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The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Janet Cronk
THE DREYER'S GRAND ICE CREAM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviews conducted by
Victor Geraci
in 2010

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Interview #1 October 21, 2010

[Begin Audio File 1]

01-00:00:00

Geraci: I am Vic Geraci, Food and Wine Historian from the University of California Berkeley's Regional Oral History Office. Today's date is Thursday, October 21, 2010 and seated with me is Janet Cronk. Ms. Cronk is the wife of Rick Cronk. Good morning and thank you for being here.

01-00:00:16

Cronk: Okay. Good morning, Vic.

01-00:00:20

Geraci: Whenever I do an interview like this I like to start at the beginning of a person's life. I think that our lives are the summation of everything from beginning to end. I like to think we get wiser as we get older so let's kind of start back at the beginning. Your mom and dad, grandparents, when you were born.

01-00:00:40

Cronk: Oh, okay. I was born in 1946 in Palo Alto, California. My father had just come back from the war. I'm the very first of the Baby Boomers. I grew up going to Stanford football games, thinking I would perhaps go to Stanford and, of course, ended up at Berkeley. My parents were both born in Palo Alto and my grandparents came to Palo Alto as young people.

01-00:01:13

Geraci: Where'd they come from?

01-00:01:15

Cronk: My paternal grandfather died when my mother was ten, so my paternal step-grandfather, who was a wonderful, wonderful man, he actually graduated here at Cal in 1899.

01-00:01:31

Geraci: Oh, my goodness.

01-00:01:32

Cronk: And he lived until ninety-four. So when Rick and I were first married, we were able to visit him, play dominoes with him. He was still mentally alert. So Rick knew Granddaddy.

01-00:01:47

Geraci: What was his name?

01-00:01:49

Cronk: Clayburgh.

01-00:01:50

Geraci: Clayburgh.

- 01-00:01:51
Cronk: And my maternal grandfather died when we were children. I'm getting paternal and maternal mixed up.
- 01-00:02:00
Geraci: Mixed up.
- 01-00:02:01
Cronk: My Grandfather Clayburgh was my maternal step-grandfather. And my paternal grandfather we didn't know very well. He had a heart attack when we were children. And our grandmothers were very different. My maternal grandmother was a very sophisticated woman. Very intelligent. Traveled, entertained and what have you. My paternal grandmother was a cook. Wonderful. She did all the darning and sewing for our family. She also had sour dough starter in her refrigerator. I don't know what any of this has to do with Dreyer's.
- 01-00:02:45
Geraci: She was very domestic.
- 01-00:02:47
Cronk: But yes, she was. She was. She was. And she lived to be ninety-nine.
- 01-00:02:54
Geraci: Good genes.
- 01-00:02:55
Cronk: Yeah. Good genes.
- 01-00:02:57
Geraci: Now, where did they come from?
- 01-00:03:00
Cronk: My paternal grandparents came from Omaha and my maternal grandmother came from Minneapolis. I'm not sure about the grandfather that died when my mother was ten. Herbert Clayburgh was born in San Francisco, I believe. So we go back a long way in California.
- 01-00:03:22
Geraci: Why'd they come to California? Was it jobs?
- 01-00:03:30
Cronk: Well, that goes too far back for me. I haven't mentioned our parents. And Rick would have told you this. His father came to San Francisco during World War II, having been born in Minneapolis. And he said, "I'm going to find a way to come back to San Francisco."
- 01-00:03:49
Geraci: The weather's just a little bit nicer.

01-00:03:50

Cronk:

Yes, yes. And so he married a woman from Minneapolis and they came to San Francisco. My mother and father both were born in Palo Alto and they went to Jordan Junior High School and Palo Alto High and then my father went right into the Army Air Corps. He never got further than Arizona. He flew planes. My mother went down to Arizona to marry him in a small ceremony. She didn't have a wedding dress. Her older sister was married in a beautiful wedding but it was war and she had a very pretty suit. And then she got pregnant right away. And I have a twin sister.

01-00:04:42

Geraci:

So there's the two of you, then?

01-00:04:44

Cronk:

Yeah. And I have a younger sister. But she was, in essence, a homemaker all of her life.

01-00:04:47

Geraci:

What are their names?

01-00:04:50

Cronk:

Carolyn Mael. M-A-U-E-L. Very unusual name. And Jim Mael.

01-00:04:56

Geraci:

Okay. You're one of the rare few native Californians.

01-00:05:02

Cronk:

Yes. Well, second generation and almost third.

01-00:05:06

Geraci:

What was high school like for you or elementary school?

01-00:05:14

Cronk:

Oh, Palo Alto was a wonderful—and I suppose it still is—town to grow up in. We rode our bikes everywhere. We went to the library. We walked to school, something that children don't do today. And the schools were excellent.

01-00:05:32

Geraci:

That's the 1950s white picket fence era—middle class dream.

01-00:05:36

Cronk:

Exactly. Well, it really was.

01-00:05:42

Geraci:

Yeah.

01-00:05:42

Cronk:

Although my sister and I were always aware that finances were tight. My father was very frugal.

01-00:05:55

Geraci:

What'd your father do?

01-00:05:57

Cronk:

He did several things. But what he ended up doing was he had a homeware store in Palo Alto that was a kind of store like—it was in San Francisco—that you would go to for wedding presents. It was called The Homeware Store. That's not right. I can't really remember. But, actually, when Stanford Shopping Center was opened, it put a blight on Palo Alto. Virtually every business in Palo Alto turned over and it was very difficult. And then he had an aneurysm when he was forty-five and died very suddenly.

01-00:06:43

Geraci:

Oh, that must have been sad.

01-00:06:44

Cronk:

That was sad.

01-00:06:47

Geraci:

What'd your mom do?

01-00:06:48

Cronk:

Well, my mother was very active. She was a golfer, she was a bridge player. She was a volunteer. Allied Arts and what have you. She was an attractive woman and she eventually remarried a wonderful man who was really more the grandfather to Rick and my children.

01-00:07:12

Geraci:

Oh, okay. Now, did your mom work?

01-00:07:16

Cronk:

No, no. But she volunteered. She did all the school things and things like that.

01-00:07:22

Geraci:

So this is a very typical 1950s American.

01-00:07:24

Cronk:

Oh, very. June Cleaver just passed away last week.

01-00:07:27

Geraci:

Yes.

01-00:07:29

Cronk:

My mother was June Cleaver.

01-00:07:30

Geraci:

June Cleaver. That very middle class in everything that you do. So you're in high school. Did you go to Palo Alto High School also?

01-00:07:39

Cronk:

No. Actually, at that point we moved to Menlo Park and I went to Woodside High School for two years. And then we decided, I'm not quite sure why, to go to Castilleja, which is a girl's school in Palo Alto. There were fifty-five girls in my graduating class. It was an epiphany for me. It was a wonderful

experience. I was in student government. I was president of my class. At Woodside I would have been lost in the crowd. And probably that's where I focused on going to the University of California.

01-00:08:16

Geraci: Was this a religious school?

01-00:08:21

Cronk: No, it's non-denominational.

01-00:08:22

Geraci: Just a private girls' school.

01-00:08:23

Cronk: Yeah. No, it's just a girl's school. And it still is a girls' school today, which is so rare. But it's an excellent, excellent school.

01-00:08:30

Geraci: So when you were working there, did you have any idea what you wanted to do at Cal?

01-00:08:37

Cronk: No.

01-00:08:38

Geraci: Probably like most freshmen. "I just want to go to Cal."

01-00:08:40

Cronk: No, no. I was a social science field major, which they don't have anymore. But in essence it's kind of like "Political Economies in an Industrial Society," which our older son Jeff majored in. It was a little bit of everything. I loved poli sci and I loved anthropology. But Rick and I—he's probably told you this. I was in Delta Gamma and when I was a freshman in the DG house he was a hasher. He was a fifth year senior. All the girls knew Rick and loved Rick. He was very humorous and he was fun. He happened to be dating a senior in the DG house and he didn't know me from Adam. So a year later we met at the Lair of the Bear, the Cal alumni family camp, and started dating. We had our first date July 4th. We were engaged in September and married February 4th. My mother and father didn't bat an eyelash.

01-00:09:52

Geraci: This is rather a quick timeline.

01-00:09:54

Cronk: They loved Rick Cronk. I had two sisters. So my father was just delighted to have a man in the family. So it took me five years. I sort of had to go every other semester. We were on the quarter system. Every other quarter. And I also had a baby, so it took me five years to graduate. But I did.

01-00:10:19

Geraci: Let's go back. Let's talk about—so you married Rick then when you were—

01-00:10:25

Cronk: I was twenty years old.

