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University of California
Berkeley, California

John Harrison
THE DREYER'S GRAND ICE CREAM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviews conducted by
Victor Geraci
in 2011

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It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

John Harrison, "The Dreyer's Grand Ice Cream Oral History Project" conducted by Victor Geraci 2011, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2013.

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Interview #1 November 4, 2011

[Begin Audio File 1]

01-00:00:05

Geraci: Today's date is Friday, November 4, 2011. This is Vic Geraci, food and wine historian from the Regional Oral History Office at UC Berkeley. Seated with me is John Harrison. This is part of the Dreyer's Grand Ice Cream project. John, I like to start in the beginning. Let's start with the beginning. Go back to your family, growing up, your grandparents. We'll kind of follow a chronological path of your life, and then once we get into the Dreyer's story, boy, we hit the ice cream.

01-00:00:37

Harrison: Smooth and creamy.

01-00:00:39

Geraci: Smooth and creamy. We'll hit it directly.

01-00:00:42

Harrison: My parents, Tennessee, Virginia, combined. On my father's side, going all the way back to Virginia, North Carolina, some of the first to come over to America, then worked their way to West Tennessee, Memphis area. They were farmers, of course, like most were then, and grew up on the farm. My father's father died young. Had appendicitis. Couldn't get out in the farm—

01-00:01:17

Geraci: There was not exactly medical care like we have today.

01-00:01:20

Harrison: Medical care wasn't as we know it. A young man, he died. My father, working on a farm with cows, not too far from Memphis. He started in the dairy industry in Memphis, Tennessee.

01-00:01:34

Geraci: So you have a lifelong background, then, with dairy.

01-00:01:37

Harrison: Going back four generations, in fact. So yes, my father, not only in Memphis. His brother, Tom, went to Virginia, was a manager of a dairy there, in Newport News, Virginia. Asked his brother to come out and join him, my father, Bob Harrison, did. That's where he met my mother, in Virginia. My father was also in the dairy industry in Virginia. His entire life, then, was in dairy and food products, up into the last, was Dairy Tech, a company out of Atlanta, Georgia, which manufactured cocoa, chocolate, fruits, and flavors to the dairy and ice cream industry, stabilizers, emulsifiers, throughout the U.S. I was with him for fifteen years, covering both North and South America, as their national, international sales manager. On my mother's side, then, her family were oystermen. They were in the seafood—

- 01-00:02:41
Geraci: Which, in the Virginia area, is huge.
- 01-00:02:42
Harrison: Very big.
- 01-00:02:44
Geraci: Even in colonial times, all the pathways were done with oyster shells.
- 01-00:02:48
Harrison: That is correct. She had three brothers, my mother did, and they were all oystermen. Her father was a shipbuilder there in Virginia. Later in life, went up to New York City, lived in Brooklyn. The last ten years of his life, he was the Staten Island ferry boat captain. You don't get far away from your roots, do you? Now, on my father's side and my mother's side, grandparents. My father's father and his father, Civil War captain, Captain Harrison. Fought in the Civil War. Had a farm. Had about nine children. Typical large families, because you run a farm. You need help.
- 01-00:03:35
Geraci: That's your labor.
- 01-00:03:35
Harrison: Your workers. Exactly, labor pull. He survived the Civil War. Walked home from Virginia with a little helper. Most officers had a little black boy that would cook for them and clean and so forth, and they walked all the way from Virginia back to the Memphis, Tennessee area. It was just the times. Hardy folks. One of my father's uncles started the first dairy co-op in the state of Tennessee. My father also worked for Mayfield Ice Cream Company and Dairy, in Athens, Tennessee. It's been a whole lifestyle of dairy and ice cream.
- 01-00:04:22
Geraci: You said that they had started a co-op?
- 01-00:04:24
Harrison: That is correct.
- 01-00:04:25
Geraci: That's really at the beginning of these co-op type—across the entire nation for American agriculture.
- 01-00:04:31
Harrison: That is correct. In the teens, the twenties, where different dairymen came together, pooled their milk supply as a dairy co-op. Google it, and you'll see that Tennessee was one of the first states in America to form co-ops. It became popular in Tennessee. Then my great-grandfather, in New York City, had two candy and ice cream parlors. Made his own product, both candy and ice cream. Sold it. Very, very popular. In fact, not too long ago, my son went to NYU, New York University, in film school, Tisch, and he lived on the

same street, unbeknownst to him, that his great-great-grandfather had an ice cream and candy parlor on. How about that? The circle is really pretty small.

01-00:05:32

Geraci: Six degrees of separation. It all comes together at one point or another.

01-00:05:35

Harrison: It really does. I've been blessed, fourth generation. Tom Harrison went from Virginia back to Memphis. Started High's Ice Cream Novelties, and that's where I grew up in high school and college years, eating my way through the summer months of high school and college, drinking 40 percent heavy whipping cream. I learned, Vic, at an early age, the nuances between fresh cream, spoiled cream, milk, raspberries, blueberries, caramel. How to formulate ice cream. This was in my teens.

01-00:06:13

Geraci: So you were doing it from the hands-on approach.

01-00:06:16

Harrison: That is correct. That's what I learned. It's all stored up here. My background in Memphis State University was in chemistry, called colloidal chemistry, which is water polymers. Ice cream is 60 percent water. Unless you do something to that, other than that 40 percent solids, you're going to have a block of ice. So it's the stabilizers that bind, that separate the water molecules from one another and cause that frozen dairy dessert to be smooth and creamy. Stabilizers, emulsifiers. That was my background, and my father's as well, with Dairy Tech in Atlanta. Grew up calling on ice cream manufacturers. Early in the morning, of course, because before the receptionist came in, you could slip in the back door and talk to the plant manager and do business at that level. So I've always been an early riser, but mainly because of being associated with the dairy industry. Fun, wholesome—

01-00:07:22

Geraci: In the dairy industry, you're early risers.

01-00:07:24

Harrison: You better be.

01-00:07:25

Geraci: I came from a grapevine family, and surrounding us were dairies.

01-00:07:30

Harrison: You weren't lazy as a dairyman.

01-00:07:31

Geraci: We got to the vineyards at six in the morning, and they had long been up.

01-00:07:35

Harrison: There you go. So that's my background. My grandparents. Four generations in the dairy industry. So it's been rich, no pun intended.

01-00:07:50

Geraci:

Going to school, in high school, typical, did you have brothers and sisters? What was your life at home like?

01-00:07:57

Harrison:

I have an older brother, an older sister, and two younger sisters, so five of us in the family. It was a very typical American growing up. I'm sixty-nine now. I was born in 1942. It was that period of time when everything was gentle, it seemed like. There were wars, but America had a gentle, almost, if you will, atmosphere, that was very comfortable, family-oriented. Back then, everybody went to church and came home and had the big chicken lunch. I can remember my father purchased an antebellum home after he retired from Dairy Tech, right outside of Atlanta, Georgia, in Palmetto, Georgia. Had a big house, with the big columns. Originally 3,000 acres. Originally 300 slaves on the property. He bought it at about twenty acres. It also had, right down from the big house, another house. Always the kitchen was detached because of fire. A mammy would tell the children, going up to the big house with big platters of food on the head, "I want to hear you whistling going all the way up to the house." Of course, you can't whistle and eat at the same time. But the owner at that time was at the Palmetto Baptist Church, about a mile away, and after the service, he'd stand up on his buggy there and wave a red flag. The mammy was on the top floor of the plantation home. She'd wave the flag. By the time that horse and buggy got home, an hour and a half, two hour mile ride, the chicken dinner was ready. So there's a lot of—

01-00:09:53

Geraci:

There's a Southern gentility to that also.

01-00:09:57

Harrison:

There is. It's always around family. Today, even in the twenty-first century, if you were in the Deep South and you were in sales or marketing, and you were calling on a company, the first thing you'd talk about is the family. "How's your family?" The wife and the kids and schooling and so forth. It's still that way, even today. It's changing, of course, like the whole world is. You're right. It is genteel. It was a comfortable lifestyle.

01-00:10:38

Geraci:

In high school, did you know you were going to college? Did you always have that as a goal? I'm going to—

01-00:10:45

Harrison:

Yes. My father went to William and Mary in Virginia. As far as the kids, we were all going to go to college. We didn't know then what it mean, really, and where it would take us. I've been blessed beyond measure to have that background of having parents that wanted something better for their kids.

01-00:11:16

Geraci:

We were the lucky generation. The Depression was over, the war was over, and we entered it, and we were part of a growing, expanding country.

01-00:11:25
Harrison:

Yeah, yeah. The fruits of those that gave their lives in that wartime, that we might have that peace here in America. You're absolutely right. Our age group certainly benefited from that growth then in America, after the Second World War and up until just recently, of course.

01-00:11:50
Geraci:

Yeah, we have a little blip in the radar. Just a little one. A smidgeon. In high school, were you in sports or anything like that?

01-00:12:00
Harrison:

Oh, sure. Oh, yes. I played football and track in high school. Also at Memphis State University my freshman year, I played. Got an injury, so that kind of took care of my future of sports. I've had good health ever since. As you can see, I've been kind of swallowing more than I should here with that ice cream. It's so good. You can't stop. You hate to spit it out. But overall, yeah. Sports was a factor in my younger years. Today, if I don't get home to watch on Sunday NFL games or NASCAR or whatever, it's okay. I've gotten to that age. It feels good, frankly.

01-00:12:50
Geraci:

Not to have to be tied to it.

01-00:12:52
Harrison:

Exactly.

01-00:12:53
Geraci:

So you had just a very typical high school experience. Why Memphis State?

01-00:12:57
Harrison:

Because my father's family was in Memphis at that time. High school, my senior year, our family moved from Louisiana to California. So my senior year in high school was spent in California.

01-00:13:13
Geraci:

Where in California?

01-00:13:15
Harrison:

In Southern California. Bolsa Grande was the name of it, in Westminster, Costa Mesa. Then that latter part of that year, my father's mother died back in Memphis, and so the family went back for the funeral. My father's brother, Tom, who had High's Ice Cream Novelties in Memphis, told him about this opportunity called Dairy Tech in Atlanta, Georgia. This was 1960. He investigated and then later purchased, with two partners, Dairy Tech in Atlanta. The family moved then from California back to Memphis my senior year in high school, so I went to Memphis State University.

01-00:14:03
Geraci:

That was the local—

01-00:14:04
Harrison:

Exactly.

01-00:14:06
Geraci:

Why chemistry?

01-00:14:09
Harrison:

Just a thrill, I think is the word. Passion as well, for inventiveness, creativeness. Using something that, at that time, was fairly new. I'm talking about the colloids. Tree exudates. Guar gum, locust bean gum, sodium carboxymethylcellulose. Ingredients that were not that well-known. It just caught my attention. Before that, out of San Diego, using the kelp. Kelco Company. It was a slow dissolving ingredient. You almost had to hold the mix overnight, unlike some of these tree exudates that would work immediately and give that viscosity and bind up that free water. Then, of course, my father was just going into that business, 1960, my freshman year in college. It kind of went hand-in-hand.

