, he's Edward's adopted son.

PT: Yes. He was over there and he asked the French people, he said, "How is it?" because they do the same thing. "How is it you put a brie label on the same cheese as a Camembert cheese?" "Why," he said, "it's very simple." Marie Harel was born and raised -- She was the woman who made Camembert cheese. Was raised in the province of Brie where they made brie cheese. And they had these good size molds that they made the cheese in. Then she married and went to Normandy to a little town called Camembert. And so she was going to make the cheese there but she didn't have the big molds, she just had little ones. But she just made cheese, she didn't give it a name, it was just cheese. Well, Napoleon came marching along and he had dinner there one night and he had some of this cheese, and it was just wonderful. He thought it was great. He said, "Well, this we will list -- this cheese de la Camembert de la Normandy."

CE: I love it.

PT: So that's where it got its name camembert. However, the brie should be a little bit different and we do make --You're talking about a large camembert?

CE: Yes.

PT: It's the brie.

CE: It's the brie. So you can buy these large wheels for cocktail parties?

PT: Yes, and they are different. The salting is handled differently and the cheese being larger, you get different growth of mold. It has to be cured longer. And so it is something that is really different. But as far as the eight ounce and four ounce -- Don't expect to find anything different unless there is a difference in the age of the cheese. Because that makes a difference. As you can see on this little carton you have here, you have a description of what the cheese is like, and there is a date down here. It says, "Use before," and six to eight weeks before that date you have fresh and firm cheese.

CE: Four to six weeks partially ripened.

PT: And three weeks, it's fully ripened. And on that date, unless you have a good -- You like a good strong cheese --

CE: You'd better use it.

PT: Better use it. And the grocer is supposed to take it or the deli man is supposed to take it off the shelf when it reaches that date and can give it back to the distributor who in turn gives it, the retail man credit and we give the distributor credit.

CE: There's a great deal of accountability then, isn't there?

PT: Yes, there is.

CE: Do you use any contemporary aids to assist you? Do you use a computer in any fashion, or --

PT: We just put one in two years ago.

CE: You did?

PT: Jim, our office manager, is the man who operates it.

CE: I see that. Well, the computer has reached the cheese factory.

PT: And Jean, our secretary, is working with it, too. We all have duplicates of many -
-

CE: You double in brass, as they say?

PT: We sure do.

CE: Is this your desk?

PT: Yes, well, I sit here, yes. Right here is where I sit.

CE: And who sits over there?

PT: Well, Doug usually sits over there. He's got all his stuff over in that corner; I have all my stuff piled on the desk; that's what I do.

GM: Now the big man that was here when we came in, who was he?

PT: That was Dave Brooks.

CE: He was seated there yes. And he's a nephew of -- Is that correctly?

PT: Nephew of Ed's.

CE: Edward, yes. What's his job, Office Manager?

PT: Production Manager.

CE: Production Manager.

PT: That's Dave, Jim is Office Manager.

CE: And what are you?

PT: I'm just a General Manager.

CE: General manager.

PT: I listen to everybody and make sure --

CE: Are you the peace maker?

PT: I think I am.

CE: Somebody has to do that.

PT: We all kind of -- I kind of converted some of them to peace makers, too.

CE: Tell us a little bit about this tour of the cheese factory. Who thought of that? Was that Ed's idea, too? How did that ever come about?

PT: I think it came after I was -- When I came this was not here, it was a little -- Big room - - I can show you some pictures out of the book.

CE: All right, so, I've seen the pictures now. But tell me a little bit about -- Did people ask, coming out here, say, "Gee, could I see your cheese factory? See who you do it?"

PT: I think that's about what happened. But what happened we had a little -- Always we had cheese, a little smaller than we can package, little less than eight ounces, and we sell those here as specials. And so we always had a little trade coming in to buy some cheese here. We had a little counter and a place and people would drop in, people were going by that knew this and would drop in and buy just a couple of cheese, something like that. It wouldn't amount to very much, but then it got to be a little bigger and then they wanted -- Some people would come in and they wanted --

CE: "Could we see?"

PT: "Could we see how you do this?" So we took them through the old factory where they went right into the making room, where they were dipping the cheese, in the old plant. Down through the boiler room and the old Mary Ann, down into the cellars and back up. In those days we hand-cranked the cheese up and down, of course, we lift two lifts, sort of dumbwaiters. And I think that's why they got started, since some people wanted to see it once, maybe they liked it. Well, then again, it was getting pretty heavy after a while because --

CE: It was getting kind of pesky, wasn't it?

