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Berkeley, California

HAYLEY FIRESTONE JESSUP  
FIRESTONE VINEYARDS, SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

Interview conducted by  
Vic Geraci  
in 1994

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Interview with Hayley Firestone Jessup

Interviewed by: Victor Geraci

Transcribed by: Kate Vescera

[Interview #1 February 3, 1994]

**Geraci:** Interview with Hayley Firestone Jessup, February 3, 1994, 11:40 a.m. Vic Geraci interviewer. Hayley, let's get down to just kind of the basics of it. What's the history of your vineyard—and your vineyard, your winery, your—starting from scratch?

1—00:00:18

**Jessup:** Starting from scratch. Well, 1971 was the beginning. The property was bought by my grandfather, Leonard Firestone, and he was looking for something, an investment as it were, for his—and this seemed to be something interesting. Dad and he and another gentleman decided to look into putting in grapes and at that time California wine was really starting to make a name for it. Not in this county, of course, so that was one of the sort of interesting aspects of it. And so they bought this property, which was just a simple ranch. I'm almost positive it was Dean Brown, as another vintner. And the property itself is about 550 acres. At this time 270 are in grapes. And I think pretty much, we planted that amount. It was really a set program as far as the size of the vineyard and eventually winery.

1—00:01:48

**Geraci:** Which kind of brings me to the next part of the question. Then that was kind of almost a goal or a mission. You had an image in your mind of what you wanted to do.

1—00:01:57

**Jessup:** Absolutely. Absolutely. Dad, feeling from doing the numbers, from doing the research, and a lot of his research was done up in Napa—a great friend of his was Don Chappellet and he—we spent a lot of time up there. I remember very clearly because we had lived in London up till now, and I'm sure you got a lot of that from Mom. We lived in London and Dad was needing something else from the tire business, and so that's where this came along, sort of the beginnings of the idea. And so we spent a lot of time going up to Napa that first year when we moved out here, and even before we moved out here we'd come to California from London and then we'd get in the car drive up to Napa, which was great fun as kids. So anyhow, that's where a lot of his research was done. And then when they started looking specifically here, because of the property, my grandfather had connections here, some friends and so forth, and that's what brought them here initially. And then once they started looking into the reality of having a vineyard here, everything pointed, and you know, you'd know more about this, and studying the history specifically about the, you know, why that this would be a good area for a vineyard.

1—00:03:19

**Geraci:**

And you mentioned he had had some statistics to work with, I mean, were there any particular studies that had been done, had he commissioned a study or—?

1—00:03:25

**Jessup:**

Yes, at the time there was we did studies of rainfall, we did studies on soil, we did sun, all of that kind of—sunlight studies, you know, sort of a lot of different temperature and weather studies.

1—00:03:43

**Geraci:**

Degree-day type studies.

1—00:03:44

**Jessup:**

Exactly. To really ascertain whether this was a viable area for growing grapes, and then from the history of Santa Barbara there was grape, there were grapes, or at least that's what they tell us, at one time in this area, many years ago. So that history led us to, yes indeed try it. Try it, you'll like it.

1—00:04:09

**Geraci:**

[Try and change it].

1—00:04:11

**Jessup:**

Yeah, so that's really where the whole idea started, so Pa bought, Pa being my grandfather, bought the property and then, for a short while we were looking, sort of, at the viability of just selling the grapes—and this you may want to check with Dad, but that's what he's always told us—just selling the grapes for wine. And realized that it really wasn't a reality, that taking the whole project one step further and actually building the vineyard—I mean building the winery—was really what we should be doing and what we should go for. So that's where the whole project started. Is that—?

1—00:04:55

**Geraci:**

Yeah, I mean, basically that—what years—?

1—00:04:58

**Jessup:**

This was 1971. And in early 1971, and then we actually went ahead and got the soil ready in the fall of 1971, put in all the posts and the irrigation and all of that. The vines themselves went in in the spring or early spring of 1972.

1—00:05:24

**Geraci:**

Ok. When was the first vintage?

1—00:05:26

**Jessup:**

1975.

1—00:05:28

**Geraci:**

So just three years, you went right to the margin then.

1—00:05:31

**Jessup:** We went right there.

1—00:05:34

**Geraci:** Was there any particular design that was used as far as the vineyard? I mean, did you follow a particular thought or was anyone involved in the planning—?

1—00:05:44

**Jessup:** Yes, oh yes. Very much so. Andrei Tchelistcheff was our consultant. And we connected right with him early on, and he led us very much. He was the, sort of, the glue for our program. We were extremely lucky that he got along with Dad, and got along extremely well and the whole thing worked together. And then, in fact, both our winemakers, Tony Austin in the early days, and now Alison Green are both students of his.

1—00:06:19

**Geraci:** So they're both Davis?

1—00:06:20

**Jessup:** Both Davis trained.

1—00:06:23

**Geraci:** Davis trained. That's really important because that has a big effect on the end product, doesn't it.

1—00:06:29

**Jessup:** Oh boy, does it ever.

1—00:06:29

**Geraci:** Okay, you've kind of let me know why this particular area—what do you think your dad's expectations were, I mean as far as—we've talked about he has the land now and he's establishing a vineyard. What type of goals did really set themselves up in the early days?