01-00:15:17
Geraci:

An opportunity opened up.

01-00:15:19
Harrison:

It really was. They say the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. I think so many young people do follow in their parents' footsteps. That was certainly my case.

01-00:15:33
Geraci:

It's interesting. Starting in the mid to late fifties, through the sixties, and into the early seventies, food chemistry is just an expanding field. The University of California-Davis, Cornell, Wisconsin, with all the dairy/cheese stuff that was going on out there.

01-00:15:50
Harrison:

Pennsylvania. Yeah. Penn State.

01-00:15:54
Geraci:

It's amazing what food science was doing at that point.

01-00:15:57
Harrison:

That is correct. It was a beginning. It really was, as you were saying, a fledgling type of an industry. So much was exciting and new. And, by the way, I love ice cream. My uncle's ice cream factory, and Memphis State right there. Colloids, stabilizers. So it was—

01-00:16:21
Geraci:

I understand the chemistry part, but taste, especially in that era, we didn't know that much about taste, and we still don't know that much about taste, I think.

- 01-00:16:32
Harrison: A lot of unknown still. I have a book at home from California-Davis that talks about the tongue. How many taste buds we have, how long do they live, what are the four key flavors, what do we initially eat with, and on and on.
- 01-00:16:56
Geraci: As a young man, as a youngster, did you have any idea that you had a taste ability?
- 01-00:17:03
Harrison: Absolutely not. But—
- 01-00:17:05
Geraci: So it wasn't a matter of you training your tongue or training—
- 01-00:17:08
Harrison: Oh, no, no, no. What it was, though, unbeknownst to me, was learning all the nuances between putrefaction out here, way out here, and clean, sweet dairy product. Not too many people know that milk, of the solids portion, 54 percent is sugar. Milk sugar lactose. Early on, back in the forties and fifties, they used to call milk, sweet milk. It was a term. So no, I didn't know I had the ability, but I was training myself, unbeknownst to me. Not only on clean dairy product—what does it taste like? What is that aftertaste? What does it look like? What is it supposed to look like? And all the nuances in between. There's a lot of nuances between putrefaction and clean. Raspberries, blueberries, strawberries, caramel, butterscotch. On and on. What does it taste like? What is it supposed to taste like? What's the highest quality and what's the lowest quality, if you will, within a butterscotch or caramel or blueberry sauce? How about the raspberries, with and without seeds? What's the profile? I learned it all as a young man, not knowing it.
- 01-00:18:49
Geraci: Not intending to learn it at that point. Would you have considered yourself at that point to have been now what we classify as super taster?
- 01-00:18:59
Harrison: No, not then. Today, I'm written up in books as an expert in the industry. But I certainly was growing in that knowledge and love, and found myself being called on.
- 01-00:19:20
Geraci: For that expertise.
- 01-00:19:21
Harrison: For that expertise. "John, we got a load of cream in, and somebody thinks it's not—would you mind?" So it grew. Then, after college years, after being on my own for a while, joining my father's company, calling on manufacturers then, writing their formulas. Having a technical formulation problem, solving that. The fun of doing that. It wasn't difficult. Still isn't today. But it's the trees from the forest when you're that close to it as an ice cream plant

manager. So coming in from the outside with a clipboard and the things that you need to go through, one through fifteen, and make sure everything has been checked, nine out of ten times, you're going to find the issue right there.

01-00:20:13

Geraci:

I guess it's almost like with education, where we talk nature and nurture. Why isn't it, then, that everybody who spends a lifetime in the ice cream industry has that taste? There has to be a genetic predisposition for some people to be better tasters.

01-00:20:29

Harrison:

Yeah, yeah. In other words, Vic, what you're saying, a calling, even.

01-00:20:33

Geraci:

Yeah, okay, fine. I can settle on that, a calling.

01-00:20:36

Harrison:

Yes, yes. Unique. Never smoked, never drank. Never had a desire to. I don't know if it was just keeping a clean palate. Again, that calling or disposition to do that. The fun and joy of solving a problem also, whether it was in Tegucigalpa or Denver, Colorado. I did that for fifteen years, and saw a lot of companies who were just making a commercial, great ice cream, but now, all of the sudden, they want to make a premium ice cream, or a super-premium ice cream. "John, we don't have that individual with that company. We're not that big. Can you come in and help us formulate?"—

01-00:21:25

Geraci:

You're doing this through your dad's—

01-00:21:27

Harrison:

That is correct. That is correct. Also, when I finished school, I went to Borden Dairy Company in Texas.

01-00:21:36

Geraci:

This was, like, 1965?

01-00:21:38

Harrison:

That is correct. After school. Of course, knowing more information through Borden, and then went on my own as a manufacturer's representative, representing a half a dozen companies. Different ingredients. Cocoa, chocolate, fruit, sherbet, lime, and orange, and so forth. It was, again, calling on manufacturers in about four different states, whether it was quality issues or just selling ingredients. Again, close to that industry.

01-00:22:22

Geraci:

As you said, you were working for different manufacturers. This is also an era in American food culture when Americans are just beginning to rediscover food, but were also very tied to scientific food at this point. There's that bifurcation, that split between losing the old taste and now dealing with new creative tastes.

01-00:22:47
Harrison:

Oh my. Well, of course, there's nothing new under the sun. There's only new combinations in our industry. But when I joined the company in 1982, Dreyer's Ice Cream, talking about and calling on them for several years prior to that, selling stabilizers and emulsifiers—cocoa, chocolate—they had a technical formulation issue. They told me, because I was knocking on their door and trying to get the business, and they said their current supplier said the problem could not be solved under the current manufacturing restrictions. I was young and dumb then. I told them I could solve their problem. They gave me an opportunity. I went in there, spent about a month, and then it took another month to get everything lined up. Went in there. I spent a month there, and we solved the problem. About two years later, John Thomason gave me a call and said, "John, we're growing. We need somebody with your background as a taste tester, flavor developer. Can you come talk to us?" That was because of that experience.

01-00:24:17
Geraci:

The initial introduction for you, then, for Dreyer's, was you knocking on their doors as a sales rep, basically.

01-00:24:23
Harrison:

That is correct, with Dairy Tech. So it was a—

01-00:24:30
Geraci:

Did you know Ken Cook then?

01-00:24:31
Harrison:

Oh, sure.

01-00:24:32
Geraci:

So you knew the original Dreyer's crew?

01-00:24:35
Harrison:

I did. That is correct. I never knew Bill Dreyer, but I knew Ken Cook well. Great guy. Loved him, in fact. Very flashy. Collared shirts and sports coats. He was a dandy of a guy, though, but genuine, really genuine. Of course, he was a salesman, and that's how he got to know Bill Dreyer, selling flavors. What might surprise you, in the eighties, Dreyer's only sold fifteen flavors, all ice cream, all premium ice cream. Fifteen. Today, there's probably 455 today. Some ten different styles of frozen dairy dessert. Not one, ten. Plus all the novelties, the pops and the frozen fruit bars. On and on. It has grown exponentially. When I joined them—

01-00:25:56
Geraci:

Which is what year?

01-00:25:57
Harrison:

1982. July '82.

01-00:25:59
Geraci: That's just when Gary and Rick are thinking, national expansion.

01-00:26:04
Harrison: That is correct. When I joined them, I was a department of one.

01-00:26:09
Geraci: Me, myself, and I.

01-00:26:11
Harrison: Talked to myself a lot. In quality control, in product development, department of one. Today, there's some sixty-five men and women in that area of research and development. New products, new flavoring, packaging, ingredients. Around the globe, not just domestically. It's been a phenomenal growth from a few million dollars up to a billion plus. It's just a fabulous run, with quality people, quality commitment to ingredients, to marketing, to individuals. We built a team of individuals that wanted to excel. Yes, we have one of the Grooves called Hoopla, but we spent very little time Hoopla-ing, if you will. But when we did, we did it right, I guarantee. Man, we were always moving forward, grinding, expanding, putting ourselves in a position whereby, with GE and Nestle, we could go ahead and get to that national expansion. Of course, today, being the leader—

01-00:27:36
Geraci: At that time, Gary and Rick, then, are going to court you. How did they court you? What did they do? Gary and Rick, it seems to me, in their own philosophies, in their personal lives, I see them as almost a yin and yang. Two very different men that work so well that they can make a whole.

01-00:27:57
Harrison: You're absolutely right.

01-00:27:57
Geraci: It's just complete.

01-00:27:59
Harrison: You're absolutely right. Boy.

01-00:28:03
Geraci: They always talk about hiring smart, one of the Grooves. What did they see?

01-00:28:10
Harrison: I met them all, of course. Back here, 1982, when they had that technical formulation issue, I interfaced with everyone from management all the way down to the guy who carried the trash out. It was my style of sales, if you will. Just meeting everybody, talk to everyone.

01-00:28:41
Geraci: You had that sales background. That's what good salesmen do.

01-00:28:45
Harrison:

That's correct. I'm an oddity. I didn't belong. I belonged in either research and development or sales. I had the background for both. My roots were in research, but my lifestyle had been in sales. Seldom do they ever cross. They run parallel to each other. That's, again, what you're talking about with Gary Rogers, engineer, and Rick Cronk over here. They were parallel, but through the university here, their paths crossed and they became lifelong friends, and also partners in business. But two different lifestyles. They called me up— John Thomason— and said, "John, we remember that good job you did for us a couple years ago in solving that problem." What he was also saying is that, we really like you. We appreciate what you did. You're family. You did something for us that our current supplier said he could not do, and no one else could, but you took it. We have designed a position around your ability. Wow.

01-00:30:22
Geraci:

That's very typical of them.

01-00:30:23
Harrison:

It really is. Watch this now. The year before, I had left my father's company. For one year, I had not called on Dreyer's. I left and went with management recruiters in Santa Barbara, California. I was finding jobs for people in the food industry. I get a call from JT, John Thomason. Said, "John, we are needing a plant manager here." Da, da, da, da. I said, "Would you mind if I did a search and see if I couldn't find that guy for you?" He said, "No. Would you?" I found my future boss. Talk about a circle.

01-00:31:21
Geraci:

Who was that?

01-00:31:25
Harrison:

I thought you were going to ask me—no.

01-00:31:30
Geraci:

It will come up. We'll get there.

01-00:31:33
Harrison:

Yeah. Anyway. It was a perfect timing that I got the phone call, flew up to Oakland from Santa Barbara, and interviewed with Gary, Rick, Jan Booth, John, JT, all of the guys. The plant manager. Of course, everybody did the check, because they knew me. I wasn't an entity they didn't know coming from Breyers Ice Cream in New York. I'd already been in the family, and so it was a relationship thing. It was just a matter of, "John, we want you. Can you come? We're growing. We need your background. We don't have a John Harrison here."