01-00:10:26

Geraci: And you were a freshman? Or sophomore by then?

01-00:10:28

Cronk: No, I was a junior. It was my junior year.

01-00:10:30

Geraci: Oh, okay. Your junior year.

01-00:10:31

Cronk: Because we met between my sophomore and junior year.

01-00:10:34

Geraci: Okay.

01-00:10:35

Cronk: But it doesn't matter. None of my sorority sisters were married.

01-00:10:40

Geraci: And, there again, very typical of the times. You joined a sorority.

01-00:10:43

Cronk: Oh, yes. The DG house was great. Some of my closest friends are still my closest friends. It was a base. I'd come from a school with fifty-five girls. My freshman year on campus was Mario Savio and the Free Speech Movement. I literally went around the demonstrations the day, the famous day, of Mario Savio in the car and what have you. I went around and I went to class. Later I became a little more politically active. Of course, I was a Democrat and my parents were Republicans. That's kind of Cal. [laughter]

01-00:11:27

Geraci: Well, that's the era. It has to be. Let's talk a little bit about that day. That's a famous day. How many people can say they saw the Free Speech Movement in action.

01-00:11:36

Cronk: But I was so unaware.

01-00:11:38

Geraci: So at that time you were not politically engaged.

01-00:11:42

Cronk: No, no. As I said, later, all of us became more involved.

01-00:11:55

Geraci: Politically involved. Now, when you were in school, high school, college, were you in any sports or any clubs?

01-00:12:05

Cronk:

That's a good question. I was fairly athletic but Castilleja their practice field was a circle. Now they have a lovely field donated by the Spieker family. But we played field hockey in a round circle that wasn't regulation by any mean. And, again, the thing about Castilleja was—my sister and I were in the plays. Things we never would have done at Woodside.

01-00:12:46

Geraci:

It's a small, intimate—girls' schools provide a background for young ladies that they will not get anywhere else.

01-00:12:59

Cronk:

Well, they're not very popular today. And women, and Title IX sports, they have all this opportunity. But back then it just was a major difference.

01-00:13:13

Geraci:

What'd you major in at Cal?

01-00:13:15

Cronk:

Social science.

01-00:13:17

Geraci:

Social science. Okay.

01-00:13:18

Cronk:

With an emphasis in anthropology. Cultural anthropology. Which I loved. I'm not sure what I would have done with it.

01-00:13:24

Geraci:

That's almost a degree that was designed for teachers.

01-00:13:27

Cronk:

Or, for instance, that was the day of Kennedy and the Peace Corps. But it wasn't very practical.

01-00:13:39

Geraci:

You can't go to Cal without having some of that era at least rub off on you.

01-00:13:43

Cronk:

Oh, absolutely.

01-00:13:44

Geraci:

The activism.

01-00:13:46

Cronk:

And I went door to door for Teddy Kennedy. Not Teddy Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy. And Martin Luther King was assassinated. I remember watching that on TV, just tears streaming. As I said, Rick and I became more political. I did more than Rick did.

01-00:14:05

Geraci:

Now, let's go back to the Bear's Lair. Really you met Rick there.

01-00:14:10

Cronk: Right.

01-00:14:12

Geraci: So what were you doing at the Bear's Lair?

01-00:14:15

Cronk: Well, my freshman roommate, Cam Corlett, now Cam Teasdale, she worked at the Lair of the Bear and tried to get me to go my first summer. I actually decided to go back to Palo Alto to Menlo Park because I thought my parents missed us and I went to Stanford to summer school, which was a really interesting summer. And Cam continued to press and say, "You got to work at the Lair." So the next summer I did get a job in the dining hall, which is a starting position. I arrived and I was very neat and tidy and I had matching Bermudas and tops, ironed and what have you. The Lair was the dirtiest place on earth. It still is.

01-00:15:02

Geraci: It's a camp.

01-00:15:03

Cronk: It still is. [laughter] It's primitive. Oh, I was in shellshock. Plus the dining hall was the worst job. You were low man on the totem pole and you didn't get the right day off and what have you. And if I hadn't met Rick, I'm not sure I would have lasted the summer, because I was pretty pampered, I guess.

01-00:15:30

Geraci: Did you know Gary at that time also?

01-00:15:33

Cronk: No, no. Gary was in the Army I think at that point.

01-00:15:36

Geraci: Okay, so yeah. Was ahead of you.

01-00:15:38

Cronk: Right. And so was Cab.

01-00:15:40

Geraci: Okay.

01-00:15:41

Cronk: Cab's from a family of eight brothers and sisters and her younger sister Gail is my class at Cal. So I knew Gail but I didn't meet Cab and Gary until after we were married. But, again, we had that short period.

01-00:15:57

Geraci: I was going to say it wasn't that long. And then you mentioned right away you had your first child.

01-00:16:04

Cronk: Well, not right away. In those days it was very important that you didn't have to get married. So I like to point out that we had Jeff a year and nine months after we first got married.

01-00:16:16

Geraci: His name is Jeff?

01-00:16:18

Cronk: Yes, right. Right. But yes. That did slow down my education. But because of the quarter system, it made it easier. I could really arrange my classes Tuesday/Thursday or Monday/Wednesday/Friday and that was long before childcare was in our vocabulary. There wasn't anything on campus. The only reason I graduated was because of Cab, who at that point had become a friend. She babysat for me. And a neighbor babysat for me. Otherwise my mother was away and Rick's mother was not domestic or helpful. She was a very nice woman but she didn't help with her grandchildren.

01-00:17:05

Geraci: So your friendship with Gary and Cab, then, starts very soon and you become very close?

01-00:17:12

Cronk: Oh, yes. Yes. Yeah.

01-00:17:15

Geraci: Taking care of the kids. Now, do you have any other children?

01-00:17:20

Cronk: Yes. We have Rob, who is two and a half years younger than Jeff, our oldest. And six years later Chris arrived. Chris was the one surprise. He was like, "Oh." I may be getting ahead but that was when Rick and Gary were negotiating with Chart House to purchase Dreyer's. The celebration, it was in May 1977. I was on the couch because I had a difficult pregnancy. I couldn't go to the dinner with Ken Cook and whatever. I was on the couch. Not happy.

01-00:18:09

Geraci: I was going to say missed out on all the fun at that point. So you graduate, you start your family. Had you thought about going to work at that point?

01-00:18:22

Cronk: No, no. This isn't particularly relevant. No, I had my two children and we'd been through the restaurant business, which had been the ship that didn't come in and was very stressful. And then Rick and Gary got together. Rick was still running the restaurants in the very beginning. I thought, "Oh, I can go out and get a job. I'm free. My children are five and six and a half." And then I suddenly was pregnant when I was thirty years old. So no, I never hit the job market.

- 01-00:19:11
Geraci: Yeah. There's nothing wrong with that. Let's go back then. You mentioned the restaurant.
- 01-00:19:18
Cronk: That was a leap of faith for Cab and for me.
- 01-00:19:21
Geraci: Yeah. Let's talk about that. So here Gary and Rick come up. Well, actually, this is Rick, because Rick had done food service before.
- 01-00:19:30
Cronk: Yes. Rick.
- 01-00:19:31
Geraci: Rick had really done more in restaurant and food service.
- 01-00:19:35
Cronk: Oh, yes, definitely.
- 01-00:19:37
Geraci: Let's talk about that. What types of things had Rick done?
- 01-00:19:40
Cronk: Well, Rick could do anything. He was a jack of all trades. He had worked since he was in the seventh grade. He'd been a shoe salesman. He'd worked in summer camps. So I don't know why we first became interested in the restaurant business but I think everyone thinks they know what the public wants, the perfect restaurant, and then nine out of ten restaurants fail. But he'd worked as a waiter.
- 01-00:20:09
Geraci: And you said he had been a hasher at your sorority.
- 01-00:20:11
Cronk: Oh, well, that didn't take any experience. When we were first married, we loved going to—we didn't have any money—restaurants and trying new things. We'd both grown up on frozen lima beans and Campbell's soup casseroles. So, really, things like crepes suzette. We'd work on the recipe. Or Caesar salad. We'd go to Vanessi's in the city and work on the recipe.
- 01-00:20:51
Geraci: This is the food part of me. What makes people want to experiment? Because the background, yes, the fifties, the food, it's industrial food.
- 01-00:21:00
Cronk: Yes, it was.
- 01-00:21:01
Geraci: It's very processed.