1—00:06:46

**Jessup:** His idea was—well, first of all, he wanted a change of life. He had lived in executive life in, you know, the tire company. He wanted something that was—he wanted to get away from the city. He wanted to get away from the rat race of a business life to come here and become a farmer and have a much worse life. No [laughs] I mean, not worse, but—

1—00:07:11

**Geraci:** More business.

1—00:07:13

**Jessup:** He puts in, right from the word one, he was fifty times more involved, but he was in heaven. He was never, never looking back. And I think, you know, when he first looked at this spread sheet he thought we're crazy, but—

1—00:07:33

**Geraci:** It seems to me the keyword that you mentioned was there was that it was his.

1—00:07:36

**Jessup:** That was it.

1—00:07:38

**Geraci:** It was the option of ownership.

1—00:07:38

**Jessup:** Yeah, he's—the ownership was not just his. I mean, I don't know if you—

1—00:07:44

**Geraci:** Why don't you just go ahead and explain that for the tape.

1—00:07:47

**Jessup:** Okay, his—when the whole project started he needed to have the capital to make the thing work. And so initially he invested one third ownership with my grandfather. One third ownership with Suntory, and then one third ownership by our family. And that was in the winery itself, the winery business itself. The vineyard was owned by my grandfather. So they are two separate entities initially. And the winery, you know, in order to get it going, obviously, I don't know the figures on it, but needed quite a bit of capital, which we did not have. So that's where that started. Dad was the managing partner, the other two were limited partners. And that's how that worked.

1—00:08:40

**Geraci:** And Suntory is what type of corporation?

1—00:08:42

**Jessup:** Suntory Beer Company from Japan. Kirin, all those, whiskey, Suntory Whiskey.

1—00:08:49

**Geraci:** Right, that's—

1—00:08:49

**Jessup:** Yeah. And they're wonderful, wonderful partners.

1—00:08:52

**Geraci:** Which I know, in talking to your mom, possibly was a later issue in how do you define between distilled spirits and wine and its image and what's going on.

1—00:09:02

**Jessup:** Right, Right. Well it yeah—and we were very lucky because our partnership with them, for the most part—I mean, it was, you know, it was very difficult because we were, aside from dealing with a different culture and a different—yeah a different culture, we were also dealing with two

different cultures in that what we were trying to achieve was a very small entity compared to what they have. And, but it ended up being a very, very, I think a very nice working relationship. I'm sure there was, at times there must have been—

1—00:09:37

**Geraci:**

Well, like any partnership there needs to be—Let's go ahead and talk—so that takes up into the late 1970s, then. Is there anything particularly happening in the 1980s? Let's kind of follow it chronologically, just based on the history of it.

1—00:09:50

**Jessup:**

Let's see. The changes would be, you know, we had our one winemaker, Tony [Austin] to start with. He left us, I want to say 1979, 1978, 1979. Then we had the nonalcoholic beer project that started, Firestone—Fletcher, which we started 1984/1985, I want to say 1985? And that was an effort to look at another option within the drinking/beverage industry. And, you know, to this day, there is no question that we had a winner on our hands. We did not have the money to compete with the big companies and that's what it is. In that industry, we found out, it's advertising.

1—00:10:50

**Geraci:**

Okay.

1—00:10:51

**Jessup:**

What we didn't have was the ability to advertise on a widespread basis. We had a great product. Everywhere we took it—if we could have people taste it, they would buy it, but we couldn't get the word out wide enough. So that was—

1—00:11:08

**Geraci:**

Which on its limited smaller market, that's not a product then that would be—it doesn't have the same image as wine would have on a smaller distribution basis.

1—00:11:17

**Jessup:**

No, no.

1—00:11:17

**Geraci:**

Well, how about what happened in the 1990s?

1—00:11:22

**Jessup:**

Let's see. Then, in the early 1980s, Dad had a short stint in politics, but then that didn't happen, so then the beer thing, then—let me see, now the changes that we have actually, as a family have been able to buy out Suntory. So that has meant that Firestone is actually Firestone owned, which is very satisfying for Dad, and for the rest of us that it's a family-run company.

1—00:11:54

**Geraci:**

I know in talking to your mom and also in doing some in depth research before I came in, your dad's whole philosophy in raising his children and not to put you in the same position he was in. You know, now that he owns it as a family—does that put pressure on you, I mean, knowing where you dad's coming from?

