

REEL 15

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Tour guide

Does this guy look like he might be your age? This is the new one, this is Paul the III's son, Matt. He broke the chain. But so that's the family who has worked here in Encinitas, ok, but this is something interesting. The ranch was not started here in Encinitas, where do you think it was started? Here in California. It can't be too cold. Close, it started in Los Angeles. Now let me come over here. This was the founder of our company in Los Angeles. His name was Albert Ecke. He named his son Paul Sr. so you see how this works. He came here from Germany, and what he wanted to do was have a resort but things happen – outside. Look at that. Look at all those plants. This right here is in San Diego but it looks just like this in Los Angeles. Now the original address for the ranch was Sunset Boulevard. Do you guys know where sunset blvd. Is? Where is sunset blvd. Paul, Sr. and grandma Magdalena Ecke. This building right here has been renovated at least three times, but this is the original building right outside that door. And this was built like in 1923 right outside that door, don't go out there but you can see. Here's a really nice picture. This is the original building again, right here, this is a poinsettia in the background, this is great grandma Magdalena Ecke, Paul, Sr. and Paul Jr.

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See here is where you see us today. See that little white thing right here? This is the ranch today. This is El Camino Real here. No Target or KB Toys here. We sell poinsettias to the whole world. How do you think we do that with just this much space? How do you think we do that? That is very true, that is one answer. Let's look at this right here. Very good. This is our facility in Guatemala. Where is Guatemala? It's down into the southern part of America. This is our first farm in Guatemala and we have another farm now so we have two farms in Guatemala. So that helps us in producing

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the poinsettias. Now the second reason we can use less space is because we changed how we did poinsettias. Because before it took so much space, and that wasn't very efficient. We plant them in this little wedge that you see, and so they're sitting up right now, we turn down the lights by adding shade to the greenhouses so it's not so bright, we close all of the doors and all of the vents so the wind is not blowing around and it's very still and very quiet and then we spray water on them and we spray water all the time and when you go in there, you get sprayed with water and it's very wet all the time and now you see the difference? The plant is able to live even without roots, and what it does is it forms a little scab, we call that undifferentiated cells.

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Now I'm gonna talk about some of the ways people grow poinsettias. There are growers all over the world and all over the country that grow plants and they always want to do something different than their neighbors. So we do a lot of experimenting here at the ranch so we can recommend to people all over the world how to grow their plants. So we do it all. We can't get enough of it, we love these plants. Let me show you. Look at this plant. What's the difference between this plant and this plant? Yes, this one is smaller. So you have to grow this one differently than you grow this one otherwise they'll be the same. This one is started much later than this one, this one takes a lot longer to grow, we call this one a mini start. Doesn't kind of look like a star. This is just a little tiny one, you can see how little the bottom is. This shouldn't be that way, it's actually bad for them. But you see how small that is? Do you see how much talent goes into growing a plant this small? That's a lot of work. but it's different, this is an arrangement plant. Yes, every color is a new plant. Grow a bigger plant. Those plants we started growing in February, these plants we started growing in August. Bigger plants takes more time to grow. It takes more time to grow them. More effort. Look at this. I had a gentlemen over here ask me if this is a poinsettia. Yes, it is a poinsettia. And something that we do here on the ranch that is very important to us is we make new poinsettias. This is a real poinsettia. Would you like me to explain how to make new poinsettias? Remember how I said that we take little stems and put roots on them? When you do that, whatever stem you take will be just like it's mother, always. But if you look at a poinsettia, these are the flowers and it can make seed. This right here is not a flower, this is not a petal. This is a modified leaf. This is the column right here and we put it inside right on the stigma, which is the female part and it makes the seed. When we get the

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seed, we germinate them or we grow the seed to see if we get anything new. Now when we get something we really really like, usually it's red, we try and have it make new colors.

