

Printed for Mark Freeman

Interview with the Weidners

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Evelyn Weidner

...And then I bought a flower off of the Sundays of the straw flower and gave a flower to each of the city council people, whom I know anyhow. And so instead of just doing my dry bit I got up and talked about where new plants come from. And how this one's coming from Israel, this one's coming from Japan, this one's coming from Australia, this one's coming from Germany. The royalties on those plants go to those countries and we need, in the United States this is true, we need to be up to snuff and we need to be doing our own research and we need to be bringing out our own new varieties and keeping that money here, I was totally off base when I said scientifically but it was funny anyhow about how they'll make new plants, you know how they can do, like take two very closely related incestuous plants and they take the genetic stuff from each one, and my explanation is they put them in the center? Smoosh them all together and eventually you get a plant. I was not very scientific but at least I got a good laugh. Okay, back to your question.

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Oh my god, yes, oh absolutely, there is just no doubt, that's where it's going to be. That's where it is already. That's where it is already. The future of new plant material, new foods for people to eat. The whole thing. I think that in the next 25-50 years, biotechnology is going to change our lives, absolutely. I mean you see with my limited amount of knowledge, which is basically never took a science course in my life basically, but when I see what they can do by going to South America or wherever a plant is native, and taking every single species they can find, many of them are so ugly you wouldn't put them in your garden but they will have a genetic trait and they can do embryo rescue and go in there and take that genetic material and smoosh it together, and come up with new colors, you know the blue rose, they know the genes that make the flowers blue, they know how to give you a dark blue flower or a light blue flower on a PH. They can do such amazing things and we're just beginning and they'll do the food crops first,

obviously that's where the money is and there will be problems and we'll have to solve a lot of problems, but you never get progress without problems. I got a book at home that talks about plants and how they got to America and their history and when coffee came from Arabia and that area originally, Africa -

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There's always a group, what do they call it, ? williams that say this is bad we can't go there, let's stay with the old stuff. And we need to keep the old gene pool, absolutely, and they've got huge banks of genetic material plants they're trying to save because that's useful, to do some new stuff, but it's like plastic or anything else, you wouldn't live without it, you wouldn't live without your computer, you wouldn't live without that technology that makes that camera go. And I can remember when I was a kid, we didn't have TV, we didn't have plastic in those days, I don't know what they made things out of, plastic came along fairly soon, what did they use to call plastic years ago? They had a different name for it. -

And so he does these little quizzes because he reads a lot, if you take a young person who doesn't read and doesn't read history and doesn't read, you're right, they don't have a clue who Winston Churchill is or when WWII or - you know right now in the business because my husband's been gone for about a number of years, 10 or 12 years, I get to take the star of billing, but he was really the plant expert. And even though I didn't have the privilege of taking that kind of education, he got a very thorough education in growing back at the New York Botanical Gardens where they really had to learn and they learned all these species and they knew what they were doing. I learned mine more by osmosis as we go along and he had, my husband Bob really was an amazing person, he really was a plantsman, and he could, he knew so much. We would go in the tropics and I would see some beautiful plant down there and I would say, oh Bob, look at that, why aren't we growing that? And he'd say, Evelyn, the humidity is not high enough where we live, it's too dry, you can't grow that, or it's too cold, or something and he always knew why we could or couldn't grow it or if something had the potential to grow, he would know that too and we would bring it back, and one of the things I remember was when we first had the greenhouses here and we were just growing plant material at wholesale and he took a trip to Germany with a friend and he left me in charge of the nursery, for just two weeks, not very long and to

me I thought everything was going along just fine, it looked good to my eyes. And he came back and of course the first thing you do when you come back from a trip, you walk over and go through the different greenhouses. And we opened the diffenbachia house, that's a house plant and many of you know it and he took a look at the diffenbachias and the roof practically came off and he says, Oh my god, look at those diffenbachias! And I said they look okay to me, and he said, can't you see the ? they're terribly infested with spider mites! And he turned over a leaf and of course I could see the spider mite damage on the back where it had at least the plant, I might recognize it today, but not back then. My daughter Mary, she's our plant, she can spot a insect or an infestation a mile away, she's got Bob in her there, she'll just zones in on it. but I still remember to that day he opened the greenhouse and just took one look and he could see the color of those diffenbachias was not what they should be and he knew what was wrong, and unfortunately for me as a wife, he was almost always right.