1—00:12:15

**Jessup:**

Interestingly enough, no. I think we were all as kids encouraged to go out and do other things and I think that we all had this as a training ground for various things. We all worked on the bottling line, we all worked in the vineyard, we all helped at harvest. We've all done most of the aspects of the business and I think it's given us all a very good basis in what's going on here. But he also has always encouraged us to choose other things. I'm the only one who's actually here on the premises. My brother is a lawyer, my sister is an actress, my younger brother is still finishing high school. So I think that it gives us a safety net if we choose to come back here. But, you know, I was trained as a teacher and spent five years doing that and so, no, I don't feel the pressure. I think, he would love to have the family involved, and we all take great pride in it, because unlike the tire business, it's a much more tangible entity, if you will. I mean the tire business was so big that him being involved in the tire business was one in thousands of executives. Whereas this, if we do choose to become a part of it, it's such a small business that we would actually really feel—we do feel a connection to it. And that's one of the reasons that I've come back to being involved, aside from the fact that it's very flexible and having three children it works really well. So that's a very personal—

1—00:14:06

**Geraci:**

So it seems then that his goal and his mission in establishing it seems to be working out really well. It was a personal thing.

1—00:14:14

**Jessup:**

It was a personal thing, yes. It was, you know, I don't know if he would say that. He's probably got some other reasons. But I think that there was the desire to create something and there is an incredible amount of pride and satisfaction—pride doesn't sound like a great word because you think of somebody who is proud, and no, he's not like that. He's an extremely un—proud person, but there is that sense of accomplishment in seeing something that he's created work. In terms of the philosophy of the winery, it has always been to create and to make wines that people can drink at an affordable, reasonable price that is extremely high quality wine. And he has managed to maintain that. I mean, we've never, aside from a couple of vintages, very rarely made a wine that's so high priced that people can't afford to drink it.

1—00:15:19

**Geraci:**

Okay, how about a few of the specifics of—as far as the winery, the acreage you have, grapes, varieties that you're growing at this point.

1—00:15:28

**Jessup:**

We have nine different varieties. We have five reds, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Pinot Noir, Merlot, and Shiraz, which is one that we're just starting to work with and then this will be our first vintage, now 1994. We have four whites, the Riesling, Johannesburg Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, and Gewurztraminer. We, over the years, have changed the amount of acreage in those various varieties, depending on the market, depending on the success and the growth of those varieties. For example, the Pinot Noir, we started out with a lot more and then found that this particular growing area, versus say Sanford or Babcock or one of the other, we had a hard time growing well the Pinot Noir variety. We still have some, we still make some, but I think we only have six or eight acres of it, as opposed to a great deal before in the early days. And since then we've grafted over and we have a lot more Merlot than when we started because that's become a very popular wine, and it's a very good grape in this area. In this particular vineyard.

1—00:16:49

**Geraci:**

Do you use all your grapes here, do you sell elsewhere, do you buy elsewhere?

1—00:16:53

**Jessup:**

We do buy elsewhere and we do—I don't know that we sell much, but we do buy from other vineyards around. Partially to complement what we make here, because in the growing of grapes, the combining of different growing climates—grapes that have been exposed to various climates will produce a wine that is much more complex and much more interesting than just sticking to one area. I mean for example the Chardonnay, we buy it from various other areas, and also to give ourselves enough to produce because—our little problem, which is not really a problem, depending on how you look at it, is that we not always can keep up with our distributors as far as what they want us to produce. They'd like us to get on the ball and produce more a lot of the time, and we don't want to, so that's the greatest problem to have.

1—00:17:59

**Geraci:**

I'd say that. That's not a bad problem. That's a good problem. Most business would love that problem. Will there be one or two or even more particular wines that you feel that you really specialize in that are something that the Firestone name is going to be—

1—00:18:17

**Jessup:**

It's interesting, it's changed over the years. When we first started, one of the things—we're known for Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon. People know that because it's a well made, 100% rose—well 100% rose, of course,

100% Cabernet varietal. So that's one of the things we're known for. Early days, our Riesling, we couldn't produce enough, Johannesberg Riesling was *the* wine in Firestone vineyard and we could sell it like hot cakes. That pattern has changed a little bit. Our Chardonnay, especially when we were very well rated in the—in 1989/1990, we got some very good scores on the—by the wine writers, thank you. And so that sort of took off, and them since then, Merlot has become extremely popular. So, lots of different things.

1—00:19:17

**Geraci:** What about people working in the winery, I mean, what kind of employees, part time, any special training? People that are—

1—00:19:27

**Jessup:** Yes, well, administrative we have ten full-time people, and that's a combination of sales type people, the general manager. We have the accountant, bookkeeper, we have administrative assistants, we have a sales manager, Dad, that includes, and we have one other sales person who we just hired on this year. We have tour guides, we have probably six or seven of those, all of whom are part time except our tasting room manager. So that's sort of the front end of the winery, maybe a couple around. In the back we have our winemaker, Alison, who is trained at Davis. We have an assistant winemaker who came from Santa Ynez Valley and I think he may also be Davis trained. Our controller, he's now called the Director of Operations, I think that's his name, is also Davis trained, I'm almost positive. We have a cellar master, we have two or three cellar workers, and then we have an oenologist. So that's in the back. So that adds up to six or seven.