- 01-00:21:03
Cronk: And not fresh.
- 01-00:21:03
Geraci: And not fresh.
- 01-00:21:04
Cronk: You didn't have anything from Mexico.
- 01-00:21:05
Geraci: But a lot of people have that a-ha moment. Something where it just turns them to say, "Oh, there's a great meal."
- 01-00:21:13
Cronk: I don't remember an "aha" moment. But when Rick was first interested in this, Bradley, Lee and Freeman had just started Victoria's Station and it was very popular and very successful. So we thought we could do the same thing with California wine. Our restaurants were called Vintage House. I'm sure Rick told you we went to Texas with a California wine theme and everyone thought that California wine was Gallo and French wine was in. We had light entrees on our menu and all the competition had beef, beef, beef, and French red wine and we lost our shirts.
- 01-00:22:06
Geraci: Because the first restaurant is in Orinda.
- 01-00:22:09
Cronk: That was always successful from day one. But it couldn't sustain the four others after it.
- 01-00:22:16
Geraci: There were three others here in the Bay Area, weren't there?
- 01-00:22:20
Cronk: Well, we went from Orinda to San Jose to Houston, San Antonio and the last one was W.F. Cronk's, we still have a sign in our garage. It was a restaurant in Mill Valley.
- 01-00:22:37
Geraci: But you still have the sign?
- 01-00:22:39
Cronk: Oh, yes. It's big. Nobody else wants a sign that says W.F. Cronk.
- 01-00:22:49
Geraci: Now, I know that working in restaurants is a tough life. That's a lot of hours.
- 01-00:22:56
Cronk: Oh. Oh, it was tough. And we moved to Houston. Gary always stayed here but Rick and I moved to Houston for nine months. I had two little babies. No family, no childcare. Little rental apartment, rental furniture, and Rick would

work until midnight. We came into the restaurant on Mother's Day for brunch and it was going to be a treat. The dishwasher had been arrested the night before and Rick ended up doing dishes.

01-00:23:36

Geraci: That's the feeling I got. That Rick ended up doing a lot of these things.

01-00:23:41

Cronk: Well, Rick was the people person. He was the manager person. Gary was the numbers person. He was forward planning. So it was a great partnership. I'm sure you've heard this over and over again. They had two such different skill sets, so they complimented each other.

01-00:24:19

Geraci: Okay. Now, a little bit before the restaurant, hadn't Rick been in investment industry for a while in the city?

01-00:24:28

Cronk: Oh, yes. He became a stockbroker. That was part of why I went to Cal every other quarter. We went to New York for three months and he actually trained with Eastman Dillon Union Securities and was a stockbroker for a while. That was a rough patch.

01-00:24:56

Geraci: I take it he didn't enjoy that.

01-00:24:59

Cronk: Oh, he enjoyed it. But in his enthusiasm, they would have these stock offerings and he'd get so enthusiastic and he'd phone my family, other friends families, and sell them these IPOs and then they weren't successful. It was not good. But he learned a lot.

01-00:25:38

Geraci: Well, just the business skills that he's learning. Okay, so we'll move it forward back to the Vintage House again. What was it like going to dinner at one of those restaurants? You mention there was light fare.

01-00:25:44

Cronk: Well, we were fairly ahead of our time. Again, I mentioned, we would have light things. We would have á la carte. By the time we had W.F. Cronk's in Mill Valley, you could go in and order a Caesar salad and a glass of wine and that would be your dinner, whereas, in those days, you still had the big plate full of food in most restaurants. That was one of the reasons that financially we failed. All the restaurants were popular but we just weren't bringing in the dollars that we needed to.

01-00:26:21

Geraci: Well, maybe that's just judging it from today. That is going to be an area where there would be more people interested in eating healthy and eating fresh.

- 01-00:26:28
Cronk: Yes. And that really was the beginning of á la carte ordering and, as I said, lighter food.
- 01-00:26:39
Geraci: Now, the year's on this are?
- 01-00:26:42
Cronk: Well, '77 Chris was born. I guess it was like '78, maybe. See, I should have prepared.
- 01-00:27:00
Geraci: No, I guess what I'm trying to get to is this at the beginning of the California Food Revolution, some people have called it, and moving toward the California or fresh cuisine.
- 01-00:27:10
Cronk: And wine. California wine. We called ourselves Vintage House. That's the earthquake [drill]. [sirens in background] They're having a statewide earthquake preparedness drill today.
- 01-00:27:36
Cronk: So our whole concept was modeled after California wine. In our restaurants we had a winery, the Hansel Winery in Napa that we designed our buildings after.
- 01-00:27:52
Geraci: Oh, I didn't know that. The Hansel Winery.
- 01-00:27:54
Cronk: Right. And we literally went up and physically picked up green wine bottles— we literally cut them ourselves, I don't know how, and sanded them some way, and used them for water glasses in the restaurant. We were hands-on into every detail.
- 01-00:28:19
Geraci: My goodness.
- 01-00:28:19
Cronk: And Cab and I tested recipe after recipe. Beef bourguignon we served in—
- 01-00:28:25
Geraci: Julia Child.
- 01-00:28:27
Cronk: Oh. Well, and Julia Child was part of all this. And popovers. We had big popovers and we had beef bourguignon and the popovers and we thought that was very new.
- 01-00:28:38
Geraci: But you and Cab were actually doing some of the recipe testing then.

01-00:28:41
Cronk: Oh, we were the only ones doing the recipe testing. And then Bob Nealis came along, who had worked with us at Lair and then Vintage House closed he went on to work at Dreyer's his whole career.

01-00:28:55
Geraci: But what was he doing?

01-00:28:56
Cronk: He was the chef.

01-00:28:57
Geraci: He was the chef. Okay.

01-00:28:58
Cronk: I don't even know what his major was at Cal but he worked at the Lair of the Bear. He was a cook at the Lair of the Bear, which is hardly gourmet.

01-00:29:11
Geraci: Was he classically trained as a chef?

01-00:29:13
Cronk: No, no, no. No.

01-00:29:14
Geraci: Just an interest in cooking.

01-00:29:16
Cronk: But our first restaurant was amazingly successful. Just had people the whole time it was in Orinda. As we opened other restaurants they weren't quite as popular.

01-00:29:32
Geraci: Now, I take it then that with you and Rick, and I don't know, maybe with Cab and Gary also, frequented Napa. You were wine country people.

01-00:29:42
Cronk: Well, not so much. We were young. We didn't have any money and we had young children. So as much as we could. But we watched Julia Child. We have a hysterical movie that I'm sure Cab has on CD at this point of her sister imitating Julia Child and stuffing a turkey. It was a little off color actually.

01-00:30:08
Geraci: But that was Julia.

01-00:30:10
Cronk: Julia Child was, too. But those were the days of Mateus a wine from Portugal. We thought that was just the very "in" thing. And Pouilly Fuisse from France was a wine we always bought if we were giving a gift to someone. So it was the beginning of California wine.

- 01-00:30:34
Geraci: That's interesting, because this restaurant then is at the cutting edge. Chez Panisse is just beginning at this time. The food movement is just in its infancy.
- 01-00:30:46
Cronk: I'm not sure we were aware of Chez Panisse at that point. Alice might have been a little bit later or she was more famous a little later.
- 01-00:30:58
Geraci: It took them a decade or two. It wasn't exactly a profitable either.
- 01-00:31:04
Cronk: Oh, well, if you read her biography they struggled.
- 01-00:31:16
Geraci: Anything else about the restaurant? What about the design? You had this theme of wine country? What would the restaurant look like?
- 01-00:31:24
Cronk: Oh, well, the one in Orinda we kind of wanted it to look like a wine cave. It was in the basement of this building, a lot of it, so a lot of it was dark. But, again, the hands-on [approach]. We had a third partner, Dave Hakman and, of course, you're always down to the wire before your opening night. I remember he laid the floor in the entry. It was leftover wine barrel staves. And literally, for the first week or two you'd come into the restaurant and it would smell like a wine cave. It just had this wonderful aroma that quickly went away.
- 01-00:32:09
Geraci: It dissipated.
- 01-00:32:10
Cronk: Those were the days when people smoked in restaurants.
- 01-00:32:17
Geraci: Okay. You really went for the theme, then.
- 01-00:32:20
Cronk: Oh, for sure. Yeah, yeah. I think they should be duplicated today. We had little wood trays that had holes and three little wineglasses. You could order three wines.
- 01-00:32:39
Geraci: Order a flight of wines.
- 01-00:32:40
Cronk: Exactly. We didn't call it that. The same thing. And nobody was doing anything like that. So we thought we were quite sophisticated.
- 01-00:32:55
Geraci: Who was picking the wine for your restaurant.