01-00:32:25
Geraci:

What did they want from you? What did they expect in bringing you in? With Gary and Rick, when they're bringing someone into this family, they're

bringing you into the family, but they've got something in their mind that they're lacking and they want you—

01-00:32:40

Harrison:

That is correct. One thing. They recognized that fifteen flavors wasn't going to cut it. They needed new flavors, new products. I developed, in the first five years, seventy-five flavors that went to the market.

01-00:33:00

Geraci:

Oh my goodness.

01-00:33:00

Harrison:

Yeah. There was another twenty-five that didn't make it. The most popular flavor was cookies and cream. That grew to be the number five most popular flavor in the world. In America, as well. Number five. I was taking a break from the laboratory. I was in our ice cream parlor on College Avenue. I was doing some computation there. I asked the young lady to bring me a scoop of my favorite, vanilla. On the plate, two cookies. I thought to myself, why don't I save a step and put the cookies in the ice cream? I got up, walked down College Avenue towards the BART. On the right hand side was then a Lucky's grocery store. I went in and I bought a package of Hydrox, Oreos, Lorna Doones, another half a dozen cookies, brought them back to the laboratory, tried them in vanilla ice cream. The one that had the best flavor after being frozen was the Oreo, Nabisco's product. The reason—not too many people know this—you put a Hydrox and Oreo side by side, and the Hydrox is like gnawing on this lab coat. No flavor whatsoever. But the Nabisco Oreo product, they use a burnt cocoa to make the Oreo. They use, as you know, a lot of cream filling, which rounds out that—if there was going to be some harsh—

01-00:34:41

Geraci:

On the palate, that gives you both a lot of front and back taste.

01-00:34:45

Harrison:

That is correct. The Oreo spiked with flavor, where the Hydrox did not, and Lorna Doones and all the others were down here. But that Nabisco Oreo came up delightful. Well, showed it to marketing. Marketing said, well, John, we think it's too much of a kid's flavor, and chose not to market cookies and cream. Then about a month later, two months later, we had a Perfectly Peach ice cream—that was the name of it—Perfectly Peach ice cream planned. We had pre-purchased a peach crop over in Modesto that we were going to be using for this summer flavor.

01-00:35:26

Geraci:

That's a commitment to quality ingredients in and of itself right there, that you're purchasing an entire crop.

01-00:35:31
Harrison:

Oh, that is correct. A farmer's crop. We did that many times over. Peach is one of the most difficult flavors to produce. One, because it's frozen. Two, because peach is mellow, is a light flavor. You don't get, like a raspberry, that tart top note there. Acid note is what it is. Food acid. As a premium product, Dreyer's Ice Cream, we had higher butterfat. Butterfat is a marvelous flavor in vanilla. When you started adding ingredients, butterfat coats the tongue, coats the buds, so it's difficult to get that fresh fruit flavor through. Most difficult. The crop was not only destroyed, but some of the trees were destroyed. Marketing came to me and said, John, what do you have over in that filing cabinet that we can look at? I pulled out a half a dozen. They said, let's try that cookies and cream for ninety days, and let's see what happens. I call up Nabisco. Their closest plant, Portland, Oregon. We'd like to have a twenty-five pound box, broken and whole Oreo cookies, loose. The gentlemen on the other end laughed at me. He said, "Mr. Harrison, we've been making"—1982—"the Oreo cookie for fifty years not to have a broken cookie. That's what you need?" He said, "We don't have it." I said, "What have you got?" He had twenty-four sleeves, a twenty-four pound box, for the grocery store, for the shelf. I said, "Send me two truckloads. Tell the driver to hit every pothole on the highway."

01-00:37:27
Geraci:

And toss them all over the truck, loading and unloading.

01-00:37:30
Harrison:

That is correct. When we got them, we tossed them up in the air. Then we had to get a fifty-five gallon drum, poly-lined, and then get these and open them up and abuse them as best we could. Then, for the first time ever, a flavor required two ingredient feeders to get this flavor into the package. A feeder was a V shape. Would come down here. Then at the bottom was an auger that would take the cookie, in this case, forward, drop it down into the ice cream on the three-inch line that was passing by, and it didn't have any top here, and it would drop right in. Then there was an in-line blender over here to evenly distribute. Over here, we had an auger that was about this far, maybe an inch, inch and a half, and then that would break the cookie in half, give a nice particulate, what we wanted to see. Then the other one over here was real fine. Maybe a half-inch. That would crush. It had the crumb. That's what we wanted. Dropping in, and that would give a light tan color all the way throughout. You know that it was an Oreo cookie because there was that crumb all the way throughout. For the first time ever, it took two ingredient feeders on this new flavor that had never been produced. It was flavors that drove, I believe, Gary and Rick and John and the guys to call up John Harrison and say, "Look, we need somebody fulltime, going forward, to develop flavors. You've been a flavorist. You know ice cream backwards and forwards. You know formulations. You know what's possible and what's not possible." I knew—

01-00:39:47

Geraci: You must have worked a lot with JT, then.

01-00:39:49

Harrison: Oh, I did. JT, he was my main man. He was vice president of manufacturing. He was someone that I had a high degree of respect for his commitment to quality. He had a high respect for me, for my ability to get the quality that he demanded in formulation ingredients. There's some ingredients you just can't make ice cream out of.

01-00:40:24

Geraci: It seems to me, even what you were talking about with the Nabisco, keeping that in suspension has to be a major issue.

01-00:40:31

Harrison: It is. Of course, the blessing on that end is the in-line blender right before it goes into the package. There's a blender in line that gives an even distribution. Of course, that was my job, and that's what the knife is about.

01-00:40:50

Geraci: To cut those packages open?

01-00:40:52

Harrison: Every morning, I had about sixty packages waiting for me. We're running about twenty flavors a day in every plant. The ice cream makers bring samples into the laboratory, marked one, two, and three, from that day's run. Three sample packages. They could have run 6,000 gallons, 12,000 half-gallons, 36,000 quarts. On and on and on. But I got three samples from the beginning, middle, and end. I'm looking at them, breaking it open, tasting, looking at that distribution of the cookie, or caramel, or almond. Or, or, or. If it wasn't right—and it wasn't right. We were running twenty million gallons, but we would have upwards to a half a million gallons a year that did not meet our specs, our standard of quality. There it is. It falls right in here. Outside, donate it. Outside, donate it. It's got to be right in here.

01-00:42:02

Geraci: I was just going to ask, what happens to all of that product?

01-00:42:04

Harrison: It went to rescue missions and food banks across America. They loved it, of course, when we made mistakes. We had a contract with them that said they could not sell the product. We would have kept it and sold it. They could not sell it. Had to consume it on the premise. Of course, half a million gallons a year, that was a lot. One year, I remember, at Christmastime, out here in our Union City warehouse, we had a million gallons in there. We had just a skeleton crew there. In the freezer box, a million gallons of finished ice cream, and the ammonia line burst and got into that whole million gallons. The cartons are paperboard, but there's a film on it that ammonia gas could not get into. But what happened, the gas caused the ink, with all the nutritional labeling and ingredient labeling, which you've got to have right and be able to

read it, got smeared because we had six, three, and three half gallons in a cellophane wrap. When you handle that and jostle it around and so forth, or shipping, even, would have a little bit—so we donated a million gallons, in package, poly-lined, thirty or forty truckloads, to a pig farmer in Stanislaus County, California. The pigs, they'll eat the ice cream, the packaging, and the plastic wrap. Pigs eat everything. But our insurance did not pay based on the ingredient loss. They paid as if it were retail price.

01-00:44:12

Geraci: That's to your advantage.

01-00:44:13

Harrison: We did not lose a penny, in other words. It may have cost us, going forward, a little more for our insurance, but that wasn't my call. Anyway, when I came onboard, they were flavor-intensive. They wanted new products, new flavors. I developed the first new product line the company had ever had. At that point—what was it? Probably a sixty, sixty-five-year-old company at that point. That happened to be Tres Chocolate. All chocolates. Milk chocolates and dark chocolates. Super premium. Pints only. They wanted an almost orgasmic experience with this Tres Chocolate. I approached it as making the finest chocolate in the world. You'd go for See's, locally, or Tobler. You'd go worldwide, and I did, to get that dark chocolate eating experience, and that milk chocolate eating experience.

01-00:45:39

Geraci: Very different, as opposed to American and European view of chocolates.

01-00:45:47

Harrison: Night and day. Night and day. I approached it. I thought I would have the most difficult with milk chocolate, because there's so much milk in ice cream that it would dilute the color, it would not give a good chocolate note. I was wrong.

01-00:46:14

Geraci: If I remember right, in reading about chocolate and the American manufacturing, it's almost a sour milk, isn't it?

01-00:46:21

Harrison: The answer is yes, on milk chocolate. They use powdered milk. Hershey chocolate uses—Ghirardelli milk chocolate, they use not liquid, but it's a powdered milk. Some will even use a cultured milk to give a little top note to it, a uniqueness to it, a creativeness to it. With that said, then, the milk chocolate came right into place, because we use Ghirardelli's Oban chocolate liquor. That's not alcoholic. It's the pot liquor, cooking on top of the stove, you cook something down. They refer to that as pot liquor. You never throw it away. You always work it in, and drink it, even, if you've got to, because that's where all the nutrients are. The chocolate liquor is taking the cocoa bean, cocoa, 50 percent cocoa butter, 50 percent cocoa solids, the mass. So the natural home for this butter, cocoa butter, is with the mass. They would grind

it. Conch it, it's called. Conching for hours, days, on end, driving off the acidic notes. What is left, what Ghirardelli did is make the Oban, they called it, product. It was like a chip, a big chip, about this size, and it was the chocolate liquor. Nothing added, nothing deleted. It was straight-out liquid. Heat being applied, come out liquid, and formed into mold, and that's what I used to make the milk chocolate, the milk Tres Chocolate. The color was almost an orangey brown. Natural. Nothing added. Ah. Now, you've got to add sugar. You've got to add more sugar. Any chocolate recipe always uses more sugar. You take the base on your vanilla, and then if you're going to make it chocolate, then you add more. With this one, you've got to add more because it is a pure ingredient. I would add Grand Marnier, a raspberry sauce, to that milk chocolate. Delightful.

The dark chocolate. I grew up with cocoa and chocolate in my uncle's ice cream factory. I knew the best available. I know, and knew, who made what, where, and when on planet Earth. Sold some of the best cocoa powder in the world with my father's company, and product, to ice cream manufacturers. So I had an inside track. But I was frustrated. I could not make the Tres Chocolate dark chocolate. I kept adding more and more, and getting nowhere. There has to be an answer. I got on the phone and I called cocoa manufacturers around the world. South America, Germany, France, Holland, Netherlands. No one knew. No one had ever attempted this before. An idea came. I'm working at the wrong level. I'm working at the wrong end. I need to go back to the bean, not to this side. When I did, then I uncovered a high roast. Starbucks Italian Roast is a high roast coffee. Flavor, bam! You know you've got a cup of coffee. You may not like it. Maybe it's too intense for you. You want to come on down for some Colombian. That's okay. But with all this milk, fat, sugars, I needed to roast a bean like never before. There was only one company in the world doing it, and that's in Dover, Delaware, called Baker's Chocolate, a name most Americans grew up with.