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There, everybody wants to have a perfect plant. Nobody wants to bring white flies into their garden, when you go to the store, unless you are into the route who want to eat food, organic foods, we like to see beautiful apples and oranges that don't have blemishes on them, we don't want to see worms in the pears and we don't want to see rotten strawberries. All of that comes with a price. Nature really doesn't care. Nature is just as happy with the caterpillar worms that munch on your plants that you just bought as she is with the beautiful bloom. The butterflies have their place and butterflies kill caterpillars and the caterpillars kill plants. The snails and the slugs deserve to live and the gophers and all of those things as far as mother nature is concerned. We as homeowners would like to have our gardens look good. That puts a pressure on we as growers to provide the customer with a plant that's clean and not bringing home any more pests than you have in your garden. We don't like to have to pay for somebody's insects, it is a challenge today. We do and most growers do what they call a spray program, and IPM, where basically what you try to do is use the least toxic method of killing your insects first and controlling them. we sell here at the nursery a lot of beneficial insects to people and they work quite well in the garden, if you'll follow the rules, it's not necessarily easier, or less expensive than going out with a sprayer, but if you'll follow the rules and do it right, you'll have just as good a result. It doesn't always work as

easily in a greenhouse environment because we don't have a beneficial insect that works on every single pest that happens to cross the border. Unfortunately, some of the pests we have, some of the insects and the mites and the fungi are tougher than some of the beneficial and we see that today on Eucalyptus that are dying that they're just bringing in that beneficial loss. Most of our wasps not wasps to sting people, there little minute things that you'd never see, but it seems we are such a mobile society today and as fast as we find a remedy for one particular pest, using a broad term, another one has come in from some place in one of the far corners of the earth, if I'm preaching still on this bit of tape, it's really important that people understand why the agricultural inspector has those rules and why you shouldn't smuggle that cutting in that looks okay to you. you might be bringing in next year's big pest and there's number or them that have a huge -

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We have used in the past a number of pesticides that have too long a life, and so we are trying and the chemical industry is working hard all the time to come out with ways to control the insects that destroy the crops and still be environmentally friendly. And part of what biotechnology is going to do is to have those plants that have some resistance in them, to somebody's dreadful pests that are so economically damaging. So it's an area that has lots of problems we certainly have to keep lots and lots of records, we don't dump any spray materials, any pesticide, no pesticide goes into the ground, it gets dumped, you spray it all out, you account for it to the very last ounce, so the state of California knows exactly how much is used of what and what goes on and that's good, it's a lot of work, but that's good. We need to be careful of our soil and our plants and at the same time we need to do our best to win the battle, you'll never win the battle against the ants. They are absolutely the - the lion is not the king of the jungle, the ant is and it's the king of southern California and some things will never be an endangered species and the ants are certainly one of them.

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We've never had a problem with them so I can't really comment on that. One of the things that, they do come in and they do inspections, they come in you know the glassy wing sharp shooter that is threatening the whole entire wine grape industry, they're trying so hard to control that and contain

it until they get some wing sharp shooters here. They've never found one, but they still come and inspect, but I can remember many in the past, and maybe there are some today that try to hide things from the agriculture inspector or consider them the enemy, again my wise husband Bob used to say, that man, that inspector guy that comes in. He's our friend, he's helping us find some of the problems that we may not even see, so if he finds a pest, or infestation or something, you should say thank you because that infestation is going to be damaging your plants whether you discover it or not. It never does any good to try and hide something like that. So we have a very good relationship with all of the enforcement agencies, we follow all the rules, absolutely to the letter, if we make a mistake, it's an absolute inadvertent one. We don't smuggle in any stuff, you don't find us out there spraying in the middle of the night, tempting as it might be.