- 01-00:32:59
Cronk: Oh, good question. I don't really know. We certainly didn't even know what a sommelier was.
- 01-00:33:07
Geraci: That's what I'm saying. From the sounds of the operation, one of you had to assume this wine position.
- 01-00:33:12
Cronk: Well, that would have been Rick's side because he was the food and the wine and the staff. And you've undoubtedly heard about Jack Cakebread.
- 01-00:33:27
Geraci: Yes, but I haven't heard about that relationship.
- 01-00:33:30
Cronk: Oh, you haven't heard that story?
- 01-00:33:31
Geraci: No, please.
- 01-00:33:32
Cronk: Oh. Jack Cakebread had, I think from his father, inherited but he was a car mechanic and he had a shop on College Avenue. And all the people from Dreyer's, even pre-Rick and Gary, took their cars to him for an oil change or whatever. And you'd have to look at their cookbook or their website. But they became passionate about wine and would spend every weekend in Napa and bought their original winery just kind of over a dinner, where somebody said, "Hey, this winery's for sale." And they did the same thing that we were doing in the restaurant business, although they made it a lifelong pursuit. But they worked during the week and then went up to Napa and worked on the winery.
- 01-00:34:26
Geraci: But I didn't realize the relationship between the Dreyer's people and Cakebread.
- 01-00:34:28
Cronk: Oh, yes. Yes. Jack Cakebread has actually asked Rick to be on his board, which I think would be a wonderful board. It's not a public company but he's just very open to ideas and Rick hasn't had time to do it yet.
- 01-00:34:44
Geraci: Yeah. Rick's been busy.
- 01-00:34:50
Cronk: But Jack started off small and look at where he is today.
- 01-00:34:54
Geraci: That's a great side story to it. Because I was just wondering, with the wine, obviously with that type of connection then, Rick knows something about

what's happening in Napa. Because Napa is also just beginning its growth at that point.

01-00:35:09

Cronk: Yes, yes.

01-00:35:10

Geraci: It's not until '66 that Mondavi builds his facility and starts bringing tourism in. From that point on, those are the beginning years of what we know today.

01-00:35:21

Cronk: Well, actually, Robert Mondavi played a part. I know several times we took all of our waiters from Vintage House up to Mondavi and they were taught how to open a wine bottle and how to serve the wine and what have you. Margrit Mondavi actually was a cook. She was more than that. She was the food person at Mondavi. I remember a fabulous chicken lunch that was prepared by Mondavi for our wait staff.

01-00:36:01

Geraci: See, at that point they were also bringing Julia Child in under their master chef's program. They were bringing chefs from all over the world.

01-00:36:05

Cronk: Yes, yes. Just starting that.

01-00:36:10

Geraci: Yes. So this didn't fly in Texas?

01-00:36:15

Cronk: No. We just didn't know our market. For lunch we would have a shrimp salad. Avocado and shrimp and a flank steak. I literally went to the competition, which was another restaurant like Victoria Station. It was trains. I can't remember the name of it and they had sixteen menu items and fifteen of them were beef. We had one steak on our luncheon menu. We just didn't know our market at all. And as I said, they thought California wine was Gallo. No one appreciated California wine.

01-00:36:56

Geraci: It'd be fair to say then that you were just maybe a decade before your time.

01-00:36:59

Cronk: Oh, for sure.

01-00:37:01

Geraci: Today something like that would—

01-00:37:02

Cronk: I don't know that we would have known Houston. Well, the restaurant business is tricky.

- 01-00:37:12
Geraci: It's brutal is what it is.
- 01-00:37:13
Cronk: It's brutal. You're right.
- 01-00:37:16
Geraci: Why Texas?
- 01-00:37:17
Cronk: Oh, because the liquor laws had changed in Texas. You couldn't serve alcohol in restaurants. You had to have a private club or you'd have your locker room.
- 01-00:37:37
Geraci: Remnants of prohibition.
- 01-00:37:40
Cronk: Or Blue Laws or something.
- 01-00:37:41
Geraci: Right.
- 01-00:37:44
Cronk: So the laws changed. So it was like California. You could buy drinks and wine. And then they were very successful. The economy was booming with the petrochemical industry and the numbers just looked great. While we were there, there were restaurant companies from all over the country opening up one week and another one that had been opened for nine months closing. It was just a very attractive place to go at the time.
- 01-00:38:16
Geraci: But it would make sense because restaurants, one of your more profitable items is the alcohol you serve.
- 01-00:38:24
Cronk: I guess so. We never looked at it that way. And Gary was doing the planning and doing the numbers and he saw this trend. And then we went to San Antonio, which really didn't understand California wine. Luckily I didn't have to live in San Antonio.
- 01-00:38:51
Geraci: Now, when you're opening, you say at the one time you spent nine months in Texas.
- 01-00:38:55
Cronk: Yes, as I said, on a budget. My mother would send our boys a book of McDonald's coupons for Valentine's Day and little did she know that was dinner for two nights that week.
- 01-00:39:17
Geraci: Did you later have the courage to tell her this?

01-00:39:20
Cronk: Oh, yes. But not then. You know the famous story of my mother was the one who gave us the original investment for Dreyer's.

01-00:39:27
Geraci: Yes, let's talk about that.

01-00:39:31
Cronk: Well, again, it was such a leap of faith. My parents adored Rick and at that point my father had—no, he'd passed away. I take it back. My mother was frugal and she had to watch her income but we needed \$14,000 and we didn't have it and Rick asked my mother and she said yes and never regretted it. It was a good investment. Good return on investment.

01-00:40:02
Geraci: What did Rick promise in return?

01-00:40:03
Cronk: Oh, a Mercedes. And, indeed, four years later, or our first public offering, we bought Rick's parents and my mother a Mercedes, which they were thrilled.

01-00:40:24
Geraci: So she got her money back with interest.

01-00:40:26
Cronk: Yes, yes.

01-00:40:28
Geraci: So Vintage House is failing and I can imagine the conversations over dinner with that. It's because times are looking kind of tough at that point, I would think.

01-00:40:48
Cronk: Well, we were young and naïve and enthusiastic. We never didn't have food on the table. It wasn't that bad.

01-00:41:05
Geraci: But things were tight?

01-00:41:06
Cronk: Oh, things were very tight. But I think you forget that. You don't remember that.

01-00:41:14
Geraci: You try to forget things like that. Remember the good things. Remember the good times.

01-00:41:17
Cronk: Exactly. You forget how painful giving birth is so you decide to do it again.

01-00:41:24
Geraci: Yeah. All of a sudden you're moving from restaurants and now Gary is talking about buying an ice cream company. What were the conversations on that?

01-00:41:40
Cronk: Well, we were best friends. Rick trusted Gary. I trusted Gary. I didn't really know Cab and Gary that well at that point. It just was an evolution and it seemed lucky and it was at the right time.

01-00:42:03
Geraci: I love the fact that they were able to capitalize a million dollars to buy a company with \$14,000 each.

01-00:42:11
Cronk: Yes. Well, and you know Gary leased his car.

01-00:42:15
Geraci: Right.

01-00:42:15
Cronk: Sold his car to the company and leased it back or something. Gary always had a deal going. He's never paid for anything straight in his life.

01-00:42:26
Geraci: But that just shows the brashness of youth, this ingenuity.

01-00:42:30
Cronk: Oh, yeah. Exactly.

01-00:42:31
Geraci: They're problem solvers.

01-00:42:37
Cronk: Yes. Again, optimistic. Rick Cronk looks at the world with the cup full-full. Not half-full, but full.

01-00:42:52
Geraci: And that seems to really show in the people that you talk to and the way they respond to Rick. His optimism rubs off.

01-00:43:00
Cronk: Oh, absolutely.

01-00:43:02
Geraci: His sense of humor.

01-00:43:02
Cronk: And, again, we talked off camera about the Vintage mafia. That between the Lair of the Bear and Cal and the Vintage House waiters, there was a component. Many of them came over to Dreyer's and stayed their whole career because, again, they trusted Rick and Gary and knew both of them.

Knew both the good and the bad. Because we'd all been in the trenches together.

01-00:43:36

Geraci: Now, in the beginning, Rick is still running at least one or two of the restaurants, right?

01-00:43:41

Cronk: Yes.

01-00:43:41

Geraci: You haven't phased everything out?

01-00:43:44

Cronk: In the very beginning. But that didn't last very long. The original investment was not our money. I can't remember. It was other people's money and we lost it. Wally Hawley was running a fund. I can't remember the name of the fund. But we had a million dollars of somebody else's money. That's how we were able to build these. The restaurants were beautiful. A million dollars went a long way in those days. The restaurants quickly went away.