01-00:51:30
Geraci:

Has been around for centuries.

01-00:51:32
Harrison:

On the shelf, Baker's, high roast, no sugar added to it. It was the chocolate liquor Oban, if you will, in the package for cooking. I talked to them and I got them to make a high roast cocoa for me. Now, I had to back off from all of that other I was adding and adding. I backed off, and that made a perfect Tres Chocolate dark chocolate ice cream. We introduced that line of about eight or nine flavors. I had the European pistachio. What do they call that?

01-00:52:28
Geraci:

A hazelnut?

01-00:52:29
Harrison:

Hazelnut, thank you. Hazelnut puree ribbon through the dark chocolate.

01-00:52:39

Geraci: Now, are you patenting any of these?

01-00:52:42

Harrison: Yes, we were, and did. Then we introduced it to Neiman Marcus, in their food court, new for Neiman Marcus, in Dallas, in San Francisco, in Los Angeles, in New York City. James Beard had the product introduced for the media at the New York Opera Club in New York City. Julia Child was there. Everybody was enthralled with this eating of the finest chocolate, dark chocolate, milk chocolates, but in a refrigerated, creamy, refreshing, cool state. It had never been consumed before. They had several hundred people in that opera club that night. Julia and her husband and James Beard. I got the James Beard award for the newest food product in America. I got named the taster of the year award. The creativeness. Then later on, by the way, we sold it to Haagen-Dazs, the rights to the product. They never made it. Today, Dreyer's owns Haagen-Dazs.

01-00:54:15

Geraci: Under Nestlé.

01-00:54:17

Harrison: Nestle umbrella, that's correct. Gary said—and he grew up here in the Bay Area—and Rick said, we knew this product from youth. It's excellent. Of course, you know the story of Gary in the office of Ken Cook, the day Ken Cook was turned down—

01-00:54:47

Geraci: For a loan.

01-00:54:48

Harrison: A loan to expand the business. Gary leaned across the table and offered him a sizeable minimal price. But the point is, is that Gary said, "It's a marvelous product. Don't change a thing, but let's add to and keep going. Let's not stop." That's what they needed, a John Harrison. A formulator. A flavorist. Someone that knew ingredients backwards and forwards. Knew what was right, what was wrong, what was possible, what was not possible.

01-00:55:24

Geraci: But also the ability, a Gary and Rick thing, to have faith in people and turn you loose and say, ready, fire, aim. I don't want to meddle in your daily life; go do it. The faith in you.

01-00:55:42

Harrison: Right. That's a precious expression you mentioned. Ready, fire. Not ready, aim. Ready, fire, aim was one of the ingredients that made us, as a company, who we are today. That is that we gambled, but we gambled with knowledge. Within any industry, I don't care who they are, being first in the marketplace is paramount. To be out there. We would then tweak it as necessary. Sometimes it wasn't. It was just getting out there. We introduced the first light ice cream in the world. It was a table like this. There were about ten or twelve

of us around the table, from marketing, management, research and development, John. Gary came in the room and said, “We’re going to make a light ice cream.” Now, you’ve got to understand, Gary doesn’t have a day in his résumé on ice cream. Not a day. But he had vision. He knew what she, the consumer, was asking for and needed. Our industry was giving the consumer what we wanted them to have. No more.

01-00:57:32

Geraci: No less.

01-00:57:33

Harrison: Gary said, “We’re going to give them exactly what they’re asking for, and they’re asking for a light ice cream.”

01-00:57:38

Geraci: That’s marketing sense.

01-00:57:39

Harrison: Of course it is.

01-00:57:40

Geraci: Know your consumer.

01-00:57:42

Harrison: We had on the table, Vic, all of the light food products in America. All. About eight. Different spelling on “light.” Different definitions for “light.” There was a light mayo, there was a light bread, there was a light beer, Miller Light, and a few other light products. Nothing in our industry, in ice cream. At that time—whatever it was—a ten billion dollar industry, but nothing light. Food and Drug—

01-00:58:20

Geraci: Can we stop right here and we’ll pick it up in the next tape? I need to change tapes.

[End Audio File 1]

[Begin Audio File 2]

02-00:00:03

Geraci: Today’s date, November 4, 2011. Vic Geraci, seated with John Harrison. This is tape number two. When we left off, John, we were talking about the light. We had just gotten into the light ice cream.

02-00:00:16

Harrison: When Gary said we’re going to make a light ice cream, what popped in my mind was Mellorine. That was a product that Texas and a few states, back in the sixties and seventies, manufactured using vegetable fat. Vegetable fat was probably ten cents a pound then. Dairy fat was a dollar. So that’s why. It was one of those economic things. When Gary and Rick came to Dreyer’s in that

1980 area, the whole industry in America was going this way on quality. Cheap, cheap, cheap. Ice milk. In my lifetime, five half-gallons for one dollar. I can see it now on that grocery store banner. You can't bottle water that cheap. Here's Gary and Rick going the opposite direction. It was unheard of. I knew they were going to be successful. That's why I wanted that business. When they had that technical formulation issue and I was knocking on their door, because I knew there's always room for quality. There's always spendable income for quality.

02-00:02:08
Geraci:

Especially in an era when consumers had disposable income now.

02-00:02:12
Harrison:

Had disposable income. Why? In part, they had disposable income because both mates were working. When they came home at night, they did not want to have a bad eating experience, and so they bought the best. That market was growing in America. There was no Food and Drug definition for Mellorine, or, in this case, Gary's light ice cream. You could not go out of state with it in Texas. You had to make it in Texas and sell it in Texas. No interstate.

02-00:02:54
Geraci:

Was Blue Bell doing that?

02-00:02:56
Harrison:

Blue Bell was, that is correct. Howard and Ed Kruse were their names, manager and plant manager. Brothers. They're in Brenham. Knew them well. They knew me well, knew our family well, the Harrisons, in Tennessee, in Brenham. All companies were in Texas, but they weren't shipping it out. Gary and Rick had visions beyond California. So, Food and Drug. You cannot make a product and put it on the shelf without Food and Drug already approving the product. There's a whole definition of that product, whether it's ice cream, ice milk then, sherbet, sorbet, et cetera. You have a definition of those products. There's nothing "light" in America, so we decided then to make the product. Not easy. We made a light ice cream, and then we sold it and got feedback. Took it over here, sold it. Got some approval from Food and Drug to sell it over here in this state, Nevada, over here in this state, and this state.

Then we went to Washington, D.C. and showed that there was a need for a light ice cream. What was currently in the regulation was ice milk. The ice milk product was never successful. Now, yes, if you had five kids at home that had to eat something cold and sweet, it met that need, but that was all. It was just sugar, because sugar was cheap. Manufacturers put a lot of sugar in it. The regs for ice milk was you can have 7 percent butterfat, down to 2 percent. Guess where our industry went to immediately? Two percent. Added a lot of sugar, and it was terrible and it never went anywhere. We were proposing to replace ice milk with a light ice cream. What were the regs then are you recommending for a light ice cream? That light ice cream had to be a

minimum of 50 percent of your volume ice cream. If your volume was 12 percent butterfat, then your light had to be six, not two. With six, the law for ice cream was minimum ten. So you're not far, six to ten. If you had good, quality ingredients, your 6 percent light will be better than America's 10 percent ice cream, and that's what happened. Exactly what happened. The light was approved by Food and Drug. Ice milk was deleted.

02-00:06:32

Geraci:

First of all, it had a mouth feel. Ice milk has no feel.

02-00:06:38

Harrison:

Ice milk is just really icy. That's correct. I refer to it as cold icing. Like Breyers, but I didn't say that. [laughter] Okay, moving on. Watch this now. You have three areas in a frozen dairy dessert. You have the appearance, the body, and the texture. Appearance, body, texture and flavor. Those three. Appearance, flavor, body and texture. We'll get it right. They've got to be there to have a good eating experience. The appearance, the body and texture, the flavor. We had, in our light ice cream—ready, aim, fire—we had two of the three. Two thirds? That's not bad. But the third was the texture. We didn't have it. It needed to be smooth and creamy. We spent twenty million dollars to get the third leg correct. Came from technology in Europe, and the first ones in America to do it. That result was—never been done—putting ice cream in the package, about ten degrees colder than what everybody, including ourselves, was doing at the time. Ice cream, being—the best ice cream—60 percent water, and you put it in the package at twenty-three degrees Fahrenheit, you can then put that caramel and get a pattern. You put the strawberries and the cookies and so forth, and get that pattern. Then you wrap it and send it into a cold hardener, six below zero. The fan is blowing, and now you're at thirty-five wind-chilled temperature in there. Within twenty-four hours, it takes it from twenty-three down to the core at six degrees. But what happens during that process, from twenty-three all the way down to zero, or ten below even, is you have migration. Water solids are moving around in that package. When you have a couple of water molecules that come together, now you have a large molecule. You have a little coldness. Might even have a little ice. A light ice cream, we had lower solids than forty. More water, in other words. Less fat. Fat creates an emulsion.

02-00:10:08

Geraci:

Which means more ice in the long run.

02-00:10:10

Harrison:

Yes. But the butterfat there, you need. We were having, naturally, a difficult time, but we knew that from the outset. But we wanted to be ready, aim, fire, and we were. We were out there. Yet, even with that, the consumers recognized that we had a marvelous product. Great flavors, great appearance. Yes, creamy, but a little cold. With that technology of reducing the temperature at the filling—

02-00:10:47

Geraci: The core.

02-00:10:49

Harrison: Core out here, not in the hardening room, but out here on the manufacturing floor, to put it in that package much colder, now you, vroom! These water cells are not going to move, and now you've got creaminess like never before. If they took that technology and put it with a 12 percent ice cream, it would be too good, too rich. Want to try? So that made the slow-churned light ice cream. Now the word "light" is gone. Now it's slow-churned ice cream.

02-00:11:33

Geraci: That's at the same time that you had brought Uwe in also.

02-00:11:35

Harrison: Oh, that's correct. Have you had an interview with him?

02-00:11:38

Geraci: Yes, I have.

02-00:11:38

Harrison: He's beautiful. He's beautiful, knowledgeable. A technician's technician. He was our key. He brought that technology, that's correct. The future. Slow-churned has as good, if not a better, eating quality than full-fat ice cream. If you can get 50 percent less fat, 30 percent fewer calories, with the same eating experience, and consumers are going that way, and that's the future, then ice cream is in trouble. That whole technology has expanded, and will continue to expand, to such a point that—and it's just in its infancy, by anybody's standard. People like Uwe and others that are coming, that we have, we're going to continue to be the leader within the frozen dairy dessert community going forward. Not only nationally, but internationally as well.

02-00:13:05

Geraci: Were there any other specific brands that you take great pride in? I mean types. I shouldn't say brands. Types.