1—00:21:03

**Geraci:** That's a fairly large structure.

1—00:21:04

**Jessup:** Yeah. It's a pretty good size, but we're also making between eighty and ninety, sometimes as much as ninety five thousand cases of wine.

1—00:21:12

**Geraci:** What is your bonded limit, as far as cases, do you have—?

1—00:21:17

**Jessup:** I don't know. I don't know what it is.

1—00:21:19

**Geraci:** Okay, but right now it's between eighty and ninety thousand cases of production.

1—00:21:23

**Jessup:** Yeah, yeah.

1—00:21:24

**Geraci:** That's a lot.

1—00:21:25

**Jessup:** Yeah.

1—00:21:26

**Geraci:** And that makes you the largest producer in this area.

1—00:21:29

**Jessup:** In the county. Yeah by quite a bit. In the tri—counties, Meridian is quite a bit bigger than we are, but that's the closest to us in the entire Ynez. And there are vineyards, that are much larger, as we well know, became the Kendall Jackson and all of that stuff up in Santa Maria, is a lot bigger than what we are but, actual producing—

1—00:21:52

**Geraci:** [unintelligible?]

1—00:21:53

**Jessup:** Yeah.

1—00:21:54

**Geraci:** So as far as the running of the operation itself, do you have any special techniques or equipment, technology, something that makes you different than the norm or out of the ordinary? I know it's a difficult one.

1—00:22:07

**Jessup:** That one I don't know.

1—00:22:07

**Geraci:** You can beg off.

1—00:22:08

**Jessup:** I think I'm going to have to. I don't know, I don't know. Yeah.

1—00:22:13

**Geraci:** Knowing environmental issues at this point, how about herbicides, pesticides, filtering, you know as far as capsules now and the change over from lead to tin—

1—00:22:27

**Jessup:** Yes, that one I can tell you we have gone from lead and we have tried the aluminum ones and now we're on a—some sort of alloy, what is it? It doesn't cut your fingers as much, I'm not quite sure exactly what it is. But we had some that were just horrendous, and, you, know, everybody ended up with bleeding fingers. So that's on the capitals. We're trying a plastic cork now. We just put that in for the first time—I just found that out yesterday. And that's something that the business is trying out because of the leakage of corks and the inability to necessarily produce enough corks—

1—00:23:09

**Geraci:** At this point to match.

1—00:23:10

**Jessup:** To match. Exactly. So that's a new thing for us. As far as herbicides, pesticides, all of that—we try as much as possible, as everybody else does, to limit what we use. We have a very heavy duty recycling program for our water, as most do, given California limits. We use settling ponds to recycle all our water. So we use it in the vineyards after we've used it inside. And even if it's not truly waste water. We do use sulfur in all our wines, we're not a sulfide—free vineyard. And we put that right on our bottles—

1—00:23:56

**Geraci:** That's a very difficult issue to try and stay away from—the use of sulfur.

1—00:24:01

**Jessup:** Yeah. It's produced naturally in the wine.

1—00:24:02

**Geraci:** Right. And that's what I mean, in the yeast and the fermentation process itself, it is a natural byproduct, so how do you avoid that?

1—00:24:11

**Jessup:** We can't. There are, I guess—

1—00:24:16

**Geraci:** Is that a special process in itself? Trying to avoid.

1—00:24:21

**Jessup:** Probably it is. There are vineyards—there are wineries that do say that they are free from sulfites, sulfurs. So I guess, maybe what they're doing is claiming that because they do not add, then that's where they're free from—But that's something that I'm not—

1—00:24:43

**Geraci:** Actually that leads me to—let's kind of skip around a little bit—to another set of questions. Dealing with the health issues then, I mean, that—directly involved in those health issues. This is a very difficult one, and I'm not trying to put in a negative frame, but, I mean, we do have a controversy in this country based on, is it an alcohol, is it a food, is it good for you, is it bad for you? Temperance, moderation versus alcohol—

1—00:25:08

**Jessup:** Well, it's funny, one of the things that I pulled out was, Mom gave a talk at—and I don't know if she referred to this—her talk, the biblical talk.

1—00:25:16

**Geraci:** I've heard about the biblical talk. That's great if you have it.

1—00:25:20

**Jessup:**

I have it. And I will give it to you because it's very interesting. And, you know, we come from an Episcopal background, my grandfather was an Episcopal priest. But, let's see, it says: some love their wine and some condemn wine. And I wanted to reach my own conclusions, so I'll be delving into the Bible myself and I would like to share some of the passages that I find particularly enlightening with you. The people of the Bible lived with wine and it was very much a part of their everyday life. On and on and on, and she goes—and she found one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen different excerpts from the Bible where wine becomes important, not to mention the changing from water to wine at Cana. So, I mean, there's that side of it. I think we were very grateful to "60 Minutes" for exposing that whole paradox, the French paradox. I don't, and showing that there are some health benefits to wine, I think, in moderation, all things. And I think that's such a personal issue that one has to deal with that.