PT: Yeah, because the men were working with boots on and washing things down and making cheese and all that kind of things so that. When we rebuilt then we put a

hallway in there so they could look through the window and see where the operation was taking place.

CE: When do the tours take place, in the morning?

PT: Every half hour from ten in the morning until four in the afternoon.

CE: Every half hour. How long does it take?

PT: About 15 minutes, - 20 minutes.

CE: Perhaps we could do that after lunch?

PT: Yeah.

CE: Would you like to, Mrs. Martinelli?

GM: I have done it. But I'd like to see it again.

CE: Oh, you have done it. Okay, all right, now let's get to you going here. Were you married at the time you came to this --

PT: Yes. Yes, I married shortly after I went to work for the Marin Dell Dairy.

CE: And who did you marry?

PT: I married Marie Neil of Petaluma. It's an old Petaluma family. They're related also to the Haskins. They're the two old, the older families here.

CE: And you have children?

PT: I have two children, we have two children.

CE: And Marilyn, she's the pianist?

PT: Marilyn is the pianist.

CE: Tell us about her, she plays for a trio? Concert?

PT: Well, it's the Chambers Soloists Trio and they put on a spring series and a fall series also. The fall series has not yet begun but we expect it will. She is married and living in Petaluma. She teaches piano at the Sonoma State University, and has a number of her own private pupils.

CE: Where did she study piano, might I ask?

PT: She studied with her mother, to begin with.

CE: Her mother was a pianist?

PT: Yes, she teaches piano also, still, yet.

CE: How lovely to have all that in your home.

PT: She plays my accompaniment at church. I sing.

CE: You sing!

PT: Anyway that's besides, that's not cheese factory.

CE: And Bob, what's Bob do?

PT: Bob, he's living with us at home, yet. He doesn't have any other interests besides Explorers and --

CE: Is he interested in the cheese business?

PT: No.

CE: Not one bit?

PT: Neither one of them, no. He's got the Explorer group in Novato and he's worked for the Marin County -- What do you call the college down there?

CE: Indian Valley?

PT: No, well, he started at Indian Valley but now he's working for the whole unit because they kind of closed Indian Valley down and shut it off.

CE: Oh, yes, the Community College system.

PT: Marin Community College, that's it, yes, he works for them as Maintenance Superintendent and also chief of building construction and that sort of thing. He gets mixed up in all those things. And then he works part-time for the Sheriff's Department as a volunteer deputy. So he's pretty well -- He comes home late at night, when I'm in bed and he leaves before I get up in the morning.

CE: You see him weekends?

PT: Yes, if he's --

CE: Well, not weekends, you're here.

End of Side A

CE: So, you live in Petaluma?

PT: Yes, that's where I met my wife. She had been studying organ in San Francisco and the Christian Science Church had been recently been built and they had put in an organ and they didn't really have anybody that was really good at playing an organ but they did have an organist. And she went to the president of the group and wanted to know if she could practice on their organ because she was studying it and they said certainly. So she practiced --

CE: Where was the church?

PT: Christian Science Church.

CE: There's several in the city.

PT: On B and Sixth in Petaluma.

CE: Oh, in Petaluma?

PT: Petaluma.

CE: Oh, B and Sixth, I beg your pardon. Is that where you sing?

PT: Yes.

CE: Good for you. Are you a baritone?

PT: Yes.

CE: I thought so.

PT: And so they gave her the job as organist, about a month later then they were looking for a soloist, too. My stepmother who is Christian Scientist -- In fact, the whole family was, at that time, Martha was especially Christian Science, they said, "We'll you try out." So, I went in and tried out and I walked through the door and into the platform and looked down at the organ and there was this beautiful blue-eyed blonde.

CE: You lost your mind.

PT: That was the story about that.

CE: Let's get back to the cheese business; I don't want to keep you too long here. You started earlier to tell us some of your challenges. Now you gave me two of them. Were there other things that were challenging you? The first one, well, you solved the green mold and then you set up the bookkeeping system and made it a family corporation and everybody holds stock. What else have particularly done that --

PT: I think cheese making is a continuing challenge, actually.

CE: Why do you say that?