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Now let me answer her question really quick, you take the top of the flower off. And you give it the right environment. Horticulture is the name of the science of growing plants for pleasure. That horticulture. So a grower can do that. Now I have a degree in Horticulture, Environmental Horticulture, growing plants for pleasure. - For flower, right now to look pretty and we grow 600,000 plants. That is more than half a million plants. but do you want me to tell you something interesting? That's not our main business. Remember those baby plants? We sell millions and millions and millions, I think at least, I had somebody try and tell me the number, but I think it's like 30 million of those. But we only sell half a million of these. But we still do a lot of work around here don't we? We like poinsettias. But remember these plants go to California, our baby plants, where do our baby plants go to? The baby plants are sold to the whole world. There are people in China who grow our plants. Their favorite color is red. They sell poinsettias all summer long and into the fall and even part way into the spring. They make them red. Now this brings up an interesting point. Now do you guys know when poinsettias bloom? When do they bloom?

Paul Poinsette was an ambassador of Mexico back in 1850 and he found the poinsettias. Paul Poinsette, poinsettia. He found them in Mexico. In Mexico it's very hot and

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So they use the greenhouse to make the plants believe that it's fall and they will flower. We have to make the plants believe that there are short days, so what do we have to do?

What did your mom give you for being sick? We do the same thing with our plants. We give them medicine that we call pesticide, and we make sure that we give them just the right amount. Not too much, not too little so the bugs won't eat them. And at this time, the pesticides are working very well and we can leave the doors open. Now as you guys remember from what I told you, the land all around here for miles was all poinsettia fields, this is the

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last field. Those are actually how we would do it. Now you see those have the flower on top, so we would cut them down at the bottom, sell the flowers and dig the roots up.

Watering them and we're always giving them the proper medicine, fertilizer. Not quite sure how many acres this field is.

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Evelyn Weidner

So you know when we started this nursery in 1973, it was going to be a retirement project, so we started small and it has just kept on growing every year a little bit from 1973 on up to now. We actually came down to Encinitas in 1968, moving down from orange county where we had a large greenhouse company and we moved the greenhouses down here and we eventually sold them after we were good and tired of working too hard and not making enough money and the end of the year. And then we decided.

We accidentally sort of picked a very good place to start a nursery, we bought the piece of land because it was an actually very good buy and my husband like to buy land and it's right on the freeway here so which is right on the coast, between La Cadia boulevard and La Costa boulevard. So the customers going by on the freeway can see the sign, we also get the noise of the freeway coming in here so there's always a good and a bad. Life is full of tradeoffs as they say. But the place has been a wonderful place. It's about four acres, and we have both greenhouses and retail sales area where the show part of the nursery is. Then we grow on an additional three or four acres in the neighborhood that we bought little by little as we needed the land over the years. It's good. It's a nice place to be, the weather is perfect, you can't be Encinitas in San Diego County to live in.

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Oh, you know when you're in a place like this for a long time, you start out with it being a small town, we always think about it as a small town. But now we've got La Cadia Boulevard going all the way over the hill to inland El Camino Real, there's stoplights and traffic and as we say, Orange County has caught up with us. So we've seen a lot of changes over the years, we've seen greenhouses move out of the area, move inland as land gets too

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expensive, it's the natural sort of farmer way of progression, but we've also managed to keep down here that essence of being a small town, we say funky Lucadia, funky Encinitas, we're actually Encinitas now, there's no more Lucadia but in our minds there still is. So we've kept that small town feel, even though we've grown up to be a real city and we have lots and lots of people but we've certainly seen the changes and some of them are good and some of them are not so good, but people that come down here to live by enlarge or people who come down here to shop are wonderful people who appreciate everything they have down here in this country and they love coming into the nursery and getting really good honest advice and seeing really good plants coming out of the greenhouse.

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When we started this nursery, we had had up in Orange County, a wholesale only greenhouse company where we sold to other greenhouses other nurseries, garden centers, flower shops basically all over the United States, I grew up in what we call a retail Momma and Poppa nursery, a momma and poppa nursery is a little garden center, there so small that momma and poppa and the kids, in this case it was me, that's all the help you can afford to have. And so that was my background, I've always loved working with the people, working retail, helping the customers, so we started out when my husband Bob thought up this idea, first we started out with a few greenhouses for him to grow some cuttings just to give him something to do and those of course went on wholesale. And then he came up with the idea of having a tuberous begonia field because I love tuberous begonias. And where people could dig their own tuberous begonias because they transplant easily and they have beautiful flowers and I still love them. They're my favorite flower. So we did the tuberous begonias and then the next year we added fuscia basket because I love the fuscia baskets too and pretty soon we had the wholesalers coming back in and wanting to buy the things that we were growing so we blend the business now, sometimes it's a happy blend sometimes it's a blend where we're fighting over who gets the plants, I'm the owner, I take it for retail. And it runs out about half and half. Half retail half still going out wholesale to local growers shipping some of the four inch color blooming plants, we try to keep the business a business that's not necessarily the biggest business in the world, by a long shot, but it's a business where we enjoy being in business and we're growing good plants and growing the plants we like to grow. So we're unique in the sense that we don't have to