02-00:13:15

Harrison: Flavor-wise, of course another one that I introduced that has threatened vanilla in the Slow-Churned—nothing threatens vanilla.

02-00:13:24

Geraci: Vanilla is the mainstay.

02-00:13:26

Harrison: Vanilla, in ice cream, is 30 percent of the total volume. We make four different vanillas. We make a straight vanilla, 16 percent butterfat. We make a vanilla bean ice cream. We make a French vanilla, which has the highest total fat, because now you not only had dairy fat, but you also had egg fat. To call a product French or custard, the ice cream manufacturer has to add 1.4 percent egg yolk solids. The egg has 80 percent fat, so you're adding another 1.4 to

the 16, 17.4. Then the last, and the newest, about ten years ago now, we introduced double vanilla. Sort of like laundry detergent.

02-00:14:21

Geraci: It's concentrated.

02-00:14:22

Harrison: Right! This one was my favorite one in 1982. Then vanilla bean was my favorite, when I developed that one. Then the French vanilla reformulated. That became my favorite. Now the double vanilla is my favorite. It's creamy. Strong vanilla, good vanilla. Make a good milkshake. You can add a banana to it and you'll still get the good vanilla, or honey, or a little cinnamon, or walnuts. Vanilla is 30 percent—three out of ten packages out of the store will be vanilla. Number two is chocolate. The most popular chocolate flavor in America is a flavor that Bill Dreyer and Joe Edy invented in 1929, rocky road. The first time marshmallow was ever used in ice cream. Edy's background, he was a candy maker, and they had been using marshmallow for years. He brought that in, but the only marshmallow that was available in 1929 was the large fireside marshmallow that their wives used to cut up, bite-size. You wouldn't put a whole—can't do it. Can't put a whole Oreo. Got to cut it in half or quarter it. It wouldn't work, so bite-size. Then, of course, Kraft finally came around and gave us bite-size. Miniature marshmallows, they call it. So, first time marshmallow was ever used. Very innovative. Originally, it was walnuts, but it didn't have that bite, that crispiness, that freshness, lasting. Very few people will roast walnuts. Too much oil there. It's too porous. It absorbs and gets soggy. But you know, right here in Oakland, they have a candy company, called Annabelle, who made rocky road candy bars. There, they used the walnut. Again, the candy and ice cream industry has been interwoven since day one. The almond, the roasted almond. Crisp.

02-00:16:46

Geraci: It holds that crispiness.

02-00:16:48

Harrison: It holds it, that is correct. You buy yourself a Hershey candy bar. Because of all of that milk, powder, and the cocoa butter in that Hershey bar, you take the bar, melt it down, get the almonds out of the candy bar, cut them in half, and it will be as brown as this table, almost a black. You don't know that eating the candy bar, because it's crisp and it's got a—bang!—flavor. The more you roast it, the longer life, and also the more almond note you will have. Now, you can get to a point where you get burnt, and that's no good, but you want it to round out with the Hershey chocolate in that case, or in this case, rocky road. So miniature marshmallows. Milk chocolate ice cream, miniature marshmallows, and rocky road. Chocolate, as a whole, is 10 percent of the total volume sold in America. Don't tell the chocoholics that. They think it ought to be number one. At least 40 percent of chocolate, then maybe vanilla down a way. Chocoholics, they're very vocal.

A flavor that I developed with Dreyer's was using the chocolate fudge brownie, little brownie bits. Brownie ice cream had been made for ten years when marketing says, John, why haven't we got a brownie? I said, "Because everything in the market is crap." What it was, it was a goo, extruded goo. Little pieces of goo in chocolate ice cream. I said, "We're not going to do that." JT wouldn't allow it anyway. So we found a bakery in L.A. that made a brownie this high, with pecans, and chopped up were little pieces like so. We're still making double-fudge brownie. No one else is making a brownie ice cream in America. Why? Because we made it right. They made it wrong. When you make it right, it lasts forever, and will—

02-00:19:10

Geraci: Consumers all learned to go to it.

02-00:19:12

Harrison: Of course. So chocolate, number two. It used to be vanilla, chocolate, and strawberry. But because of a compromise, because of improper handling of strawberries from the field, just like this cantaloupe mess—it's a ground crop, strawberry. If you don't know what you're doing and watch that, bacteria can go sky high. You can get horrible mold, bad taste in berries. When you're on a manufacturing floor, you're popping that can and you're throwing them in. You're not tasting them. It's okay. It was wood on wood. [laughter]

02-00:20:12

Geraci: It will come out of my salary.

02-00:20:15

Harrison: So, vanilla, chocolate, strawberry. Strawberry is in the top ten. It dropped out of the top five. Number three is one-third strawberry, one-third chocolate, one-third vanilla. Neapolitan.

02-00:20:32

Geraci: I never realized that. Neapolitan—

02-00:20:34

Harrison: That is correct. Now, what was the original three color flavors in Neapolitan? Vanilla, strawberry. So we've got red, white, and what's number three? Original. Most of the early ice cream makers in America were Italians, Vic. Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore. The first commercial ice cream plant in Baltimore, Maryland, 1851. They were Italians. They gave us Neapolitan that spoke of their family members back in Naples, Italy. Neapolitans. They also gave us spumoni, another great Italian flavor. Multifaceted, but great nevertheless. The original was pistachio. The three color flavors of the Italian flag as well. Then, of course, the chocolate lovers rose up and kicked pistachio out, and chocolate came in. Strawberry, vanilla, and chocolate. Neapolitan.

Number four is probably the most responsible for kicking strawberry out. It is butter pecan. Great taste, great flavor. People love it once they try it. It has not

been that popular on the West Coast. It was more in the middle of the country, South, really. The Northeast was coffee. We're more chocolate out here in the West. Flavor preferences—

02-00:22:20

Geraci:

So you see variances between both Edy's and Dreyer's and what they're putting in the market.

02-00:22:25

Harrison:

Absolutely, absolutely. Then number five, cookies and cream. The top five represent—watch this—55 percent of the total volume sold. When you're out of those five flavors in that grocery, you're out of ice cream. You've taken options away from those consumers. They're going to get POed and just walk out, because my favorite's not there, 55 percent. Pistachio is way down the list. The next five, you would have chocolate chip, strawberry, flavors like that. Coffee. Coffee almost got into the top five here. Had a great run, but it's still in the top ten. I was telling you earlier that, in the slow-churned, French silk, a flavor I developed for the slow-churned only, in certain markets, outsells vanilla. What is French silk? It's a milk chocolate ice cream. First time ever. A ribbon of vanilla mousse, with chocolate chips, thin, big ones, with a hint of mocha. Fun. It's like you're sitting in Paris on the {Broadway?} outside, umbrella, sunny day, and you're getting this orgasmic, if you will, mousse, chocolate, coffee, cocoa. It's a great flavor. Consumers love it. It's a solid number two after vanilla in the Slow-Churned line. May well always be.

02-00:24:24

Geraci:

Your last description moves us into a new area. You love food. You have a passion for this. Gary and Rick knew that. They start putting you on the road. Let's talk a little bit about that.

02-00:24:41

Harrison:

The company started growing. Chicago. New York. They were recognized that—Diane McIntyre. Gary ran for an outside board position, and hired Diane McIntyre to handle his campaign and funding and so forth. Well, that didn't work for Gary, but what did work for Gary is Diane came to work for Dreyer's Ice Cream, and headed up, for the first time ever, a PR, public relations, department. They needed a spokesperson. With my passion for ice cream and history and family and fourth generation—the company selected three men to try. They tried one, up in Seattle. This person clamed up. Got frightened on TV.

02-00:25:56

Geraci:

That's not going to work.

02-00:25:57

Harrison:

No. Couldn't say anything. Another guy, the second guy, he got in an argument with the host. He was prone to this. You've probably interviewed him. The third guy was me. They couldn't shut me up. The interview went from a three-minute TV to, John, can you stay for another three minutes? That

doesn't happen in TV. In radio, yeah, you might have upwards to an hour interview on radio, especially if it's live, especially if it's a hundred-thousand watt in Denver. But otherwise, it would have been a five to ten-minute interview on radio. So that started a twenty-five year traveling 1.5 million miles, air miles, criss-crossing America, talking about my favorite subject, and one of my favorite desserts, Dreyer's Grand Ice Cream, Edy's Grand Ice Cream. I was in markets that we did not sell one package in the whole state, much less their capital. That's pure PR. To cause people to—

02-00:27:36
Geraci:

Salivate a little.

02-00:27:37
Harrison:

Salivate for something they can't buy.

02-00:27:44
Geraci:

You have that field, that voice, and your descriptions. I see this a lot in the wine industry, the people that can really evoke this inside of a person, and you have that.

02-00:28:01
Harrison:

Thank you. I treated every interview as if it were a radio interview. That no one could see me. Therefore, my language had to be as descriptive about vanilla. Eighty percent of the world's vanilla beans are grown on the island of Madagascar. In our French vanilla, we add ground vanilla beans to give that total aroma of flavor. Vanilla, of course, number one. Then talk about French vanilla, ground vanilla beans in it. Talk about what you could do with a French vanilla for a dessert. Getting a crème de menthe and putting it over that, or get some raspberries from the market and strain the seeds out, and add a little bit of sugar to that and refrigerate it, and then pour that over your French vanilla ice cream, and so forth. It was a whole lifestyle for me of TV, where they could see my golden spoon tasting and how I taste. I represented, for twenty-five years, not only Dreyer's ice cream, but I represented a ten billion dollar industry. The Association of Ice Cream Manufacturers in Washington, D.C. knew that. Because when I was on a TV or radio newspaper magazine, I talked about the industry, not about a company. I talked about the flavors. Some were, yes, just from our company, but the majority. Every market, and our marketing people confirmed this, that I went in, the whole market went up in sales because of that TV interview. Sometimes, I was on all four networks in that city. Kansas City, Chicago, Miami, New York, Seattle.

Over 300 million in impressions, value. That's how John is successful. Well, impressions. They equate value to that. The only one, so much so that Breyers, our only other national competitor, hired a Hollywood actor, and dressed him up in some whites and sent him out with a little van that had "Breyers" on it, and he lasted for about three to six weeks. Because once they asked him a question about where's cocoa from, who produces the most cocoa? Eighty percent of the world's cocoa beans are grown in the country in

Africa with the same initials as “ice cream.” Ivory Coast. The cocoa tree, if you were in Ivory Coast, you would never see a farm, because it only grows in the shade of other trees. The pod, about the size of my fist, is green. When it ripens, it turns an orange. It’s got about fifty to sixty cocoa beans inside, encamped around like a pomegranate and pomegranate membrane in there. Then they open them up, put them on paper and sacks, and leave them for the sun to dry. I’ve got cocoa beans here. Let me show you one.