PT: Well, it's -- You're dealing with live bacteria in a media you don't have full control over and you don't add any additives, no preservatives, and you don't

pasteurize the cheese. The milk is pasteurized. But you add a culture that produces lactic acid, which varies in conditions, strength, and strains, they are subject to phages, which are like a virus or something or other.

CE: It's a very delicate thing, isn't it?

PT: Now we are buying our lactic cultures from a laboratory in San Francisco who makes cultures such a thing; Dairies Industry Laboratory, they call it.

CE: Great.

PT: We send them samples of our whey and they analyze it for phages and they isolate the phages and produce different strains of these bacteria that will reduce the given phage that they might find. So we're having very --

CE: So you are using these new resources to assist you?

PT: Yes, we are.

CE: Tell me, Pierce, can you explain to a lay person simply what making cheese is? Someone never having been on a farm doesn't know what whey is. What is whey?

PT: Milk is a very complicated structure. It is very necessary at the very beginning of life and so it has to have all of those things that you need at that time. And it consists of carbohydrates in the form of lactose, milk sugar. It has proteins which are the caseins and fat which -- Animal fat -- And then it is a good many of the -- The calcium that is needed especially for bone growth and bone maintenance, actually. Milk is rather high in calcium.

CE: That's why sometimes they're told to drink it, isn't it? Growing children, for their bones?

PT: Yes. There are other sources of calcium but they work well with the milk. Like such as bran flakes or something like that.

CE: Very good.

PT: It has vitamin A, which is a fat soluble vitamin. I don't think there are many other vitamins in it that I really recall, off hand, but it's a good source of that. Of course, the fluid milk you buy these days is mostly all fortified with vitamin D. That's a fortification but that's an additive. We don't have that in our cheese.

CE: In cheese, do you begin with butter or cheese?

PT: We would begin with --

CE: I mean, butter is an entirely different process.

PT: That's nothing to do with cheese.

CE: Nothing to do with you, anything at all, okay. Now to make the cheese, then?

PT: We, as I started to say, have the lactic acid culture that we add to it. And then we have our own curing culture which I managed to isolate and reproduce some years back. Which is a very common organism, actually. It's a milk mold. We used to call it *oidium lactis*. It's now called something else, I can't off hand remember what, longer name, sounds much more impressive. Which is the main curing organism but there are also working in there some of the small bacteria cocci. And they're the ones that produce the red ferment at the end of the curing process if you let it go that long. It doesn't show up until the alkalinity has built up to the point where it favors the growth of that. What's happening in that cheese is this: We add an enzyme to coagulate the milk at the outset. Right now we're using microbial rennet they call it. It's made by the growth of mold in whey. I think they

use it as the culture it's grown in. But they extract that culture, that enzyme, and instead of being the animal rennet that we used to use.

CE: Well, tell me this, backing up a moment, you don't -- The whole corporation has evolved from your dairy herd on your 700 acres. Until now, Edward indicated, you buy the -- What do you buy from somebody else to make your cheese?

PT: Well, as I say, Ed didn't, at the outset we had cows here until 1925. The early days they produced all their own milk here. Later on they bought milk from little dairies that are around here.

CE: Okay.

PT: And then we were one of the first one to pasteurize milk for making cheese, in the state. We pasteurized the milk in an old tubular pasteurizer before we made it into cheese. And that made a big difference because you could control the bacteria that you had in the milk. You kill what's in there and then you put in what you really want. And that's the situation there. Now later on, the little dairies that were around here disappeared. They all went to fluid, market milk, and those that didn't just dropped off. So we had no supply there but we talked to the people at the Cooperative Creamery in Petaluma, it's called the California Cooperative Creamery now, and they were really cooperative. They were great with us - -

CE: I know where they are. Did they provide you?

PT: They provide us with the milk. We have a special mixture. It's 4½ % butterfat and a 9% serum solids.

CE: 4½ % butterfat.

PT: Yes.

CE: And then how much percent --

PT: Nine percent serum solids. The total is in the 13.5 total solids, which is high. You don't get that --

CE: What does it come in, a box?

PT: No, it's still fluid.

CE: It's still fluid with all that solid? Okay.

PT: And the pasteurized it for us. They put it in a 5,000 gallon truck. They bring it out here and put it in our 5,000 gallon tank, storage tank, which is refrigerated. Enough milk for two days at the moment.