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be out there getting bigger and bigger all the time, we've been there, done that, and I know the real satisfaction that comes from having a business where you have a personal connection with your customers and whether they be retail or wholesale.

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OH, yes, the pansies. You know our business is a unique business and as it's grown over the years adding something every year, we looked around for something we could grow in the off season cause we're not open to the public, wholesale is open all year, but I get a break. So we close the gates to the retail public after the begonia season and as we looked around for something that we might grow in that window in the middle of the winter, we chose pansies, dig your own pansies. Cause they can go into the field after the begonia season and they are wonderful southern California all over winter flower and really easy to grow. And it brought back a lot of memories for me, funny how these things go back to your childhood. When my parents moved to a little mountain community called three rivers in the San Quaxin valley. And my father had a little roadside nursery and worked and one of the first thing my father did was plant a small field of pansies, and in those days we would dig the pansies and they were called field grown pansies and put them into like a peach box it was called. And you could just barely fit a dozen in there and one of my memories after we got back to pansy growing again is that I guess the retail part starts early. Because my parents would let me dig some of the ones that were obviously seconds and I would take the pansies to school, and I was in the second grade and my friends and I, we had our little sales booth set up there up on one of the playgrounds and I would sell the pansies to my friends who would go home to their parents and take an order and I got to keep the money I guess, It wasn't very much money. But I remember even then telling them how to grow their pansies and so on and so going back to dig your own pansies in the winter season is a real memory trip for me, going back, I even have a picture of myself as a second or third grader standing there with my box of pansies in my hand, I was a scrawny little ugly blonde rat of a kid but I sure did love those pansies and I remember waiting for that very first flower to open up and I still do that today, I can't wait for that pansy season to start.

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...time today looking into the sun, and I'm standing there my blonde hair and my pansies and it's obviously winter because I had a sweater on or something and I was blonde little skinny brat.

I was talking about how we like to have a business that's comfortable that we have a connection with our customers. It's also been a family business, going way back we believe very strongly for kids to do a little work, it doesn't hurt them a bit, and when we had our greenhouses in La Habra, our children all started to work, when they reached first grade, five or six, in the summer, it wasn't very hard, it was every other morning from 7 to 12, they sometimes thought they were working terribly hard but they got paid for it, I think they got paid \$.50 an hour, maybe it was \$.25, in which they were required to save half. When I grew up in the business of my parents, I obviously worked, it wasn't really work, it was pleasure. And we talk about memories, I remember going out ? and somebody pulled up in their car and I would go out there and do my best to sell them something and we had candy there and orange juice that we squeezed ourselves. In depression days, you would do anything possible to get a few dollars in. and businesses are still the same way. You work hard to give your customers what they need and to bring in the money so you can pay your employees and have a little bit left over for you at the end of the season. I've got my daughter working with me, and of course me and my husband worked together for a long time and it's a real pleasure to see how well a family can work together and even my grower and our wholesale sales manager, we feel like family. There's something special about being able to work together as a family, and get along, sit down in the office and argue about who's right and what we're gonna grow, and sometimes I win and sometimes I don't win, don't often win, but I'll fight for my point and everybody else fights for their points and we come to a consensus, this is not a business that has somebody at the top saying you will do this and so. We run this business and figure out what's going to work best. And family businesses are wonderful especially if they spend more than one generation and I'm proud of my family, all the family, even the ones that aren't in the business.