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Mark Freeman

What type of things have they cited you for?

Weidner

I don't think they've ever cited us for anything. Off the record there was a case - and our local assembly woman finally put an end to it. and there are some government people that will get carried away and are petty beaurocrats. We used to pay through a payroll service. First of all, we used to do it ourselves, and then the workers always got paid on Friday. The traditional Friday paycheck once a week. Then we ended up going to a payroll service and they needed to have, in order to pay, they needed the hours sometime on Wednesday or Thursday, whenever it was. And we adjusted that alright and would call in the hours on Thursday morning and just assumed -

We bought it and he was going to take it all away to court and all this sort of stuff and I thought, that's enough and I called Sunny Mojenet our assembly woman and I said you know they're really harassing us and we hadn't done anything wrong, we paid overtime every time somebody's worked more than once in a while, the last time the guy wandered in again, really nice young man lives nearby and he was going by or came in the nursery and thought he'd do a check but they're very nice, and he talked to

Mary and said we need to check your records and we do our best. That's another tricky law, we're not allowed to ask if they're legal or not you have to take the documentation they give you. The driver's license and a green card, two forms, the ID, unless that green card is so blatantly false that you can tell. You know they paste it on. And so we went through, he was going to come back in a week and we had the records all ready for him and we had also let the word out to our employees that they were checking. So we had two employees who voluntarily quit before he came back and they obviously had falsified documents and we'll get our share. It's pretty hard, they can buy a good set of Ids from Tijuana and we do our best to make sure they are legal and I think at the moment I think everybody we have here is legal. Once in a while the thing will come back from the social security check, the social security number, then the employee would come in with a new social security number, well that works for a year until they catch up with it. So it's a big game that's played. But he was certainly very nice and very friendly.

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The guy after he got through checking things. And he said I supposed you have a Coke machine over there or something like that -

Yes, absolutely. The city, we are, every city that fronts on the ocean is under some type of directive to keep the water that goes into the ocean clean. As clean as possible. That includes the runoff from homes, and your lawn and the things you throw out on the sidewalk. But it also involves greenhouses. The city of Encinitas was particularly was sued by the baywatchers or whatever the organization is and so we are in a continuing process, the city and everybody that's in here, including the growers to clean up the water and make sure it doesn't go into the ocean. My head grower happens to be from Germany, Oliver, and they are very environmentally conscious over there, much more so than, we are usually about five years behind Europe on this. Oliver has been very proactive in this situation. We have applied for and gotten a grant and hope to get another one that has allowed us to cut the run off substantially, we're looking to get down to almost zero runoff. And at one of the other ranches we call New Ranch, they aren't really ranches, but we call them ranches, an acre is not a ranch, but that's just the name we use. We have put in a new spitter system, the spitter is the little thing that goes into the plant that brings the water down, it comes down this little tube and it drips into the

plant or sprays into the plant surface and we call them spitters. We changed our time clocks so we water in short bursts of water rather than a longer burst that lets the water all run through. We've changed our spitters into different types of spitters and we're still experimenting with the different ones, if I had the one from up above, you could see that it looks different from the little one I'm holding in my hand. And we're down at what we call New Ranch to a very small amount of runoff a day, I think it's running around five hundred gallons that we measure see how much there is. We now have a nice agreement with the people Convalescent Christian Science home that's next door, that we're gonna take the remainder of that extra water and it will be used to irrigate their plant material on the perimeter, so then we'll be down to nothing. And we're looking to do the same here at this ranch which may be a little more difficult, all these things cost money and they cost a lot of money, they cost money to change over time clock systems and new spitters and new watering systems. The pumps, Oliver just had the figures that he's applying for, the next phase of the grant and we thank the government when they do something good like this. The work and the pumps that will go into allowing us to use that last bit of runoff water, when you tally it up it will probably come close to ten thousand dollars. We don't make that kind of profit in this business to easily do that so we're working every way we can and doing the work to apply for a grant that will allow us to do our share of not having, well there's not so much of having pesticides in the water, that's not really an issue today, it's more that the fertilizer that we all use goes into the bays and changes the nitrogen and phosphorus content and one of the reasons the fertilizer mix that we use here at Weidners is very low in that middle number, the phosphorus. Is that here in southern California we don't need that high number, there some of our being wasted in the soil or running into the environment and going down and bringing too much phosphorus into the runoff water so we're very conscious of that here, not an easy problem to solve. But little by little we are working to the point where there will be little or no runoff, and every single person living on the coast will face that as a homeowner also and as a city it's going to be necessary to treat that water and see that we're protecting our oceans. And that's important too, all of those little estuaries and places where the water goes, that's where all of our baby fish and baby crustaceans and our ecosystem comes from. And when you go over to Greece or cruise around there -