1—00:26:41

**Geraci:**

Well, I mean, at this point, we are trying to tie the issue into colon cancers, breast cancers, the warnings for pregnant mothers. We have all sorts of issues floating around this, and how has that helped your industry? Has that hurt your industry? Has it not affected it?

1—00:27:03

**Jessup:**

The effect has been that we now have to have on our bottles: the Surgeon General warns that—the warnings are there for pregnancy and cancer and so forth. So that's there. Has there been a marked change? There was a marked change in the drinking of red wine when *The French Paradox* was released. We had an incredible number of people coming in and saying: I read or I heard about, you're supposed to drink red wine; I need a case of red wine. I mean, they couldn't have cared what it was, they just wanted red wine. So our sales—it just happened that that hit when we released out Prosperity Red, which was our big red table wine that was an incredible seller, and that's a whole other issue. But, that stuff was going out of here like hotcakes, and we couldn't keep it in. So people don't want to hear the bad news necessarily, they do like the good news. They want an excuse to have a glass of wine. It's always been around.

1—00:28:07

**Geraci:**

Well, the interesting thing is, do they need the excuse? That becomes another argument, an issue in itself.

1—00:28:13

**Jessup:**

Yeah, some people, I guess they do—I don't know. It's a very—you get into that, you deal with a whole—

1—00:28:21

**Geraci:**

It was fun to watch your mom become very animated with this because it's a personal way of life. It's a lifestyle.

1—00:28:32

**Jessup:** Absolutely. But it doesn't mean we're a bunch of alcoholics hanging out at—

1—00:28:36

**Geraci:** I know—

1—00:28:37

**Jessup:** No, but I mean—

1—00:28:38

**Geraci:** That's the image.

1—00:28:39

**Jessup:** That's the image, but you know what's interesting, though. It's not. In some ways it could be, but it's not. I think we've never run into that really. Maybe people just don't say it. But, it's never been an issue. It's more a lifestyle of entertainment—of entertaining, not entertainment. Entertaining, you become people's good friend because you can bring a bottle of wine, and people love a glass of wine. It's not—if we brought a bottle of gin, or vodka, it has a different connotation than bringing a bottle of wine. Not that gin or vodka's wrong because I don't want anybody to think that. But—

1—00:29:22

**Geraci:** But there is a difference.

1—00:29:23

**Jessup:** There is a difference. There is definitely a difference. Just as there is a difference in bringing a six—pack of beer and a bottle of wine. They're both alcohol. They both have about—well, beer has less—but they both can have the same effect. But there's a difference in the delivery thereof. It's two different people.

1—00:29:44

**Geraci:** A question, a lot of which you don't have to answer, is, just out of curiosity, how is wine treated in your home, just your family? And how do you treat it with your own children? How do you plan on treating it with your own children?

1—00:29:55

**Jessup:** It's a great question. And it's funny because when we lived, as a little child we lived in Italy, we lived in England; we lived various places because of the business, of the tire business. And I remember very clearly, in Italy, wine is part of the family existence. Kids drink it with their water. It's just a part of the culture. And so that's what we did for a year and a half. I was nine or eight or nine—it wasn't an issue, it wasn't: no, you can't have wine, I mean, that's for adults. It was: you want to taste a little bit? Sure I'll mix it in. I mean, to me it was disgusting, I didn't like it, aside from anything else, the water in there, and the whole thing. It

became really unpalatable. But it wasn't a taboo subject. As far as my own children, I will treat it the same way. It's a way of life for us. And they know it. They know the winery; they know what it's all about. I've brought both of my children—I have a six year old and a four year old—and both of their classes have come to the winery, seen the whole process. They've both come to the winery and seen the process, we've picked grapes. We made grape juice, we talked about fermenting. They smelled the fermented juice—none of them liked it. One or two tasted the fermented juice that was not yet wine—it was still in the fermentation process—they all just: “Agh!” They spit it right out and I don't blame them because fermenting wine is just about as foul as you can get. So they've all experienced that and it's a part of their lives. And they know that I work for—and it's not a taboo subject, it's part of our lives. And my husband and I both enjoy wine, you know there's always wine at the table. And if they want to sip it, they can sip it. They can find out what it's about. Neither of them particularly—

1—00:31:51

[Tape stopped]

**Geraci:** Let's talk about government regulations, and that could be state, federal, local, and speaking of local, Santa Barbara County.

1—00:32:24

**Jessup:** What I can address, the specifics, if I think about it a little bit I can tell you, but the biggest issue is the amount of regulation and the control. It becomes—we basically have had to hire on one to one and a half people to deal with the federal and state regulations and the paperwork that is required. Just to give you an idea—and a lot of it makes sense, a lot of it is overkill, in my personal opinion. And that's only because I watch a little bit from an outside view—I mean I see it day to day—but, I'm not hands on—I don't know the ins and outs of it. But when the grapes come in, they are of course weighed. All of those weight tickets are government property, basically—they report it to the government. From there, every single bit of juice is tracked. It makes sense, I guess, they need to know, it's an alcoholic beverage, so and so, forth. Then you get into—so if we lose grape juice, that has to be reported. It's all paperwork. The reporting of the pH levels, the alcohol levels, the TA levels—tartaric acid levels, all of that stuff has to be done at—that's all another whole load of paperwork that has to be done. But down the line, I guess it affects them, I don't know, but with every step of the way, that all has to be reported. And within an incredibly small margin of error, and that's the tough part because then we have to end up sending it out and... And it changes, you know, wine is a living thing, it changes. In fact, our oenologist actually happens to be married to our general manager, which is wonderful, it's just a recent occurrence. And the poor people were having a conversation and their lives are governed by the governing issues. Anyhow, but, for the

consumer, one has to keep—I'm not trying to implicate that we need to remove control, because of course there has to be, because there would be people who would go sideways with it, and run it out of—