CE: Okay. And that is only a two day supply?

PT: Two days' supply, yes

CE: Oh, Lord.

PT: Well, that's a little, that's a very small. Cheese factories --

CE: Out of 5,000 gallons of milk, how much cheese can you make?

PT: Let's see, we're making about -- We get into pounds now.

CE: Yes, I realize that.

PT: 5,000 gallons is 42,000 pounds or something like that. And out of that we get about, oh, about 7 1/2 pounds per pound of cheese. Six hundred pounds of cheese out of 5,000 gallons of milk.

CE: Well, it's almost equal, then.

PT: Pounds reconvert to gallons, yes, gallon per pound.

CE: Boy, have we learned stuff about the cheese business!

PT: Here we have the milk. Now we bring that milk out of the storage tank into a surge tank, which the pump pulls it out of that storage tank and pumps it through a re-heater. Which will bring the temperature up from 40 to 45 degrees up to 90 degrees. That is what we call a setting temperature, 90 degrees. We put the measured amount of milk, which is about 142 pounds, I think, into each of about a hundred different containers, those white buckets that we have down there. And at this point we add the microbial rennet and the lactic acid bacteria and the *oidium lactis*, which is related to mold bacteria, and then it goes to work. About 20 minute after we set it, about 10 minutes after we set it, it becomes solid, it's like a gelatin or jello but not that hard, it never gets that hard. And then we cut it with a wire cutters. It'll put little cubes in that bucket and then the whey starts to rise. That's the watery portion of the milk. In milk the casein and the fat are in suspension. They're not really in solution; they're not dissolved in there. And if you have un-homogenized milk, you'll see the fat rise to the surface.

CE: And that's the whey.

PT: The whey. The casein exists as sort of little fibers all through there and the action of the coagulant is to sort of line those fibers up something like a structure, and they all stick together and they make a curd. Then the lactic acid bacteria produce acid and they back up this formation of the curd by producing acid which toughens the curd, makes it hard.

CE: The cheese is now really getting --

PT: At this point then we decant off a portion of the watery portion, the things in solution, which is whey. It has a very little bit of butterfat because you don't save it all, you don't get it all out of the cheese making. It has the milk sugar, that portion that does remain in, the moisture that's in the curd. And it has some of the minerals which are in milk. The calcium comes from the casein, I think.

CE: How do you get the flavor?

PT: Well, the flavor is developed by the --

CE: Or is that a secret?

PT: No, it isn't a secret, anybody can do it. It takes somebody to sell it, that's the term we used to say, that any damn fool can make it, but you have to sell it. Anyway, the growth of the bacteria produces a breakdown in the -- Especially the lactic acid culture break down the milk sugar into acid whey or lactic acid. The *oidium lactis* growth breaks down the protein into amino acids and things like that. In other words, it converts the casein into an edible thing for bacteria to eat and it develops flavors. Your amino acids and what they give off, different ethers and that sort of thing makes the flavors.

CE: Makes the flavors. Do you have a laboratory here, might I ask?

PT: No, the laboratory is my desk here.

CE: You don't have a microscope or --

PT: Oh, I have a microscope, but I have --

CE: Where do you keep all that, at home?

PT: Oh, it's in the closet over there.

CE: Oh, I see. You don't need a sterile lab to do this?

PT: No, not really, no. It isn't like a hospital.

CE: You don't have to wear a white coat to go through here.

PT: No. The boys all wear white clothes.

CE: Well, that sort of goes with it, the cleanliness.

PT: Well, where we were we --

CE: Well, how do you make cheese, the various flavors? Well, now tell me, you have stuff always on the production line. If you've got these 5,000 gallons every two days you're whipping out 5,000 pounds of cheese, it's always going out of here then, isn't it?

PT: Except for the one day that, the cleanup, you see, then we set a break in that. I'll show you the -- Maybe you can visualize it better.

CE: You have describe most of your duties now to us, are there other duties you haven't told us about? Or responsibilities? I suppose there are a myriad of them like Edward has many things he does that -- Like you say in the service, other duties as assigned. Here's a job description of your job and then this little sentence on the bottom which says, "and any other duties as assigned."

PT: Well, that's possible. We have rare Board of Directors meetings, but we do have them and we converse by telephone to the people in the south, one of them is on the board.

CE: Is your board a rotating board, or do you have life membership?