01-00:44:32

Geraci: Okay. So Dreyer's is here. We're in the Dreyer's story now. What was it like in those beginning days?

01-00:44:38

Cronk: Oh, it was fun because there was such opportunity. Ken Cook was a wonderful man but he just didn't have vision. There were so many kinds of easy ways to improve. And what he had done is maintain the quality and the good name. When we were even at Cal, or even growing up, Dreyer's was the premier ice cream. You knew it was a good product.

01-00:45:11

Geraci: So you knew the brand because you're local. You're West Coast.

01-00:45:14

Cronk: Oh, yes. But they were running out of production space at the plant on College Avenue. It's hard to believe. There was a plant there with big vats and trucks coming in at 4:00 in the morning in a residential district. It was not in the right place. But the first thing we did was expand the plant with new equipment and then quickly outgrew that and went to Union City and beyond.

01-00:45:45

Geraci: I imagine there was a tension between the City of Oakland and Dreyer's?

01-00:45:50

Cronk: Oh, well, the neighbors. Not the city. The City of Oakland always appreciated Dreyer's Grand Ice Cream.

01-00:45:53

Geraci: Because of the tax base you're bringing in.

01-00:45:56

Cronk: Yeah, yeah.

01-00:45:57

Geraci: You can't blame the neighbors.

01-00:46:01

Cronk: Oh, no. Not at all.

01-00:46:02

Geraci: Who wants a factory in your backyard.

01-00:46:03

Cronk: But then years later they fought our building, our new building. It was a vocal minority. Because that building added so much to College Avenue. The people having lunch, the parking lot on the weekend that is available for all the businesses, the merchants. So I think it's a win-win but there's always been give and take with the neighborhood with Dreyer's. It is the biggest building.

01-00:46:42

Geraci: What was it like for Rick working at that point? This is a growing company.

01-00:46:48

Cronk: Yes. Well, Rick was on airplanes. He was on airplanes. But Rick was always able to balance. He was always a Cub Scout leader. More when our youngest was older, he was able to coach soccer and that sort of thing. He didn't do that in the beginning because he was just traveling all around the country hiring new people, opening up new markets. It was work. And we weren't always making money when we were in the restaurant business.

01-00:47:36

Geraci: This had to put a lot of strain on you, though. You're the one carrying the home front.

01-00:47:44

Cronk: No, no. That was fine.

01-00:47:47

Geraci: Perfect partner.

01-00:47:48

Cronk: As I said—

01-00:47:49

Geraci: A perfect partnership again.

01-00:47:50

Cronk: Yeah, yeah. I'm independent. For years I'd pack the car and go to the Lair of the Bear and Rick would go on hundred mile backpack trips with the Boy

Scouts. We'd argue over our Suburban because I wanted it and he wanted it. [laughter] That was fine.

01-00:48:18

Geraci: So you're saying that there was time being made for family.

01-00:48:21

Cronk: Yes. Rick definitely did that. I don't remember it as being as difficult as it probably was at times.

01-00:48:33

Geraci: At what point do you start to realize this is going to be successful?

01-00:48:43

Cronk: Well, we always knew it was going to be successful but it was far out. But early on our first public offering, Rick and Gary went to Europe. They did tours to sell their stock for Hambrecht & Quist. The second or third public offering they were busy and Hambrecht & Quist wanted them to tour again and Rick and Gary said, "No, we'll only do it if we can bring our wives and go first class." So Cab and I had the most fun trip to Europe. It was, a day here, a day there. But we stayed at the best hotels and we had more fun.

Well, of course, one of the big decisions was direct store delivery. Do we have our own trucks or do we warehouse? And that was a big decision because it was expensive to have our own trucks. And it turned out to be, we think, the right decision.

01-00:49:58

Geraci: And it's risky in that it's a long-term plan and stockholders want short-term profits.

01-00:50:03

Cronk: Well, true, yes.

01-00:50:06

Geraci: This was a gamble.

01-00:50:14

Cronk: But we were always growing. We had competition early on from Kraft Food, who owned Breyer's, but that quickly dissipated.

01-00:50:30

Geraci: Well, once the lawsuit was resolved.

01-00:50:32

Cronk: Yes. And the years following. There were times when Breyer's was doing a really aggressive marketing campaign. But I think people realized that Dreyer's is a premium ice cream and Breyer's was never the quality that Dreyer's was.

01-00:50:55
Geraci: Did Rick bring the office home a lot?

01-00:50:59
Cronk: Oh, yes, yes. Cab and I entertained all the time. And we'd entertain prospective people that they were hiring, executives. Norm Lawson was working for Mother's Cookies and he was sales, sales, sales. Old fashioned sales guy. And we wanted Norm to work for Dreyer's. He lived in Danville and we lived in Orinda or Lafayette and we would take Norm out to dinner. We'd have Norm and Phyllis over to our house for dinner.

01-00:51:35
Geraci: You wined and dined him, right?

01-00:51:37
Cronk: We wined and dined him. Finally he said yes. He was great. He was a big part of some of our early growth.

01-00:51:50
Geraci: Did Rick and Gary come to you and Cab with the questions about the business? "Should we do this? Should we do that?"

01-00:51:57
Cronk: Oh, we discussed everything major. But Cab and I weren't involved in day to day.

01-00:52:06
Geraci: But you were good sounding boards?

01-00:52:06
Cronk: Oh, absolutely. No, it's fun. And gosh, we're both opinionated. Have you met Cab, yet?

01-00:52:15
Geraci: I haven't met Cab yet.

01-00:52:18
Cronk: She's a very strong lady. They (Gary and Rick) needed our buy in.

01-00:52:26
Geraci: Sometimes you need a sounding board, somebody to look at you and go, "That's crazy."

01-00:52:31
Cronk: Well, you come home and you vent.

01-00:52:35
Geraci: Right. But that's the stable base to come back to each time.

01-00:52:42
Cronk: Yeah.

- 01-00:52:48
Geraci: One of the things that they developed at Dreyer's—you've already mentioned the direct delivery system. The Grooves program. So far I've been able to gather that employees either loved it or despised it. There's very little middle ground.
- 01-00:53:06
Cronk: I never was aware of people despising it. It makes so much sense. It's just a courteous way to treat people. There's humanity in the Grooves built in.
- 01-00:53:25
Geraci: There's humanity built in but the Grooves also put a lot of responsibility and accountability on you.
- 01-00:53:31
Cronk: Yes.
- 01-00:53:32
Geraci: And people who don't like that amount of accountability or responsibility—it can be daunting to them.
- 01-00:53:39
Cronk: Well, then, they didn't belong at Dreyer's. It wasn't a good fit.
- 01-00:53:42
Geraci: That's the point I'm beginning to find. It's almost a self selection process. People start going, "This isn't me." And the people that are gravitating to this system buy in. And once people have bought into the system, it's almost cyclical. It just gets better and better and better and better.
- 01-00:54:00
Cronk: Right. And it's meant to include everyone. We used to call them truck drivers. Now they're sales—what do we call them?
- 01-00:54:14
Geraci: The route salespeople. Yeah.
- 01-00:54:17
Cronk: Route—yes. Yes. They're route salesmen. They're not truck drivers. And they're trained that way. Everybody owns their job. And if you don't own your job and you're not happy with it, then, again, you're probably in the wrong place.
- 01-00:54:35
Geraci: Again, this isn't the place for you.
- 01-00:54:37
Cronk: And if you hire smart then you don't have to worry about some of these other things.

- 01-00:54:45
Geraci: That's something that fascinates me about both Rick and Gary. They're very intuitive men.
- 01-00:54:51
Cronk: In different ways.
- 01-00:54:54
Geraci: Yes. Let's talk about that. You're absolutely right. But they're intuitive. They know how to read people in situations very accurately. They just cut the layers or get right to the point.
- 01-00:55:10
Cronk: I don't know that I can add to it.
- 01-00:55:12
Geraci: I'm asking you to describe your husband at this point. That's a tough question, isn't it?
- 01-00:55:16
Cronk: No, no. Intuitive is a good word. But, as I said, I'd describe him—well, he's gregarious. He's outgoing. He loves people. I'll tell you how Gary and Rick are different. Gary, in their house at Tahoe and their house in Oakland, his office is as far away from action. He likes it quiet. He likes to focus. He likes to be at his computer. Rick's office is always with the people. He'd rather work at the dining room table or at the kitchen table and have people around and be part of the activity. He doesn't want to be back somewhere. That's why he was sales and management. Why he was flying all over the country, excuse me, although Gary did that, too.
- 01-00:56:24
Geraci: Gary has a serious side. It's not a bad thing.
- 01-00:56:30
Cronk: Oh, Gary's brilliant.
- 01-00:56:32
Geraci: Yeah. But the stories I'm getting of Rick, great sense of humor, loves jokes, loves to play with people.
- 01-00:56:42
Cronk: Absolutely.
- 01-00:56:43
Geraci: The type of person who would walk into a serious meeting and take the tension out of the room with some humor.
- 01-00:56:53
Cronk: And keep on track.