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At the time, but if you look down at the next generation that's coming along, we have to do that. You'd have to ask Oliver that. It's a government agency to help agriculture do some of these things. And I don't know the name of it. I know they've been very nice and cooperative since we're hardly, you know one of those skills I don't have is filling out those forms and what do they need to know here and what do they want to know? So the man that Oliver worked with is very nice and they'll send something in and he'll say that was not the correct way to answer that and they certainly help.

Yeah, we run, employees here, because we're not a very efficient operation having our operation spread out over three or four growing areas, really keep year around 15-18 employees, that includes ourselves and management or most of us anyhow. You don't get anybody for minimum wage anymore. So it certainly isn't the highest paid type of work and the employees are primarily Hispanic. One of the things that I, everybody has their own little hobby horse they're on, and one of mine is that I feel very strongly that all of our Hispanic people should learn how to speak English. They're working here, they're living here and this is the language of this country and for their own future they need to learn. Not every grower shares that feeling. We encourage our people to learn English, not all of them do, many of them never do and we of course end up speaking Spanish also. There's an advantage to having a German grower, cause his Spanish is very poor so they are encouraged to learn English and when they're in contact with the retail public, they learn English and it pleases me when they can. It's a difficult situation because when a Hispanic employees becomes proficient in English, they are then able to go on and get a better job. Perhaps as a mechanic or something else, and the side of me that says I love these people and I want them to get ahead, that's just hey go for it, not every grower feels the same. I talked to somebody one day about the importance of encouraging their people to learn English, and the answer was as soon as they learn English they're gonna move on and I'll have to find a different employee. I don't agree, I think we're all here together and they are wonderful workers, wonderful, hard workers. They're smart. There's nothing wrong with their intelligence, and we do encourage them to learn English and we like to keep them and we couldn't run this place without them. They're the backbone. Fasio has been here the longest and he doesn't like to be called the bosses, but he is, he runs the crew, they know who's the boss. And one year Oliver, whoever the grower was was gone so my daughter Mary was temporarily laying down the jobs that

should be done, how many plants need to be potted, something I would have hard time doing, figuring out how long. So she would go up to Bony and she'd say today let's plant this and she didn't have it quite right. It's not the Hispanic way to look at the boss and say you're wrong. They would never be so impolite as to say that. Bony, in his own wonderful way would say, si maria, but then nobody would move. And then he'd ask the question again, so you said you wanted how many plants? And Mary would give an answer and if it still wasn't the right answer he would say yes, nobody did anything and he'd ask her again, and she'd say maybe we should put three in a pot, oh si maria. So he guided her along the way and it would have been far easier for him to say, no Mary, we need to put three plants in this pot on this crop but that's not the Hispanic way but he got to where he wanted her to go in the long run.