02-00:32:14

Geraci:

You pull those out and then—

02-00:32:15

Harrison:

Oh, sure. You see a membrane. You [peel] that off, and then here’s the bean. The point is, is that I could talk all day long on vanilla beans, cocoa beans. Number one, number two best-selling flavors. Number three, Neapolitan. Italy. Italians, da, da, da. The flag, da, da, da. Spumoni and all. Just on the top five selling flavors, much less my job as a taste tester. That was my job, to talk about ice cream. Of course, as a company, we were the only ones doing it. Programs, contests, with adults and kids. National contest, local contest. The local people were on TV when they got back with all their prizes, and the whole day of learning how ice cream is made and going through the ice cream factory, and meeting John Harrison and learn how to taste ice cream. I was an ice cream taster for a day. Every year, we had these contests. Many times, we would make it local to a certain state, and then we would challenge people to come up with a state flavor, such as alligator cream in Florida. Or we did NASCAR. Come up with a Jeff Gordon ice cream flavor. But on and on and on. This is Diane McIntyre, who was not a PR person when she joined, but she was released by Gary and Rick Cronk to be a PR lady. She did things that no one had done before.

02-00:34:33

Geraci:

See, that’s what I was talking about earlier. Their ability to let people pursue things and not restrain them. There’s no such thing as a box. In fact, you’re expected to think outside the box.

02-00:34:47

Harrison:

Paradigm. That is correct. And we did, and we had fun with it. We had the antique truck and so forth. Wait a minute now. Diane, Rick, Gary, Bob Nealis, all those guys, never spent a day in the ice cream industry. Not a day. But here’s a guy that’s born in it, fourth generation. Grew up in it. Knew it backwards and forwards. Had to get to market, to gab, the sales end of it. Research over here. So what they got in job was, as it turned out, unbeknownst to them, in 1982, that I became the ice cream taster. I became the ice cream man in America.

02-00:35:53

Geraci:

You became a face for a brand. They did a few commercials with Rick, but still, overall, you were the face.

02-00:36:05
Harrison: Correct. You see this bowtie here? First bowtie that was ever tied on my body was Rick Cronk, doing a commercial in San Francisco. Now, it is true that I wore long ties—you may see some—but most of my life with Dreyer's was bowtie. The reason I gave, and certainly true, that, as an ice cream taste tester who would taste, you would not taste ice cream this way. You would taste it by turning it upside down on the butt, because when you scoop, this is the warmest part, on top. You want that warm to hit the buds first. Not to deaden or shock them.

02-00:37:00
Geraci: Because it will constrict the cells.

02-00:37:01
Harrison: Exactly, right. So you turn it this way. Many times, if it was just too warm, right on down. So I told my boss, I said, "I'm going to go to bowtie. If I ever get it on my bowtie, I will hang it up."

02-00:37:16
Geraci: That means I'm dribbling, and that's not good.

02-00:37:20
Harrison: Yeah, you need to get rid of me as well. [laughter]

02-00:37:24
Geraci: Let's talk a little bit about what goes into tasting ice cream.

02-00:37:29
Harrison: Tasting ice cream. It's one of the most complex foods on planet Earth. One would not think of it because one would think, I love ice cream. There are millions tonight that will not go to bed without having a bowl of ice cream. Not a scoop. The Italians take a scoop, unless they're on the street. Well, America is unique because of refrigeration. Refrigeration. Mexico, our neighbors, south. To the north east, China, Japan, Korea. Poor refrigeration. Europe. We have a tall, six-foot, seven-foot refrigerator at home. Thirty, forty percent of it is the freezer. In Europe, 90 percent, or half outside. Small. So the world shops daily. Americans shop once a week. A couple times a month, maybe. Refrigeration is the key, and what drove ice cream to where it is today in America. We are the greatest volume consumer in the world, volume-wise.

02-00:38:55
Geraci: Per capita?

02-00:38:56
Harrison: No. There are other countries, per capita, that do greater. But volume-wise, no one can touch us. You can add the other five all put together, and it does not match our volume, what we consume. We love ice cream in America. We consume ice cream. It's not a dainty thing. It's a needful thing. Therefore, it's a bowl of ice cream. You go to grocery stores and you're amazed. They have that little area where they sell glasses and cups, coffee cups, and you'll have

some bowls there, and it will say ice cream, this size. Millions won't go to bed at night without having a bowl of ice cream. Why? A couple of things. One, they like ice cream. Two, there's calcium in ice cream, which is an inducer for sleep. Second, when you ingest something cold, the body compensates. It warms it up. Goes to sleep. It's a comfort food. It's a fun food. The best man at my wedding, Ronny Svenhard, owns Svenhard Swedish Pastry Company here in town. Has another bakery plant over here in the Valley. He's one of the largest in America. But there's a hoopla with pastry. Bear claw, snail raisin. But with ice cream—there's not a birthday that happens without ice cream. There's not a marriage, a decent marriage, that's going to hold together without ice cream. It's probably divorces that they serve ice cream. Rocky road or something. But that's ice cream. It's something that we've always been able to afford in America, and have fun with it, and celebrate with it. A birthday or Sunday or we made the week depression.

I give all the credit to 1951. Jacob Fussell was his name. He was a dairyman. He made the first commercial ice cream, but he made it because, four years earlier, Nancy Johnson in New Jersey invented the first hand-cranked ice cream maker. She patented her idea to a Philadelphia house wares company, and got paid \$200 in 1847. Because of her idea and invention, Jacob Fussell could mechanize and make ice cream commercial. We haven't stopped eating ice cream. It's just gone now into our freezers in America and worldwide. The point is, is that ice cream has been the number one best-selling dessert. Number two is apple pie. So when you combine them—

02-00:42:32

Geraci:

You've got the one and the two.

02-00:42:33

Harrison:

Oh man. Lifestyle of America. Motherhood, apple pie a la mode. Ice cream has, and I think will always have, that position of being the number-one dessert in the U.S. For me, growing up, of course, the love affair with it. My uncle's ice cream factory in Memphis, and then my father's business, made a living at it, and then, of course, being a part of Dreyer's ice cream. It was a small Bay Area company when I joined in 1982. We had just gone to L.A. and gotten an old plant at—

02-00:43:25

Geraci:

City of Commerce.

02-00:43:26

Harrison:

City of Commerce, that is correct. We just couldn't make enough up here, and ship it down there, and then we would be shipping some up in the Washington area. Just growing. Flavors was the key for, again, growth, but marketing, commitment to quality, people. Absolutely that's what Gary and Rick needed, wanted, was that assurance that we've got somebody down there that knows recipes, knows formulations, knows how to design a new product or a product line. That was my tenure. But with the growth of the company and then the

PR, public relations, 10,000 radio interviews. I just loved radio. First of all, because all the disc jockeys wanted my voice. [laughter] That was number one. Number two, they all loved ice cream. Vic, I cannot stress enough the uniqueness of the season that Gary bought Dryer's and brought his team together. It never happened before, and I'd been in the industry, prior to that, forty years. I knew. Nothing has happened since. Yes, Haagen-Dazs was a very unique—what's his name? Her name was Rosie and his name was—I called on them. Sold them ingredients. Brooklyn, New York. He formed a co-op of half a dozen ice cream makers. I told him about the plant that {Swift?} was getting out of in New Jersey. Paterson. I told him he ought to go and check. He did. Bought it. He just had a small plant in Brooklyn. He was unique, because he made a pint. He made a pint without air.

02-00:45:53

Geraci:

That's pretty—yeah.

02-00:45:55

Harrison:

Dense, heavy. He pumped no air in it. He balanced the air at twenty-five, but just by pumping from point A to point B, you're going to get twelve to fifteen. He stabilized it at twenty-five. Everybody else, the industry maximum, a hundred. Illegal, 101. But air was profit, but he priced it up here, where the hair should have been. Had a niche business. Became very successful. But no volume. Even today, here in the twenty-first century, he's only 200 million in sales. Million. Where commercial ice cream, total, is at twenty billion. So it's a niche business, but it's quality, and it's very profitable. He made a lot of money, number one. So my point is, is that we grew with quality products. To be able to go out there and have this ice cream man, John Harrison, ice cream taster, taste buds insured. I told my boss, I said, "Betty Grable's legs were insured. Liberace's hands." I said, "My taste buds. We could have a lot of fun with this." I said, "There's also a real, sincere side to it. I'm the official taste tester. My buds should be insured for a million dollars." They investigated and came back with, well, John, a quarter of a million—we're going to go for a quarter of a million dollars. So they did. They insured my tongue, my body, for a quarter of a million dollars. The San Francisco Chronicle came over in Rick Cronk's office. In our ice cream parlor, you could put four or five ice cream cones—sit them here for people to come get them and so forth. So I had that in his office, with a half a dozen cones up there. The guy came over—they'd never heard of anybody having their tongue insured—and took my picture, and it went around the world. I have letters, books written in Japan, Australia, France, China, with my picture and a nice story I can't read. That's ice cream and the fun. I'm in a book in Japan talking about being an ice cream taster.

After about four years, I said, "Diane, I think we ought to kick it up to a million dollars now." So we investigated and everybody agreed. One of my best friends happened to be on the insurance board. He's the one that had the policy at MetLife. Originally, it was a company over in England. What was

the name of it? Lloyd's. We did a million. Vic, it went around the world again, as if it was never done originally. Seven thousand TV interviews in America. Now, listen. It doesn't take a mathematician. You've only got—take California—thirty-five million people. You've got about twenty stations, from L.A. south, San Diego, and Palm Springs. You've got nothing in the Valley to speak of, and you've got, up here, maybe another twenty. You've got forty. Back that down to about fifteen, ten, twenty—let's say maximum of twenty—in Kansas, or Nebraska, Wyoming. So you've got twenty. There's only fifty states, so that's a thousand. I went back and back and back is my point. "Hey, John! Good to see you again. Remember me, over in Wisconsin?" "No, I don't remember! But hey, good to see you again."

02-00:50:30
Geraci:

People like ice cream.

02-00:50:31
Harrison:

They love ice cream. We were growing to be America's number one ice cream. We had a quality PR. Product, presentation, was top drawer. I had many, many radio, TV that say, "You've got it. Please tell your people back in Oakland what a good job they're doing." That opened the door. John's going to be in Orlando and Miami this week. He's going to be tasting some ice cream. Would you like to interview him? They'd send out letters, a hundred letters every week. I'd be in two major markets—I'd be in Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, I'd be in Seattle and Portland—every week, for thirty-five, forty weeks a year, for fifteen years. Going back to the same TV, radio, newspapers. Having fun. Watch this, Vic. They knew it was going to be a quality interview. They knew it was going to be fun. They knew it was going to be informational. They knew it was going to be creative. Going to have a contest, going to have some new flavors to taste. They knew that it was going to be the best part of their day. They knew that when I left—and I'd go to the car, I'd turn on the radio station, and they'd still be talking about me, fifteen or twenty minutes later, and talking about the flavors, and talking about, "John's going to be over at that Kroger store tomorrow from three to four. You guys ought to get out there and meet him. He's got a white lab coat on, a bowtie and a gold spoon on. You'll really enjoy meeting old John." Nothing like it. We didn't pay a penny for any of it. It was all free. Three hundred million dollars of free publicity. It was as if it was an infomercial. It was a commercial sometimes.