01-00:57:04

Geraci: We're at a good point right now to stop because I need to change tapes.

[End Audio File 1]

[Begin Audio File 2]

02-00:00:00

Geraci: Vic Geraci, Food and Wine Historian, University of California Berkeley's Regional Oral History Office. Today's date Thursday, October 21st, and seated with me is Janet Cronk. This is tape number two of interview number one. When we left off, I was kind of kidding with you, describe your husband. Let's continue along that vein. Who is Rick, the man, because he is highly successful at managing people.

02-00:00:40

Cronk: And just to backtrack. You were describing him as intuitive. I think of him more as energetic, cheerful. As I've mentioned many times, always seeing the world with the glass half-full but really full-full. And he's just a people person. He just is skilled. And he's compassionate. He really cares about people. And I think his children know that and the employees at Dreyer's certainly knew that. Rick's door was always open. He always was managing by walking around. He had a coffee cup and he would go around the building. Gary would never do that. That's just not Gary's thing. But Rick truly wanted to know what people were doing and how their kids were. He teaches kids still to ski, to water-ski. He's up at 6:00 in the morning, every morning, and anyone on the West Shore. If he can find a body to teach to water-ski, he's doing it. So I think of him more as just being outgoing and positive rather than intuitive.

02-00:02:05

Geraci: And that's a good skill to blend with Gary's, then.

02-00:02:07

Cronk: Absolutely.

02-00:02:08

Geraci: This is a partnership where each of them brings something major to the table and they need each other. There's a symbiotic relationship. And so far, in just talking to Rae Hunter and to Jo DeJean, they both speak of Rick as the fun person. You mentioned he's always walking around. They said he just didn't seem to want to sit down.

02-00:02:36

Cronk: Oh, he can't. He cannot sit still.

02-00:02:39

Geraci: Yeah. If there was a meeting going on, he would walk in. "Hi, here I am. What are we meeting about?"

02-00:02:46

Cronk: Right, right.

02-00:02:47

Geraci: “What’s happening?” Very much wanting to see what’s happening in everybody’s life or in their work situation.

02-00:02:58

Cronk: That’s Rick.

02-00:02:58

Geraci: How about Gary?

02-00:03:01

Cronk: Well, Gary’s very much a people person, too, but he’s, I’d say, more intellectual. That doesn’t mean smarter, because they both certainly were gifted. But Gary, as I said, he’s the one that plans ahead, focuses on the five year plan or the ten year plan. He’s a numbers person. His desk is neat and tidy and Rick’s is a mess. You found so many commonalities, which I understand. But when you’re so close to it, you just see Gary’s the neat one and Rick’s the messy one.

02-00:03:46

Geraci: And I can see that, having been in both of their offices now.

02-00:03:52

Cronk: Oh. [laughter] It tells a story.

02-00:03:56

Geraci: Yeah. It tells something about the person, how they conduct themselves on a daily basis.

02-00:04:02

Cronk: Yeah. But Gary’s great. He’s a great father. He has a wonderful relation with his sons, as we do ours. We have three, they have four. They’re within a ten year period of age, so growing up and traveling, our trips they grew up together and we did many things together. But we had the Lair of the Bear, we went to Africa three times. Rick took Matt Rogers up Kilimanjaro with one of our sons. As I said, Gary’s a great father, as is Rick.

02-00:04:48

Geraci: What about the boys? What are your children doing now?

02-00:04:52

Cronk: Oh. Well, our youngest is in the restaurant business.

02-00:04:55

Geraci: Did not learn from dad’s mistake, right?

02-00:04:58

Cronk:

Oh, it's so funny. He graduated from Georgetown *cum laude*. He has an MBA from Haas. He's smart as smart can be. But he's a people person. He worked in New York for four years doing financial reporting and studying companies. He just didn't like being in an office. He's a people person. He has a partner that brings different skill sets. Chris is hands-on but he's more the business side and his partner is more of the actual restaurant side. But anyway, so Chris is great.

02-00:05:49

Geraci:

Where is their restaurant?

02-00:05:51

Cronk:

Well, they have several in San Francisco. You wouldn't know of them. Fly and Solstice. But kids go to them.

02-00:05:59

Geraci:

Some of the more hip spots.

02-00:06:00

Cronk:

They're meeting places for young people. Neighborhood and affordable.

02-00:06:07

Geraci:

What are their names? I'm just—

02-00:06:09

Cronk:

Oh. Well, there's a bar called Fly and Solstice is a restaurant that's been around a long time that, again, caters to younger people. I don't think they say tapas but they have small plates. So you can have a beer and a little something to eat. It's a restaurant, too. Chris came in when they developed Brick, which really had a good menu, good chef, good equipment but it just didn't fly with the younger group. So they've changed Brick to Fly Two, I believe. Their big purchase is Nate Thurman's BBQ. It's branded. It's a takeout business and every young person in the city knows Big Nate's. Again, kind of like Dreyer's. It's easy in the beginning to improve the quality of the food, which needed new smokers and new equipment. Chris brought in some of the Grooves philosophy with their staff.

02-00:07:32

Geraci:

Now, see, that's interesting. This is moving on to another generation now.

02-00:07:36

Cronk:

Yes, yes. And just learning from his father, the kind of person that his father is. Having integrity and compassion but knowing that some people have to go and doing it in the nicest way possible. But raising the bar in the restaurant.

02-00:07:58

Geraci:

That's interesting. But hopefully doing successfully?

02-00:08:03

Cronk:

Well, they're at the point where they're not too sure.

- 02-00:08:07
Geraci: Well, regretfully, the restaurant business has a lot of those.
- 02-00:08:11
Cronk: Well, They have a lot of capital expense right now. They're putting their money into equipment, as we did at Dreyer's.
- 02-00:08:20
Geraci: Right.
- 02-00:08:20
Cronk: Our middle son, Rob, was premature. He's had problems all of his life. He graduated from the Culinary Institute in Hyde Park, New York, which you must know. The CIA. But he developed carpal tunnel and he has issues. He has kind of a tough life. He lives in Lafayette near us. Our older son, Jeff, again, Berkeley graduate. Doing the marketing thing with Leap Frog, the educational toy company. And he loves that, but they went through a down period. They're still struggling. He survived several lay offs and then was laid off and had three children. He looked around for a year and ended up doing totally the opposite. He co-owns a fine cabinet shop in Concord, California and they make cabinetry and they build houses and they do remodels. His partner is the cabinet woodworking side and Jeff is the business side. So the same thing. Two partners, two different skill sets. So our oldest and youngest are kind of following in their father's footsteps.
- 02-00:09:48
Geraci: You mentioned you have grandkids?
- 02-00:09:51
Cronk: Oh, yes. Our oldest, Jeff, lives literally down the street and he has a twelve-year-old boy, a ten-year-old girl who is the jock of the family and an eight-year-old boy. They're around. We're definitely hands-on grandparents. We're available and they come over all the time. We go to their soccer games and their plays. It's fun.
- 02-00:10:19
Geraci: The fun things.
- 02-00:10:21
Cronk: It's really fun.
- 02-00:10:21
Geraci: Yeah, those are fun things.
- 02-00:10:23
Cronk: And Jeff is the pack master of Happy Valley Schools Cub Scouts pack.
- 02-00:10:30
Geraci: So the Scouting tradition is continuing there also.

02-00:10:31

Cronk:

Oh, definitely. And it's been particularly good for them because Cole, our oldest grandson, is not an athlete. He could care less about playing soccer. He's into reading. He's a thespian. He loves to sing and act. So scouting gives him that outdoor experience, kind of that male fun experience that he should have, because otherwise all he would do is read a book.

02-00:11:01

Geraci:

It rounds them out.

02-00:11:03

Cronk:

Yes.

02-00:11:06

Geraci:

You opened the door for scouting. It's kind of strange with Rick. As a child, scouting was always there. It's not until he becomes an adult that scouting becomes an absolute passion.

02-00:11:20

Cronk:

He never was an Eagle Scout and everyone's always amazed. But his troop disbanded when he was a life scouter. So he never went on. He didn't really have the chance to go on.

02-00:11:35

Geraci:

I didn't realize they had disbanded.