1—00:34:56

**Geraci:** Adulteration. Scams

1—00:35:00

**Jessup:** Exactly. So, that's not what I'm trying to get at, but for a business like us, it does become extremely—and for many small wineries, they can't, they just can't function within all of the regulations. They can, but it's extremely stressful for them. And in pulling their minimal resources apart. So there's that. Then it gets into the issue of the labels. There's a very small window where we can produce. We have to submit, of course, all labels for all labels for approval by the BATF, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. And then there's a very small window of time when we can produce labels and use those labels. And we ran into an issue where our Riesling—one of our wines, I think it was Riesling, We submitted the label—it wasn't ready. We submitted it, printed it, and were ready to label our Riesling according to their regulations. The Riesling ended up not being ready, so there was a problem, we couldn't label it, we had to redo it. And redo all the labels. And that's a lot of money. That's a lot of money when you're talking about 10,000 to 15,000 cases of wine.

1—00:36:23

**Geraci:** And especially, as you say, this is a living product—

1—00:36:24

**Jessup:** It's a living product.

1—00:36:26

**Geraci:** It's not that—it's not always predictable, how it will work.

1—00:36:29

**Jessup:** No, no. So, it's become an issue. I know there's been a movement from our winery and other wineries with the Congressman to deal with the federal issues, and to make people more aware that if, especially in Santa Barbara County, where living expenses and so and so forth and county regulations are so prohibitive that if there isn't some leeway, they'll just scare them all out. They will price them out, I should say. The permits and so and so forth that people won't be able to afford to do it here, which would be very sad. We're very lucky in that—oh, this is one of the things that I wanted to bring up is that one of our benefits is that we are big enough to where economy of scale works. We are a viable industry, business because we are big enough. And there are other wineries where their size doesn't necessarily balance out the cost of producing.

1—00:37:44

**Geraci:** For your mom, this is become a big issue with Carey, in that she feels that's the reason she's successful there is because she can tie into this larger umbrella.

1—00:37:51

**Jessup:** There would be no way. The cost of the machinery to produce the juice for six weeks out of the year is so prohibitively expensive, of the quality that one wants, that if one isn't producing a lot and using that machinery enough then it becomes absurd. And a lot of the wineries, as we know, are stretched. And then there are those that have other income from other sources and that is why they can continue to be successful.

1—00:38:25

**Geraci:** So, economically then it may not be feasible now for new small wineries to start up.

1—00:38:30

**Jessup:** You would have to have an incredible source of income because the three year wait, the investment, in Santa Barbara County, the permits, the building, all of that side of it. Then the investment in the machinery, the wood, the tanks, so on and so forth. Either you'd have to have a lot of money somewhere else or you would have to be slightly insane.

1—00:39:00

**Geraci:** Or a combination of both.

1—00:39:03

**Jessup:** Yes.

1—00:39:06

**Geraci:** That kind of covers government issues. What about your sales and distribution?

1—00:39:11

**Jessup:** That's an interesting historical issue too, because when we first started, Dad literally took his—we had a Travelall, a blue Travelall, and he put the wine in there and he would go restaurant to restaurant, store to store, stopping everywhere along the California coast, basically, and making people taste this wine. And in Firestone everybody knew that was retread, you know: forget the wine business. And so it was his tenacity and his sheer belief in what he was doing that eventually led us to our network of distributors. We now have a distributor in every state—I may be missing one, there's one that I'm not sure about—as well as distribution in England, in Japan, of course, a minimum amount there now. But England, Japan, where else? Germany, Switzerland, Canada, there are a couple of other countries, but I can't think of where, not enough, in numerous amounts. But, oh, Haiti.