02-00:52:47
Geraci:

See, that's the beauty of it. You can't get better publicity.

02-00:52:51
Harrison:

It wasn't available.

02-00:52:53
Geraci:

You cannot get better.

02-00:52:54
Harrison:

Watch this. Watch this. I'm down in Texas there, east of Houston. Orange, Texas. I'm over there, I'm in Houston. They want me over there. Newspaper in Orange, Texas. Seventy-five thousand people. They put me on the Sunday newspaper. My distributor there was out on Sunday, fishing. Another fishing boat comes up. He's got the Sunday paper. He didn't know him from Adam. The guy is telling him about this big picture of me. "You ever seen this John Harrison ice cream taster? Tongue's insured for a million." Out there on the lake, fishing. One time, I was in Alaska, Anchorage. I'm in there, a newspaper, and they came out to the grocery store. They took my picture. Oh, we had a good, fun time. People were all around, scooping up ice cream and talking about flavors, ice cream, and then having the interview with the newspaper on the side over here. They put my picture on the front page of the Alaska Anchorage Newspaper, whatever the hell it was. Now watch this. The day before, President Clinton—Alaska is a federal state. He's in town with an entourage, going over to Japan. They always stop in Anchorage. Fuel up, whatever. His picture is in the same paper, but it's on the back side of the front, back here in the back, and his story. I'm on the front page, talking about ice cream. I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall in the editor's office who made that decision to put the president on the back and ice cream on the front.

That happened. I was up in Redding. Redding. That's a C-market. It's not L.A. It's not San Francisco or Oakland. It's not, whatever, B-market. It was C-market. Something happened. I was on the TV, radio. One of them. Let's say newspaper. But it happened on TV too many times—Salt Lake City comes to mind—where they own other newspapers, or they belong to McClatchy or whoever. Or TV is—

02-00:55:42
Geraci:

And it's shared on—

02-00:55:43
Harrison:

Yeah. National conglomerate or whatever. Out of Redding, I was on—it went and went and went. Why? Because this guy loved ice cream. He pitched me to all of his other newspapers, what a great story this is. Or TV. What a great interview. You're going to love this three-minute, two-minute interview of John Harrison. So they did it for me, because there was not another spokesperson for ice cream in America. Never had been since 1851, the first commercial plant. No one. Oh, sure, Baskin Robbins, local Baskin Robbins, maybe was on the TV with a new flavor, but he didn't know anything. Couldn't talk about anything. Maybe he knew something. Probably knew the name of it, but that was all. Probably didn't know the ingredients, what percent butterfat, or where the ingredient came from, or cha, cha, cha. And so I was it, and was welcomed. Remember they used to have AM/PM Magazine on TV? I was on all of them. All, every. That meant that the big network, NBC, would let the local network in Madison, Wisconsin, or Davenport, Iowa, have a morning, afternoon, AM/PM segment. Local produced. I was on

them until the network said, we can't afford to do that anymore; we've got to have New York in the morning in your market. Did them all. It was a god time. Let's take it to a spiritual note. It was a god time for Gary, Rick, and all the men and women that he pulled together, that he released their talents that they didn't even know they had.

02-00:58:03

Geraci: I think that's even more important. They didn't know they even had—

02-00:58:06

Harrison: That's right.

02-00:58:08

Geraci: That unbridled energy that he was able to—

02-00:58:12

Harrison: Entrepreneurial spirit.

02-00:58:13

Geraci: Oh, absolutely. We're going to stop for a second so I can change tapes.

[End Audio File 2]

[Begin Audio File 3]

03-00:00:00

Harrison: I'll tell you what I'll do. We haven't talked about tasting, if you wanted to do that.

03-00:00:05

Geraci: There are two things I want to do. I want to do this and tasting. Vic Geraci. Today's date is Friday, November 4, 2011. Seated with me is John Harrison. This is tape number three. John, let's get started this time—you brought in some great ephemera memorabilia here. Let's talk about some of these things and take a look at them.

03-00:00:27

Harrison: Let's go all the way back, as far as we can. I have here a diploma, and this was back in the teens and the twenties. The state fair is where all the ice cream makers would take their samples of ice cream and different flavors, and they would have the judges of the day judge, and they would give a grade. This one happens to be for Edy's Grand Ice Cream, 1928. This is the Pacific Slope Dairy Show. My, my. 1928, this was.

03-00:01:16

Geraci: That's great. Those are the days of the great agricultural fairs.

03-00:01:20

Harrison: Exactly.

- 03-00:01:23
Geraci: You had the contests for all of the different products.
- 03-00:01:26
Harrison: That is correct. That is correct. I don't know if you want me to say anything about these.
- 03-00:01:33
Geraci: Yeah, let's say a little bit about them.
- 03-00:01:37
Harrison: Here's our second one. This is the Dairy Product Show. This was, again, the Pacific International Livestock Exposition, in 1931. William Dreyer got a diploma of merit for his vanilla ice cream.
- 03-00:01:58
Geraci: That is great.
- 03-00:02:03
Harrison: This was something that was in the magazines of the day, stories like these. Talked about the heritage of ice cream at Dreyer's Ice Cream. How William Dreyer answered the question of vanilla. When asked by a well-meaning economizer why he didn't use artificial vanilla, since it could save him a lot of money, William Dreyer said nothing. When it was further pointed out that the first bite of ice cream made with artificial vanilla often tastes like the first bite of ice cream made with real vanilla, William Dreyer's response was quick and definite. "Yes, but no one takes just one bite."
- 03-00:02:57
Geraci: A commitment to quality from the very beginning.
- 03-00:02:59
Harrison: It was. He set the tone. He set the pace. Ken Cook knew it. Gary Rogers knew it. It was as if it just came right in, and we all had an attitude of, if it's not the best, we're not going to put it out. It was the first product line ever created beyond our regular vanilla ice cream, and it's called Tres Chocolate. James Beard presented to Dreyer's Ice Cream the Product of the Year Award certificate. Neiman Marcus, it was introduced to. It was a high-end, quality chocolate, both milk chocolates and dark chocolates. Here's a contest that we would have every year that the PR department would put on. We would have them all come out to the ice cream plant. Sometimes we'd go to the Fort Wayne ice cream plant, Houston, Texas, City of Commerce, but plants around the country that we had. We would bring in the winners, contest winners, men, women, and children. We had them for frozen desserts. We had them for frozen novelties. We had them for packaged ice cream.
- 03-00:04:42
Geraci: Were they thinking up flavors?

- 03-00:04:44
Harrison: They were creating new flavors, new products. We were showing them how ice cream was made. We were adding on what was fun about ice cream. Here's the 1983 annual report, just a year after I had joined Dreyer's. They put me in their annual report, behind all these beakers, stirring up some strawberries. There's that table I talked about, where light ice cream had its first beginning, which later became slow-churned with all of the marketing. There I am at one end of it. That was the creation right there.
- 03-00:05:29
Geraci: Always with that lab coat on.
- 03-00:05:30
Harrison: Oh, yes, always with the lab coat. Here's some newspaper articles. There I am. He's searching for flavors. Public invited to participate. One of the contests. I ran for the president of the United States one time, and one million dollars. There's my signature. I'm licking a cone of ice cream. That's along with my million-dollar taste buds. That's ice cream. We had fun with it.
- 03-00:06:05
Geraci: Did you get any votes?
- 03-00:06:07
Harrison: Oh, yes, because I didn't promise a chicken in every bowl, but a scoop in every bowl. I got a lot of votes. There I am, with a million dollars and all the ice cream cones. John Harrison's official taste tester. Here I am, in Pontiac, Michigan. The ice cream man. Looking pretty serious there, with my ice cream knife, the same one I have here on the table. That's going back to the light ice cream, before it went to slow-churned, so that's 1993. I got another one in Pontiac, Michigan. What is this one? Tasting sweet sensations, with my gold spoon. I don't know. I scream, you scream, we all scream for ice cream. Here I am. Oh, here's the Beaumont Enterprise.
- 03-00:07:02
Geraci: In Beaumont, Texas?
- 03-00:07:03
Harrison: Beaumont, Texas. The big mouth is open and the tongue is—
- 03-00:07:07
Geraci: Hold that up for a second. With the inverted spoon.
- 03-00:07:14
Harrison: Inverted spoon.
- 03-00:07:16
Geraci: You have your bowtie on.
- 03-00:07:17
Harrison: Bowtie on. Here I am, somewhere. Daily news. In the year 2000, they got me with no lab coat on, but they've got an ice cream lapel pin on. Life is sweet

for ice cream man. We'd always do that, and then tie in some trivia with ice cream. Here I am with—what is this?—United Airlines, I think, on the front page. Frequent Flyer program. Ice cream taster. At that time, eighty thousand miles in '92. Talking ice cream. Here's Dryer's Oakland class of 2002. I'm there with Rick and Gary and all of the College Avenue employees, having our picture taken. Then a picture with Oprah. Here's Oprah on the front page. 1991, July. Right on the inside, they've got me again with my mouth open. Edy's Ice Cream.

03-00:08:30
Geraci:

Wow. This man's tongue is worth a cool one million.

03-00:08:36
Harrison:

Then this is a picture that—we'll close with this one. That was in our ice cream parlor for over a decade. That's 1993. Talk about the sweet position. Ice cream taster's work is his just desserts.

03-00:09:01
Geraci:

Great. The reason I wanted to go through these is it really gives a good representation of just how much you were doing as a spokesperson. These are papers from all over the United States, articles. In essence, it's a national ad campaign.

03-00:09:20
Harrison:

It was. It was.

03-00:09:23
Geraci:

This is a national ad campaign.

03-00:09:27
Harrison:

I was told not to mention the company name during those TV and radio interviews. Not to mention. Let the product—

03-00:09:40
Geraci:

Speak for it.

03-00:09:41
Harrison:

Yeah. I always had half a dozen or more packages of ice cream there in front of me. The host would say, "John, how long has Dreyer's been here in Florida?" He would be using the name, or Edy's. "How long have you been making that cookies and cream?" They were getting caught up in it, believe me.

03-00:10:11
Geraci:

The food and wine industry does this all the time. That's the reason we have the whole profession of food and wine writers.

03-00:10:18
Harrison:

Exactly. Exactly.

03-00:10:20

Geraci:

They become an arm of advertising promotion. Let's talk about tasting.

03-00:10:26

Harrison:

All right, let's do it. Sixty packages. I've got twenty flavors. I've got three packages of each flavor. Vanilla, chocolate, cookies and cream, toasted almond, whatever it was. I'd have my ice cream knife. The first thing I would do, though, is to taste right off the top. Take a small amount. I use a gold-plated spoon, because wood or plastic had a slight resin aftertaste. Silver tarnishes; gold does not. Keeping a clean palate, very important. Of course, we all had nine thousand taste buds, approximately, on the tongue, on the roof of the mouth. They were insured for one million dollars. You divide that by one million. You get about \$110 per bud.