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We have four children in our family and only one of them is in the nursery business right now, all though I could call any of them if they're down here or around here on days that we're really busy and they'll come in. My oldest John lives in San Francisco and he's a cabinet maker, and then I have

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a daughter Jan, she comes along next, Jan's a nurse she's our nurse family therapist and she comes in and helps here and we're extremely proud of her and then Mary, who works in the business with me and then I have a son, Bill who lives up in Montana and loves horses and stuff they do up in Montana. Mary came into the business because, she loved it, all the kids loved plants, but she wanted there to be a Weidner after Bob was gone and after I'm gone someday. And so we're in this for the long haul. We just built these new greenhouses at Recidian and that shows a commitment that we're going to stay here as long as we still have good loyal customers that come down and buy from us which I think we'll keep on having. Mary just decided that she wanted to come into the business and she's been working there and when you work in it as a child and you grow up in it, you absorb a great deal of knowledge and this is the kind of business where you never stop learning. Every crop is a new crop and there's always a challenge and there's always a success so we've got the four kids in one of the business which is just about right.

I don't know whether there will be a third generation or not, you know kids today, my grandson that lives down here, my 21 year old grandson, he's so thoroughly into computers, I don't see him coming into the business, I've got some grandchildren up in San Francisco. They come down and work in the summer some of the time. Who knows, the strain of loving plants does run down the family and we're just open to what comes along. And what you want for all you children and all your grandchildren is they do something that's satisfying for them. It would be lovely if we had a third generation that comes along, but who knows, we'll see.

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The greenhouse growers, people in the nursery business like I am, were really just glorified farmers. We'd grow a prettier crop, but we are farmers in that same sense that a farmer who grows cotton or tomatoes or any other agricultural crop does. Generally farmers have settled outside of town, they buy the land where it's cheap and they farm it whether it's a truck farmer or a greenhouse company or growing wheat, and then the city gradually moves out and expands. The normal progression is that mom and pop grow older and they're ready to retire and sometimes, too many times, the business has been hard and the kids go on to be lawyers or doctors or computer specialists and they're not interested in going into the business and so the land gets sold. Or in the case where we are down here in the southern California San

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Diego area, as the neighbors get closer, we're lucky here, we have good neighbors, and they seem to understand us and love us, but some neighbors, sometimes it's difficult for the average person homeowner to realize that there's a big process to growing plants, and that process is not always beautiful, we do have to do a certain amount of spraying, the trucks come in and out so neighbors in houses and nurseries don't always make real comfortable companions. What you see in any area like this, particularly in Encinitas, you see growers as the land prices go up and as the neighbors move in closer, the temptation and the pressure is there to sell that piece of land and either move inland to still be a grower, I don't know where they're going to move once the inland is filled, or just sell the land and retire, lots of growers down in palm springs, from all over the United States, that are happily spending their winters down in Palm Springs playing golf. I guess because our land is already paid for, I don't have quite that sense of pressure to sell, and on top of that, because we're a blend of retail and wholesale, I have a retail customer base that is very satisfying and the particular things we grow need to grow on the coast, they don't grow very well inland. So we're pretty comfortable sitting here but you do see that natural progression that growers face, and like everybody else, you need to make a profit or at least something decent at the end of the year, and if you're not making that and somebody comes along and makes and offer you X amount of money for your land, it makes sense to sell your land and move someplace else and you see that happening, it's an inevitable progression, as much as we'd like to see it change or stop it, you can't stop it any more than you can stop progress.

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It's one of those things, you know I'll sit in on city meetings they say we want to keep the growers here and I'll give the nice, correct answer, but the truth of it is that most of the growers will move inland. Robert Hall, the big place down in Santa Fe, the city bought that piece of land recently, there's going to be parks, and skateboards and soccer fields and god knows what else and they already negotiating for some land inland. And there going to have problems inland, they may not have neighbors quite as close, but if you go to Valley Center, and those people that bought their acre or acre and a half, they may not be any happier about having that greenhouse company with all that glass there, off the record, obviously, places like Carp? Up there near Santa Barbara, there's been a lot of racist action in the sense that most of the employees in the greenhouse are Hispanic. And when you get a high

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concentration of greenhouse growers in one area, people tend to get uncomfortable with the total amount of Hispanic workers that are coming in and they've raised it in a lot of different ways and if you look at the bottom line – It has not been an issue here at Encinitas because we don't have our greenhouses concentrated close together like if you go up to Carpinteria, you get a lot of the Dutch growers –