1—00:40:29

**Geraci:** Oh, that's different.

1—00:40:30

**Jessup:** Yeah, yeah.

1—00:40:32

**Geraci:** How does GATT and NAFTA have any effect on all of this at this point?

1—00:40:40

**Jessup:** The cards are still out. Yes, it's going to. But we're not quite sure yet. It really hasn't—

1—00:40:46

**Geraci:** It's too soon—

1—00:40:46

**Jessup:** Too soon to really tell where the effect is going to be. Mexico, for example was never really a big buyer of our wine, but maybe things will change. But, who knows. As far as Canada goes, I think that will be interesting because I think that the taxes and all of that on Canadians for California wines has always been prohibitive. They've always—

1—00:41:15

**Geraci:** Gone for other wines.

1—00:41:18

**Jessup:** Yeah, gone for other wines, so now that will be interesting to see how that changes down the road, where that effect will come. I don't know yet. But now we deal completely through our distributors. In California our sales team will still visit and our sales manager is very involved, one our big pushes now is chain markets. A Vons or a Lucky, or a Safeway or those. And the reality is that a lot of people buy their wine in those stores, and focusing and having a good relationship with those people, the managers and owners of the chain stores has become very important to use. And we're sort of different in that effect. Gallo, and those larger big mass—producing entities do, but the more boutique wineries, that's the word I should use, have not necessarily done that and not necessarily thought there was an important enough market. But people go there, convenience, unlike, that's really in California, for example, when we lived in Boston, you don't go to the grocery store to buy wine. So it's a very different business there.

1—00:42:44

**Geraci:** It's strange. It seems it's more a European standard. You go to the wine shop to buy wine, you go to the grocery store to buy groceries. In America, we're dealing with a different consumer concept.

1—00:42:56

**Jessup:**

Right, right, right. So that's—California is not totally unique, there are other states that, you know, one does, but for us it's [unintelligible].

1—00:43:08

**Geraci:**

What about, as far as, tastings, trade shows, do you participate in a lot of those nationwide or—.

1—00:43:14

**Jessup:**

A good number, yes. Both our general manager and our sales manager both are often—Dad still does a lot himself. They'll do some of the bigger things, a lot less than we used to have to. There isn't the desperate need to sell people on our product. The name is out there. For the most part, we're pretty lucky. But they'll still do winemaker dinners. They'll do a lot of, you know, they'll go in with a distributor and go on a route and just make sure that things are going well, and there's nothing better than that. A Rhode Island grocery store manager who suddenly—you know, the general manager for Firestone comes and he really cares, that's important. And that's what we're all about. So, yes we do a lot of that. My sister lives in Los Angeles and she'll do a lot of the southern tastings there. As well as, she's gone to Arizona and done various things there. We've done some benefit tastings. As you can imagine, the requests are—and, of course, we always have to produce the wine—or supply the wine I should say. So those come in in good amounts, and you have to be a little bit selective at this stage. But, yes we do. As far as, tours and tastings here, that's a big business for us. We're open ten to four everyday; we have tours all day long. And we do a very extensive tour of the whole process, and people really get a chance to see what goes on here.

1—00:44:49

**Geraci:**

Which leads to the question on tourism.

1—00:44:51

**Jessup:**

Yes.

1—00:44:51

**Geraci:**

How important is that to, not only to yourself, but I think to the whole Santa Ynez industry itself?

1—00:45:01

**Jessup:**

Very important. There's nothing like people coming and seeing the business itself and then going back and saying, on the grocery store shelf: I recognize that place. They treated me well. I had a good tour. I like their wine. I'll buy it. There's nothing—that's what it's all about. And so for us, it's very important. And we try through the Association, the Vintners' Association and through the Harvest Festival, and then the big celebration in April. And the name escapes me right now, and I can't believe that. But anyhow—

1—00:45:40

**Geraci:** I'm scheduled to work and I can't remember the name.

1—00:45:46

**Jessup:** Anyhow, through that, those are very important for us. And it's grown, I mean, my gosh, we're beginning to be known as a winery area. There are still certain entities that don't necessarily look on us with the same light, but we are becoming known.

1—00:46:05

**Geraci:** Your dad is quoted a lot as saying that his dream is at some time in the future Firestone will mean—

1—00:46:18

**Jessup:** Of course, of course. And more and more it is. It's funny we get a lot of people who come in here and they don't necessarily associate us with the tires.

1—00:46:27

**Geraci:** There's nothing that would lead them to—

1—00:46:29

**Jessup:** No, so—

1—00:46:36

**Geraci:** Last couple of questions are actually probably the most open ended and to me sometimes the most fun. What makes your winery, this vineyard, and your wines distinctive? What's the fun part of this? This is the personal part of it. What's happening here? Making you distinctive from someone else in this valley, in this state?

2—00:47:10

**Jessup:** I mean, it is such a personal question. For me, it would be my life, basically. We moved here when I was thirteen, fourteen. So it's where I've grown up. And what makes it distinctive from other vineyards? That's such a hard question—I don't know! I think one of the things is that, for me personally, but it would be different for dad, there is always something happening here. There's always an event, there's always something going on. There's always—it's busy, it's exciting, it's a forward moving place. My parents are both very creative. The week after we moved here, back here from Boston four years ago, we had this event of food and opera. And we served three dinners to seventy five people in a twenty four hour period. They were five course meals with the most phenomenal opera. It involved four singers that were just fabulous. The whole thing was incredible. People still talk about it now, especially since we are going to do it again. There's always something exciting going on like that. We're not just stuck in sort of a mode of making a certain product. We are always looking forward, always trying new things, making new blends, trying to be creative, trying to take the whole thing farther. And I think that's why, for me, if I was excited, you never know. Aside from anything

else my father is the type of person who, when you walk in the door, you never know what he is going to say or what idea he would have come up with in the night or—you know, from five o'clock that morning when he arrives at the office, there's always excitement. For some, that doesn't necessarily come out of a great idea—