02-00:11:37

Cronk:

But he was a junior counselor for the Oakland Parks Department and had jobs in that Montclair Park, that great park in Montclair. They had a great kids' summer program. Then he'd go up into the Sierra with Oakland Parks and then the Lair of the Bear. So he had all that backpacking outdoor experience. So when Jeff was young, we thought he should be a Cub Scout. Both of us got right in. I was a den mother for all three boys. I still have my uniform. Can't fit into it. Rick just loved it. So he was pack master for all three boys. We had an excellent troop in Moraga where the troop master was a lifer. He was there not just for his children but he ran an excellent troop. He realized Rick's potential and got him to lead their first fifty mile backpack trip in the Sierra. So Rick did that for years, leading fifteen, twenty boys on fifty mile plus backpack trips, including several ascents of Mount Whitney.

02-00:13:03

Geraci:

That's a major accomplishment.

02-00:13:04

Cronk:

Yes. I did Mount Whitney once.

02-00:13:08

Geraci:

That was enough.

02-00:13:09

Cronk:

It was the hardest thing next to childbirth. 14,500 feet is right up there.

02-00:13:08

Geraci:

So that's how he got his start, then. How did that evolve over time? His complete role?

02-00:13:28

Cronk:

Tom McIntosh, the troop master, Troop 212 in Moraga, just saw Rick's potential and said, "Why don't you help out at the district level?" So he became president of that. He went on to the western region, was president of that. He's good with people and he brings people together and people want to work for him. He gives great speeches.

02-00:13:57

Geraci:

There's always a need for someone to do that. Are there any other things between you and Rick that you have done as far as outside philanthropic or community type work?

02-00:14:11

Cronk:

We actually do fairly separate things. We'll support each other. For instance, I'm on the UC Berkeley Foundation, which Rick wouldn't have time or want to do. He's involved with the business school. But I did my first stint in the 1980s. There's a social component. Rick would never be there. I'd have to go in with another couple from Lafayette or I'd be by myself because he was on an airplane somewhere. So we really did kind of separate things.

02-00:14:52

Geraci:

But what types of things were you doing and what types of things was he doing?

02-00:14:58

Cronk:

Well, a lot of them Cal. The Foundation. One of the fun things I've done over the last thirty years, probably, twenty-five years, is support the Cal Band. There's a very active Cal group in the East Bay and in Lamorinda. We would have these Cal Band parties. And it was always a struggle to find a location. In two houses, our former house and the house we have now, just happened to have the right combination and we have hosted five Cal band parties. That's been lots of fun. But that's not Rick's thing at all.

02-00:15:39

Geraci:

Yeah. Those are yours. Right.

02-00:15:43

Cronk:

And, of course, I would be involved with the kids activities where he couldn't.

02-00:15:50

Geraci:

Are there any other things that Rick was doing other than scouting?

02-00:15:53

Cronk:

Oh, well, Cal and the business—

02-00:15:58

Geraci:

Yes, because he's on the board of the Haas School.

02-00:15:59

Cronk:

—school. And I like to point out that he was on the board. They had names but nobody showed up at meetings. Bill Hasler begged him and so he was chair and then, again, he was so busy with Dreyer's. Then Laura Tyson came along and said, "Rick, please come back. I need you." So he came back for Laura. Now I think the board's in much better shape. People do attend meetings and do that. He worked hard for the business school. It was good and the new building certainly helps. And I always like to point out my bears. The bears. I found them. [laughter] We were giving this nice donation and it was one of the first donations and that really helped. But who wanted your name on a gate? So I had seen these bears. Big bronze, two bears sitting back to back. The sculptor is Dan Ostermiller. He's in Colorado. His father was a taxidermist.

02-00:17:29

Geraci:

So he grew up looking at the figures of these animals?

02-00:17:31

Cronk:

His sculptures—yes, yes. They're just wonderful. And so I said, "Well, is it okay if we have these bears?" Of course, the architect had to approve of them and then the campus art and architecture committee had to approve them, et cetera. Anyway, they seem to be quite popular. They're always a photo spot.

02-00:17:53

Geraci:

Now, why don't you go ahead, for the audio on this, where are the bears and talk a little bit more about them.

02-00:18:00

Cronk:

Oh. Well, when we gave a gift to the business school, the Haas Business School, they named a gate. We picked the location. Just to make it more Rick and Janet, we do have these bears that are sitting on a pedestal with a bench all around it and they are right at the front of the business school and people meet there. They use pictures of the bear on their stationary. They've had fun with them, as well as we have.

02-00:18:31

Geraci:

And since it is the mascot, after all.

02-00:18:34

Cronk:

Yes, yes. And they're gutsy bears but there's a little bit of whimsy. One bear's looking like this. You want to balance a ball on his nose. But they're not mean bears.

02-00:18:50

Geraci:

They're nice bears. I like that. Going through this Dreyer's story, were there any incidents or stories or events that come to your mind that really stand out in this Dreyer's experience?

02-00:19:08

Cronk:

Oh, this is where I wish I'd prepared.

02-00:19:24
Geraci: I know once they had taken the lead nationally in sales they had the big giant party.

02-00:19:33
Cronk: They had the big party.

02-00:19:33
Geraci: The big Hoopla here.

02-00:19:35
Cronk: Yeah. The party to beat all parties.

02-00:19:36
Geraci: Yes, right. The mother of all parties.

02-00:19:37
Cronk: The mother of all parties. Oh, that was fun. At that point the company was so big. Cab and I always hosted the executive sales meetings once a year and they would have them at Tahoe between their house, our house, and her mother's house, which was nearby. Everyone had a bed and a meeting. It was, again, a Dreyer's thing. A retreat that was really a retreat to talk about Dreyer's but to be with each other, for managers to know each other and what have you. And Cab and I were very involved with those. By the time the mother of all parties, we weren't that involved and there were so many people from around the country that Cab and I literally walked through this party and no one knew who we were. There was one activity that was a picture of Gary and Rick, life sized, and there was a photographer and anyone could have their picture taken with Rick and Gary. So Cab and I were standing on the side watching women come up to these pictures of Rick and Gary, hugging them, kissing them. It was hysterical.

02-00:21:00
Geraci: Did you have your pictures taken with Rick and Gary?

02-00:21:02
Cronk: I don't remember. I'm somewhat of a historian and I keep scrapbooks. So I don't remember that. But we did take the blow up posters to the Lair of the Bear the next summer. And Rick and Gary never came to the Lair. Cab and I always would come with our little kids and work our tails off. We had fun but it was three little boys and her four little boys. So we had pictures of Janet and Rick at the pool or Rick and Gary at the pool or Rick and Gary at the tennis court. It was their posters. I made a great scrap book that summer.

02-00:21:47
Geraci: Oh, that's hilarious. But the two of you then were active in the Tahoe retreats.

02-00:22:00
Cronk: Oh, yes, yes, yes.

02-00:22:02

Geraci: That would be a lot of work for you.

02-00:22:04

Cronk: Well, no. We had caterers. And you have to shape up your house anyway.

02-00:22:09

Geraci: So how many people would attend?

02-00:22:12

Cronk: There might have been twenty-five, thirty. It was a way for Cab and I to get to know the executive staff from New York and from Florida, from Chicago, because at that point we knew a few of them but we really had a great time getting to know these people who were working so hard for Dreyer's and Edy's Ice Cream.

02-00:22:43

Geraci: One of the questions I've been asking people is why did Dreyer's work? This is a successful business. Especially in this time, in this era, so many businesses have failed or were having problems or they're just borderline. What made Dreyer's work?

02-00:23:08

Cronk: Well, it's the quality of the product. People feel like they're splurging when they're buying Dreyer's. But it's affordable. Fortunately, in down economies people think they're splurging on ice cream. They might not go out to a nice dinner. So we've withstood recession and what have you. I suppose marketing and advertising. Dreyer's has had some great ads over the years. Just great advertising. Gary, in particular, is not as impressed sometimes with the marketing. He wouldn't tell you that that was part of their success. But who knows. How do you measure it?

02-00:24:01

Geraci: In his words, it was necessary.

02-00:24:06

Cronk: Yes. Exactly. And then when we went east of Denver and we'd had this agreement with Kraft Foods to call our ice cream something different because of the closeness to Breyer's, we named it Edy's and everybody said Edy's. (*emphasis on the Ed instead E.*) And I actually knew the Edy family growing up. I knew the Edy's family in Palo Alto and then there was an Edy's on Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley. And so we knew Edy's. We didn't even think of people calling them Edy's.

02-00:24:57

Geraci: It was a candy confectionary.