PT: It's life membership, practically.

CE: You have to die to get off the board or something? How many are you on your board?

PT: Three.

CE: Three make all the decisions of a three-man board?

PT: Yes.

CE: I think that's a good idea. We have too many members on most boards. It's unwieldy.

PT: You get so many diverse opinions, ruled by committee.

CE: Is there anything you would to see evolve from this point with your company?

PT: Oh, yes.

CE: All right, let's talk about those.

PT: We don't want to get into --

CE: Goals or --

PT: Yes, this year we have as a goal to really get into the Seattle area, we never have been successful there.

CE: Oh, you mean market in the Seattle --

PT: Market in the Seattle area, yes.

CE: Are you going to send Ed?

PT: We'll send him up; he needs a trip.

CE: You'd better come in here and listen to this, Ed. You're getting an assignment you don't know about. All right, that's one of your goals.

PT: And I think, following that --

CE: You can handle more business?

PT: Oh, yes.

CE: How do you get more business with --

PT: We just make more cheese.

CE: You mean instead of getting 5,000 gallons every two days you get --

PT: Five thousand every day.
CE: Every day.
PT: Or twice a day.
CE: You got the space to do it?
PT: Not really, not for twice a day.
CE: But once a day?
PT: Once a day.
CE: Okay, what other goals do you have you in mind?
PT: Well, we do have -- Ed spoke of some of the contacts we've had in the Midwest and the east coast. We do have a little contact that's very fragile right now with Marshall Fields store in Chicago. We have no real distributor back there, but he has a truck that comes out apparently any time and will pick up cheese. It's a frozen food center. They don't have to -- They wouldn't freeze this though and they'd pick it up and take it --
CE: Can you freeze your cheese?
PT: Only if it is fully ripe. I don't recommend - -
CE: In other words, if we hit this date, where they say here, and we can't use it - -
PT: I'd freeze it three weeks before that.
CE: Oh, you would!
PT: You can freeze it. Oh, you use it then, too, but I mean, you can freeze it.
CE: Yes, but I didn't know you could freeze cheese - - I don't think you can.
PT: Well, I don't approve of it myself, but people do it.
CE: Rather than have it spoil, you would recommend that?
PT: Yes, if you are not going to use it, but, of course, that doesn't happen to me, I use it.
CE: You like your products?
PT: Oh, sure. Gosh it's great. Especially the little breakfast cheese. It's creamy and nice. It has a little of the buttermilk flavor and it's really great.
CE: Have you had a physical lately? You are in good shape? You look great - - doesn't he? So you really want to continue and expand your business?
PT: I think so, yes.
CE: Do you agree with that, Edward?
EP: Sure I do.
PT: Of course it depends on other generations how far we go with it, too.
EP: That's right. Unless the future generation attempts to go ahead and expand it'll --
PT: Contract right away.
CE: You can't be static, can you, in your business?
PT: No. Marketing situation is changing all the time.
CE: Oh, lordy, lordy, yes.
PT: We had a profusion of little distributors in different places, now we have three master distributors. One in Sacramento, one in the bay area and one in Los Angeles. And they in turn resell to smaller distributors.
CE: Is there money in each of these handling, for somebody?
PT: Yes.
CE: Okay, any more goals?
PT: One more --

CE: Marketing?
PT: Marketing is a goal, I'd say.
CE: You don't want to get in any other -- Away from --
PT: Oh, I've done that.
CE: Oh, no more cheese, different forms. Is there anything more you'd like to say further? Have you been happy here?
PT: Oh, exceedingly happy.
CE: You don't want to go back to Marin Dell?
PT: No, I'm glad I didn't take the radio job to begin with.
CE: God, you'd have been in Boise Idaho.
EP: Just think you could have been at the convention today.
CE: Yes, you could have been a delegate
PT: God, How lucky I was.
PT: Not this one, the one that's coming up in Dallas.
CE: Oh, yes, in Dallas. I hope we're all Republican. Well, I can't thank you enough, Pierce, for giving Mrs. Martinelli and me this wonderful visit and you, too, Ed.
PT: I've learned me a lot, too.
CE: Well, that's good, that's good. And it's been so generous of each of you and it's a wonderful business and I think you should be so proud of it. Wouldn't you agree Mrs. Martinelli?
GM: Definitely.
CE: Thank you so much.