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Greenhouse growers like to flock together, as a people we're always more comfortable with somebody that we know, somebody and the reason we came down here of course was because Paul Ecke, Senior and Junior were talking to my husband and we were ready to move and we were looking at either the Santa Barbara area or coming down here and they said come down here Bob. The climate is perfect, we get lots of hours of sunshine, the water is good, and we'll help you find the right place and they did and that day we had a lot growers, we had carnation growers in greenhouses and we had rose growers and lots of cut flower growers and lots of weed growers and of course the Ecke ranch with the poinsettia ranch that's still there. I don't know exactly the figure but , but I know there's a lot of growers in this area. Little by little those growers have retired or moved on or whatever so we don't have that big concentration, we still get together, the San Diego Flowers Growers Association, we'll do a special meeting once a year where everybody comes down from LA and all over the place and it's kind of like a family reunion. It's changed the general feeling but not that much to me, I don't see all the growers around like we used to have but I think the thing that brought growers here is still here, lots of hours of sunshine, good mild climate, good water, close to transportation. So even though we've seen growers leave and move and go inland. Southern California distance is not that big a deal so we still feel like they're close by. There's still a lot of growers around, maybe not as many as before, but there is still a lot of us.

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Has all this change of growers moving changed the feeling of Encinitas, have we become more of a bedroom community. Yes, certainly it has, as you get large groups of houses coming in and they don't know the past particularly and lots of times they don't care, they're here and they don't want it to change any more. So yes it's undeniable that it's changed the feeling somewhat. You know it's hard for me to say. I still go, yesterday

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Mary and I were out running a couple of errands and I walked into Office Depot, big chain, behind me walked in Bill Barry, the superintendent of school's who just retired walked into another store and I walked into the post office and somebody recognized me and said here let me help you, so we still keep connections and it still seems small townish to me, even though most of the people I don't know and they don't know me but it's a real thrill walking into someplace and say are you closed now or are you open and we're coming out next week. I hope we never lose that feeling, can't keep it all and certainly has changed, the feeling, we are more of a bedroom community. But I think a lot of people are working really hard to hang onto that feeling of closeness and that feeling of community which is why even though we are poor, we are all Encinitans, we still are Lucadia and Olivihein, and Encinitas, and Carter. And I think we perhaps cling more closely now that the post office box says Encinitas, to our identity as separate little communities.

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Over here at specimen house, Bill can't do anything without having a fight. He goes in full boar, ahhh, my way of doing business and living and working has always been exactly the opposite. When the city bought some of my land right here on Lucadia Blvd., right across the street. I sat down with Lloyd Holt, the guy I was negotiating with, and we sat down together and said how can we work this out? To be fair to everybody, it's my city too and I wanted it to be nice, I didn't have to sell, they made an agreement with me that as long as I had the greenhouses there, they would not take my land. So even though they were going to take a little bit of it, they didn't have a right to take part of it. So as we sat down and talked I wanted a nice Lucadia Blvd. Too, it's my town. And it's too my advantage to sit down and work together, I don't think you ever ever gain anything by fighting. Once in a while you're forced into a corner and you have to stick up for your rights. One time years ago a neighbor lady, actually it wasn't, well it started out with a disgruntled nursery down in San Diego that felt that there shouldn't be any retail salesman unless it was all commercial, he was all commercial and most of us up here were into agriculture and sold what we grew. So he brought it as a complaint - and her kids now, her daughter now who lives here, she's just died, we're good friends, but anyhow, our business was threatened that they might actually say we couldn't be here anymore so I decided that I needed to pull out all my guns that I could. And so I had down there at retail, my little sign and my clipboard and my pieces of paper

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and the addresses asking the customers to write to the city counsel here and plead my case basically, showing how much support I had within the larger Southern California community. We got, I don't know what happened to those letters, I wish I could find them, we got a stack of letters and I told them not to be hostile, and some of them were. They said if you dare shut down Weidners and my kids have been coming here since they were little and how can you think about this? And so on. But most of them wrote very nice letters saying how much they enjoyed coming down here and of course it was resolved very nicely and generally speaking I get along fine with the city and they get along fine with me but it was an interesting experience to see how the customers came to our rescue. But they very happily sat down to write that letter. And sent it down to make sure they city knew that they valued us as a place to come.