03-00:11:14

Geraci:

Who's counting?

03-00:11:16

Harrison:

Of course, our taste buds, they only last for a window of some twelve days. They all die during that period, but they're rejuvenated. They come back. If you have some jalapeno pepper on your Mexican entrée tonight, don't worry about it. In the next twelve days, you've got a brand-new set of buds. We only have four profiles. Bitter, salt, sour, and sweet. On the tip of the tongue, it's sweet. On the back is the bitter, to protect us from swallowing things we should not, like, I thought growing up, spinach. Anything green. Greens shouldn't have been eaten. Kaopectate may be another one. It doesn't want to go down. On the sides, salt and sour. What I do when I take a small amount off the top, I invert the spoon, because that's the warmest part on the buds. Swirl, covering all 9,000 taste buds. Smack. Aerate, warming up the sample. Hitting that top note. The bouquet. The aroma. That's what I'm looking for as an ice cream taster, three things. The appearance, the flavor, and the texture. With the texture, I'm looking for smooth and creamy. Many defects, like cold, course, icy, fluffy, gummy, sneezy, dopey—do you know those characters?—they don't belong in premium ice cream. That's my job, as an ice cream, to make sure they're not there. We're looking for that right balance of cream, sugar, and added flavoring. The dairy note, the sugars, and the flavoring. Balance is the key word for premium ice cream. If something is spiked and you get something out of balance, that's not premium. That was my job.

Next, I would cut the package in half, open it up, and look for that balance of the added ingredient. The cookie, the almonds, the pecans, the fudge ribboned all the way throughout. If it was all on one bottom or one side, then we'd donate that to food banks around America. Just get it out. A lot of companies rework product. Now you've got vanilla ice cream with chocolate fudge in it. What are you going to make? Well, a lot of them will try to make a chocolate ice cream out of that, but 90 percent of it is going to be vanilla. So now you're going to dilute the chocolate that you're trying to make a good chocolate over here. So, look, just get it out. Why make something worse over here by using

some rework—most companies do. They think chocolate will cover everything. You get a strawberry. You're eating chocolate ice cream, you get a strawberry seed. Where did that come from? It came from the chocolate ice cream.

03-00:14:26

Geraci:

That's been reworked.

03-00:14:27

Harrison:

That's been reworked. That is correct. Or, in January, you get a little eggnog note in the chocolate. On and on. Peppermint, mint. That's my job. First of all, we eat with our eyes. It must look appetizing. You may come home and you smell spaghetti sauce cooking. Oh man! But you get there and you look, and you've got a bowl of purple noodles, or green. I know there's green today. They use spinach. But purple, let's say, or some off color. Orange. That's not what I expected. So all of that good aroma over here was good for nothing, because this has discouraged me. We eat with our eyes. It must look appetizing. Chocolate should be brown, strawberries should be pink, and on and on. Second is flavor. The third is the dairy note. Cream. The milk. Whatever dairy component, it has to be clean. When that balance is there, you're going to have a good eating experience. That's my job, as the ice cream taster, to make sure.

Of course, today, we've got a lot of plants. They all report to me. We have a number one taster. We have backup tasters. All of the men and women that work on the manufacturing floor are also tasting. They're looking. It's their responsibility. When it's not right, then we have an ice cream freezer on the manufacturing floor to show them product that did not meet our standard, that we had to donate. What happened? Too much color, not enough color. Too much fudge, not enough fudge. The spinner was going too fast and threw all the fudge or the caramel out to the side, or it was too slow and it all went to the bottom. It's always a learning process. It's not something where you hit them over the head. This is what happened. We learn by this, and we try to minimize that. Our growth has been growing and growing and growing, so I'm sure that percent is probably still about the same, which is pretty small for a company our size. Why? Because it's the same commitment, it's the same attitude that Gary had at corporate office for employees at that level, as we have at manufacturing. They took a lot of pride in their quality and their volume and the challenge that marketing put on manufacturing many, many, many times with new products, new flavors, that called for a lot of creativeness over here at manufacturing, JT. They bought that same vision as corporate did.

03-00:17:26

Geraci:

It's also that corporate had that bottom-up vision.

03-00:17:30

Harrison:

Yeah, the pyramid.

03-00:17:31

Geraci:

The executive board was there, the reverse pyramid, to help the workers achieve this quality product.

03-00:17:37

Harrison:

Absolutely. I guarantee that that attitude, that reverse pyramid, that the workers felt, sensed, and bought ownership as much as any other employee, whether it was a driver on the road or someone in marketing for a particular brand. A lot of it—it really did—it stemmed from John Harrison. My aunt over in Louisville, Kentucky—John, saw you on TV, or a newspaper, or this national magazine. A lot of the attitude of our total employees across the country—when we had our national sales meetings, we always had all of this compiled in a little TV video segment. Everybody, they loved John, because I was them, but in front of the camera. I was them. I was speaking what they felt. Enthusiasm, the love of product, the new products, the innovativeness, the creativeness, moving into new markets, buying competitors at times. I was, as you said, the commercial, but I was their spokesperson. I was the company's spokes—but I was the employee's spokesperson that couldn't get there. PR sent me out. I sensed it. I knew it was bigger than me. I was speaking on behalf of not only our 9,000 employees, or, let's say, 150 employees in '82 or whatever it was, but we grew to 9,000.

03-00:19:47

Geraci:

Just from the College Avenue—

03-00:19:49

Harrison:

Right, that's correct. The thousands and thousands of employees. I was representing them as well, to do a good job, to get the message across, to get the hoopla set. I can't tell you the number of sales managers, even route and salesmen, in the grocery store that would see me and just light up when John would come in with his lab coat and shake hands with him or her and have a minute with them, if you will. It's not my horn I'm tooting. It's the season for Gary and Rick and company. It was all of us put together. It really was, whether it was Sommerville or Nealis, or whether it was international or domestic. I can't stress it enough. It was a season.

03-00:21:06

Geraci:

To be able to bring this quality of product, develop it, and grow it, and then, on top of it, create a distribution system, or DSD, that's going to be able to keep the quality of that product in the store, on the shelf, that's a major undertaking, and it all came by turning people loose. Letting them do their job.

03-00:21:34

Harrison:

I'm sure someone has already told you, but there are certain large grocery chains that would not let Dreyer's, Edy's, deliver our own product into their store because they had a policy, or the union said, we handle it. We're not going to let them, Dreyer's, or Edy's, handle and deliver their product to our store. It has to come through our warehouse. We said no. For some of those, it

was a decade or more that we were not represented in these major grocery chains in America, because we knew the importance that a quality product needed to be handled in a premium, quality fashion. We knew direct store delivery was the answer. No middleman. Anybody to blame, we blame ourselves.

03-00:22:44

Geraci:

As things become more computerized, the whole fact that you're placing this product on consignment. It is not even paid for by them until it's checked out. Once it's scanned, then they're charged. You're collecting and controlling that product. That product doesn't look good, whatever it may be. You can immediately pull off shelf. You're able to shelf items, once you're scanning on a daily basis to know—

03-00:23:11

Harrison:

What to replace.

03-00:23:12

Geraci:

What to replace.

03-00:23:13

Harrison:

That's correct. We were on the cutting edge of that industry, delivery and consignment and replacement. So much so that we had the experts in the industry, Frito Lay, Coca-Cola—you don't get any better direct store delivery than these people, but they came to us to find out what we were doing because of our commitment, where Gary released those individuals to create and design and develop something that had never been done before. Tres Chocolate, never been done before. Cookies and cream, never been done before. Other flavors, distribution, handling, warehousing. We had a lot of fun. We worked hard, I guarantee. I was sixty to eighty hours a week, traveling America, for twenty-five years, talking ice cream. I got paid for forty hours a week, but that's what it was. I'm not complaining. Just the opposite. I was part of something bigger than I. Something bigger than all of us.

03-00:24:38

Geraci:

One of the things I like to end these interviews with—describe the Mother of All Parties to me.

03-00:24:45

Harrison:

The mother. Mother! That was the mother of all Hoopla celebration parties. We had it here. We chartered planes. We surpassed Breyers, something that vacillated for a number of years. But that's all right. We're going to celebrate. We had moved on, number-wise, but that was a party that we had right here in downtown Oakland. We brought all of our key people from across America. We had the party of all parties. I'm sure there's been some to match it since, but at that time, for our industry, you've got to understand our industry is very conservative. They get up early, they go to bed late. It's something that I grew up in with my family, fourth generation. My uncle, ice cream factory. My father, Dairy Tech, and calling on the dairy industry. So I knew the industry

backwards and forwards. I was an anomaly at corporate. I was somewhat unique, except for the manager and JT that I hired. But we knew how to party, and we partied, and we celebrated. I don't think there's been another ice cream company, since or before, that has celebrated like we have.

03-00:26:37

Geraci:

To me, it's a good way to end these, in that it was a celebration, first of all, of an achieved goal that was—that's pretty unbelievable to go from little Oakland facility to the number one selling ice cream in America. But the fact that he actually closed plants down across the nation and fly over 5,000 employees, just the logistics to get them here, to say thank you. And to make them feel that, yeah, we are part of this.

03-00:27:11

Harrison:

Yes, yes. Of those 5,000, many have moved on, but I would bet a scoop of vanilla ice cream that those individuals moved on with success, remember, still buy, our ice cream. That spouses still remember the success, the joy, the fun, the excitement that we all experienced as a family with Dreyer's Ice Cream, going through that unique growth season of a small company in Oakland, California, a distant, distant on the list of volume, to be America's not only volume producer, but quality producer. In an industry that was going down in quality, we went the other way. That element, that truth, is not readily known, only because we hired a lot of people that came from successful, non-ice cream industries. They were marketers, whether it was Levi-Strauss, or on and on and on. They were the top in their fields, or they desired to be the top. They learned on the path upward.

03-00:29:04

Geraci:

The transition from Dreyer's to Nestle. Are you still active in doing anything within it?

03-00:29:12

Harrison:

I've been with the company for thirty years. I retired fully on December 31 of 2010, so I am no longer active with the company, except it still haunts them, I'm sure. Time Magazine and Life and all these past. So my past, I know, is still there. I have resigned—retired is what happened—after about four or five years after Nestle purchased the company. I wish them well. It is a different organization today because of Nestlé's means of doing business from Vevey, Switzerland. I think that as long as they maintain quality, that they have a lot of people still there that are working hard, they have some wonderful brands, whether it's Haagen-Dazs, or Skinny Cow, or the Edy's, or Dreyer's, or on and on and on, that have still a big life ahead of them. There are some quality people still at College Avenue.

03-00:30:35

Geraci:

John, thank you very much.

03-00:30:37

Harrison:

It's been exactly three hours.

03-00:30:40

Geraci: Has it?

[End of Interview]