2—00:49:25

**Geraci:**

There's a propensity towards change all the time. Always looking for the new experience, the new adventure, pushing forward—

2—00:49:33

**Jessup:**

Yeah, I wouldn't say change, it's expansion. It's expansion of an entity. It's taking the winery and taking the business and encourage it to grow, to develop, but not change. Because what we've got basically is, I think, a fabulous thing. And so to change it is not—. but to encourage it to grow, to encourage it to blossom is I guess what—and to take it in different directions. But basically coming back to the winery, making incredibly good wine.

2—00:50:20

**Geraci:**

What if I were to throw it at you, that it almost seems to me that both your parents treat this as almost a child.

2—00:50:28

**Jessup:**

Oh there's no question, It's part of the family. I mean there's not question.

2—00:50:31

**Geraci:**

This is almost for you another sibling.

2—00:50:33

**Jessup:**

There's no question. I would say it equals the four of us [laughs]. There's no question. They take great pride in watching it develop, watching it grow, watching it become, they have taken pride in watching it become—I mean Dad, his quotes in the most recent article—This describes Dad—here: We feel family is of the soul and essence of this business, and we'd like our children—oh well, that's talking about us—But he talks about how important it is to keep encouraging it to grow. And I think that's really—

2—00:51:23

**Geraci:**

It seems from what I've read that it's the philosophy your father's had with you as a child and growing up.

2—00:51:28

**Jessup:**

There's no question.

2—00:51:29

**Geraci:**

He wants you to grow on your own. And bring that to the business at the same time.

2—00:51:35

**Jessup:**

But he will do anything in his power that we ask him to, to help us. I mean, not in a—that sounds bad—but he will do whatever he can do to help us and whatever he can do to help the winery to grow he will do. If it came to whether the winery was first or the kids were first, the kids would be first. There's not question there. But, sort of aside, it's never been an issue.

2—00:52:04

**Geraci:**

There seems to be a very personal thing here. And in trying to get a handle on the goals, your missions, it is really tied into his personal philosophy of life. And that's what we've been talking about.

2—00:52:25

**Jessup:**

Oh yeah. And it's a realization of—it's the ability to realize that has been so incredible for him. It's very hard for him right now because of his whole political thing, and that he is making a stab at going off and becoming an Assemblyman. And for him to leave here is extremely difficult. He's tried different things before to see whether or not he can really move away from here. No he can't, completely. I mean he'll try the beer and the various other ventures that he's looked at that have not necessarily have been as successful or for whatever reason have not happened. But this thing probably will. It will mean that he spends a great deal of time in Sacramento and not here and it's going to affect everybody. Because not only is it personal for him, but a lot of the personnel that are involved here are here because of him. Because he is the person he is, and they want to be a part of it. And that sounds extraordinarily modest and high-minded, but it's true. He holds it all together.

2—00:53:38

**Geraci:**

What do you see as the future then?

2—00:53:46

**Jessup:**

I don't know. It's funny, it's become a more real question and I think it's something that we all will be dealing with—will have to deal with. It never was a question. But with a lot of changes this year, with the Suntory business, with dad's politics, with various other things, it is an issue, and one that really we haven't really come to terms with yet. Not that it's a worry, but it's an issue that has to be dealt with. I think it may mean that the family members do become more involved. I don't know yet, we'll have to see.

2—00:54:30

**Geraci:**

Could be very exciting.

2—00:54:30

**Jessup:**

There's no question. It's a part of that development, it's a part of that growth, it's a part of that whole thing. The personnel that we have here, Patrick, and Alex, and the whole gang, they're phenomenal. And dad has

really made sure that there's incredibly good backbone to the winery before he would consider going off and doing anything else. So we really are lucky in that regard.

2—00:55:03

**Geraci:** Is there anything else you'd like to add at this point? Afterthoughts, you've gone back and thought about something else.

2—00:55:10

**Jessup:** I haven't talked about the winery this much in a long time.

2—00:55:13

**Geraci:** Well that's good.

2—00:55:15

**Jessup:** I haven't given tours since before I was pregnant, so it's interesting to reflect on it and think about why we do spend all the time here. No I think that these materials—

2—00:55:29

**Geraci:** —should help us then.

2—00:55:31

**Jessup:** Yeah, there are a lot of articles and stuff that do reflect what goes on here. This is a great one. One that was in the *LA Times*, "Wine Country Gambler", you've seen?

2—00:55:42

**Geraci:** I've seen that. That's a great article.

2—00:55:44

**Jessup:** Yeah.

2—00:55:45

**Geraci:** Well, thank you very much.

2—00:55:48

**Jessup:** You're very welcome.

[End of Interview]