02-00:24:59

Cronk: Yes. And so we needed an advertising campaign just to have people pronounce it properly. We did not want to be Edy's.

02-00:25:09
Geraci: And then Rick appeared in some of the commercials.

02-00:25:15
Cronk: Oh, he was great.

02-00:25:15
Geraci: Let's talk about this. Rick did not want to talk about those.

02-00:25:18
Cronk: Oh. Isn't that funny. He was great. He had to join the union, the Screen Actors Guild.

02-00:25:26
Geraci: Oh, no.

02-00:25:27
Cronk: And so for years we had secondary insurance, medical insurance, and it was great insurance. It paid for everything.

02-00:25:37
Geraci: So he was part of Actors Equity then.

02-00:25:39
Cronk: But it's the only union he ever belonged to. But, oh, he made some great ads. I got to go down and see them filmed, some of them.

02-00:25:50
Geraci: Who was filming these for you?

02-00:25:52
Cronk: Well, as every company, advertising firms come and go so I don't remember.

02-00:25:59
Geraci: Oh, don't worry about it. Let's talk a little bit about the commercials themselves. What was Rick doing in these commercials? He's the public face of the corporation.

02-00:26:16
Cronk: But he has a very good voice and a cheerful face. He just projects.

02-00:26:31
Geraci: Must have been strange to see him on TV?

02-00:26:34
Cronk: Well, a lot of their sales meetings would be videos. So he's used to it.

02-00:26:58
Geraci: Do you remember any of those commercials? What was he doing in them?

02-00:27:04
Cronk: Oh, well, he was just voicing over. I haven't watched them for a while.

02-00:27:18

Geraci:

Okay. Don't worry about them. Were there any people in your mind that really stuck out as being, other than Rick and Gary, as the superstars of making this whole thing come together?

02-00:27:35

Cronk:

Oh, well, all of the vice-presidents. Tom Delaplane, who was the vice-president of sales. Just a fabulous human being. And talk about people who care for him. All of his direct reports would do anything for Tom Delaplane. He's that combination of push, push, push, and raising the bar, but compassionate. Tyler Johnson was wonderful at marketing. Great sense of humor. Many interests in his life. He loves jazz. He can tell a great joke. He was great. Who else? Rhonda Disney, now Rhonda Ramlo who was in marketing. Just a bright woman. Also a Harvard MBA, as was Gary. She just was brilliant and managed to raise a family while she was working very hard and on airplanes. It's interesting. You go to marketing and sales, which is kind of Rick. And some of the people around the country. Greg Frick and Dave Mutzel, they're good friends of ours. We ski with Dave Mutzel in Seattle. Jeff Shields, Bob Nealis... Again, I should have prepared.

02-00:29:26

Geraci:

No, but you list the first names that come to your mind and you speak of these people as more than your husband's business colleagues. You're speaking of them as people you like.

02-00:29:42

Cronk:

Well, and even that we would go on vacation with. There's no rules about not associating outside of work. The Johnson's always would use our house at Tahoe for ski week for years because we didn't have grandchildren, our kids were working and we didn't want to be at Tahoe for ski week because it was crazy. So their son and daughter grew up thinking that our house was their house.

02-00:30:16

Geraci:

Oh, there's worse things that could happen, right, in this work.

02-00:30:20

Cronk:

And Dave Mutzel we still ski with today. And he was from Houston, from the hard days. He grew up in Texas and we hired him in Houston. He ended up in Seattle being the distributor of a very difficult district because of all the water and the bridges and Alaska was part of his territory. Very difficult. He was an independent distributor for a long time. We would have independent distributors in places that were difficult to manage. Eventually they were all molded into Dreyer's.

02-00:31:03

Geraci:

How much do you think you got involved in the daily business practice?

02-00:31:06

Cronk:

Oh, Cab and I weren't involved in the day to day. Just hearing about it

02-00:31:13

Geraci: Yeah, but you heard about it day by day.

02-00:31:15

Cronk: Oh, yeah. And I was always stopping by for one reason or another. So we'd know the staff. I remember one of my Cub excursions with either Jeff or Rob, they were little, was going to the plant. Having a Cub Scout tour of the plant when it was on College Avenue. I look back and think how dangerous. There were these liquid nitrogen pipes that if you touched you could have frozen your fingers. There were no barriers. No professional guided tour. It was just me going through the plant.

02-00:31:57

Geraci: You look back at those days and go, "Oh, I shouldn't have done that." How we lived through it, right?

02-00:32:03

Cronk: Well, and the plant that's now gone that was in Union City. You couldn't be on the floor for hygiene reasons, hair and that sort of thing and then the danger of the equipment. They actually built in windows and walkways so that you could have a tour and look down on the plant.

02-00:32:28

Geraci: And I imagine the plants themselves changed a lot over the years. That compared to what the Bakersfield plant is today.

02-00:32:34

Cronk: Yes. I've never seen that Bakersfield plant and I never got to it. I had several trips planned to the Midwest, too. It was the world's biggest ice cream factory until Baltimore. But anyway, the only plant I saw was the original one on College Avenue and then Union City.

02-00:33:02

Geraci: Okay. Last question for you. Do you like ice cream?

02-00:33:11

Cronk: [laughter] Actually, no. I have very sensitive teeth and I'm not a dessert person. So we don't eat very much ice cream.

02-00:33:26

Geraci: [laughter] I guess I shouldn't ask what's your favorite flavor over the years.

02-00:33:31

Cronk: This is going to be historical. Actually, I like dark chocolate. We've had some super premium products in the past. One was called Tres Chocolate that was like Häagen Dazs and Ben & Jerry's. It was super premium with denser ice cream, less air. I did like that. But two teaspoons was just about enough.

02-00:33:56

Geraci: Just about all you could do.

02-00:33:59

Cronk:

And Rick likes ice cream but he sits down to a reasonable amount. We used to go to conventions, Rick and I. Gary and Cab never had to do this. But we would go to grocer's conventions and we'd have hospitality suites. Have you ever been to conventions?

02-00:34:17

Geraci:

Oh, yes.

02-00:34:18

Cronk:

So after dinner people would come and we'd have banana split glasses, dishes, and we'd be serving and people's dishes would be full. And they'd say, "More, more." And you'd give them more and it was spilling over the side. Even if I didn't like ice cream enough, other people liked it. We were successful.

02-00:34:42

Geraci:

You were successful. Well, no. I ask it in a whimsical way. Just because that's the business you're in and that's what you do doesn't mean you have to particularly be an ice cream eater.

02-00:34:53

Cronk:

Yeah, right. Well, as I said, lots of people—and I always have certificates in my wallet, even though Rick is retired. I just gave some away yesterday. It's just always fun in the right situation to be able to give ice cream certificates. Because they're only worth five or six dollars a piece but people just love them.

02-00:35:15

Geraci:

It's magic. Yeah. That's interesting. As you go through an interview sometimes in the back of your mind, you go, "Oh, I should have talked about this?"

02-00:35:28

Cronk:

Oh, I'll think about that in my sleep tonight. I think that Dreyer's has been absolutely magical. There was some luck. There was hard work. We were at the right place at the right time. Most people close to us realize that it wasn't always easy. It looks like this fairy tale, it reads like a fairy tale. The Stanford and Haas Business schools did a paper on Dreyer's.

02-00:36:03

Geraci:

The case study.

02-00:36:04

Cronk:

The case study. Thank you. It looked like it was a fairy tale and lots of people want to do the same thing. And very successfully for us, but it was hard work and teamwork. Happily a success story, an American success story. You hear about big business being so terrible and corporate and whatever and you look at Dreyer's and Rick and Gary created a company that treated people fairly, that paid good wages and had good health benefits. People owned their jobs.

We became quite large and managed to still have that humanity and that's my takeaway.

02-00:36:53

Geraci:

That's really what I think is at the heart and sole of this story. Embedded within the Grooves or whatever, you may want to call it as a story—as I mentioned earlier, there's no human resources department. This is a company that people depend on people.

02-00:37:10

Cronk:

And there are direct reports. You don't have six people that will have to go way up the ladder to make a decision. You can make a decision fairly freely. You hope it's the right one. There's ready, fire, aim. If you have a good idea, go with it.

02-00:37:32

Geraci:

Yeah. And how many corporations allow their people to do those types of things? To trust them to think outside the box.

02-00:37:40

Cronk:

Right, right. Well, because we hired great people. And a team of people. Not just Rick and Gary.

02-00:38:20

Geraci:

A team of people. They hired smart.

02-00:38:22

Cronk:

Yes, exactly.

02-00:38:26

Geraci:

Thank you, Janet. This is it.

[End of Interview]