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Oh, that's kind of interesting. You know when you run a family business, who's boss what's the chain of command, who does what. One of the nice things about our business is it's small enough that we all do everything. That's one of the things I like the best. When we had the big greenhouses in La Habra, I didn't I don't like to do office work and I didn't feel comfortable going out and making cuttings, and then when we moved down here and bought this little business when you started out with two employees, I could do anything, and it's still that way. Nobody feels that there is any particular job that is beneath them, although sometimes when I'm down on my knees pulling weeds, Mary will say maybe you could find a better use for your time. But we have come to sort of some natural divisions as I have put Mary up to being in charge more of the time, some things you find somebody's better at than you are. I'm good at dealing with the public, I like to be out there in the public eye, so I'll do the talks and I'll do the interviews and so on. Mary is much better than I am at figures and doing daily totals and she's got a much keener sense of scheduling so she'll run the retail scheduling of the people that work there and that takes a lot of work off of my shoulders. We don't have any really clear lines, she is the boss in that sense and once in a while she'll let me know if I come in and step on her territory. But most of the time we just divide up who feels like doing something who's going to be the better one, and sometimes there's a bit of pushing and shoving where we're trying to push the job off on the other one. It's pretty easy, it's a small enough business that the whole sales are definitely in Kalem's hands and I won't

make a wholesale sale or quote a price in there or go out on a limb if it's something I don't know, I'll refer them to Kalem. Same thing when it's a growing question, there was a question the other day and Mary and I agreed on it but she said you'd better run that by both Kalem and Oliver first. It's one of the areas where she's perhaps a little bit better than I am I tend to be a little more impulsive and sometimes step in and say something to an employee or to somebody where I should have gone to the proper chain of command so she'll come along and gently or not so gently remind me that should come down through Oliver first and not through me that Oliver may have had something else he wanted those employees to do and they'll fill his obligation. If the big Patrona comes and says, control everybody else into a ?. Most of the time I try but once in a while I get impulsive and get out there and step where I shouldn't step. But I let Mary take over more and more of the responsibility She does the ordering, she does basically anything I can do. and so we work pretty well together. One of these days as I take it more easily, I may come in less. Customers and friends, mostly friends, often say how come you don't retire, when are you going to retire? And I have finally figured out the best ideal answer to that whole question and here it is. Why should I retire? I have customers who think I am wonderful, they think I walk right next to God, they take my advice, they love me and they pay me money for all of this. I get to work outside with people I like doing something I enjoy doing and what could be better than that? There is no reason to retire when you're doing what you love best right now.

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Especially people out of the business. When are you going to retire? When are you going to take it easy? And because they see how much I work and they don't realize that most of this work is not work. and it's true. The customers think I'm right next to God. And I get all these notes everyday, oh, your so wonderful, thank you for being here, thank you for giving me this advice. If I were retired, I'd have to live in the real world.

Women and men in agriculture and horticulture, it is true in the past particularly, almost all greenhouses and nurseries were run by men, that's the way the social order was, and it is still that way by in large, you see a tremendous number, more women coming into the business than men, when you look at the graduates coming out of school and so on. Most of the gardeners, the home gardening decisions are made by women also. I don't

know, yes, I think it makes us a little more sensitive to what the home gardener might like to do. I certainly have an advantage when I write my web pages where I can sit down and I can write in a free or more easier style than perhaps a man quote unquote man might do where they tend to still expect men to fill a certain role. And we're more comfortable with a woman filling a different role. Certainly when my husband died, when Bob died, an awful lot of people thought I wouldn't be able to carry on this business, and they expected the Weidners to close or sell or whatever. And I guess there's something in me that's stubborn enough and that I've been in the business all these years and had absorbed a few things that said that wasn't going to happen. And I strongly believe that anything a man can learn to do a woman can learn to do. and vice versa. I think there are strengths and weaknesses in both men and women, so I think there are some natural abilities that the males have and the females have. But as far as the nursery business, the garden center business, dealing with the public, there's probably a little bit of advantage being a woman, at least I know how it feels to get out there and dig weeds and so on and I know sort of instinctively what a woman likes to see in the garden. But other than that, nowadays I am treated in the nursery business and in rotary and the other way, most of the time I am treated just like everybody else.

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Boy that's a difficult, how big are we? That's like saying are you rich? As far as are you rich, anybody who has more money than you have, you consider them rich. And yourself not rich. So it's the same in this kind of business, there are huge greenhouse businesses that have hundreds of thousands of square feet of growing space that are in most of the wholesale business. there are lots of garden centers that are operating and buying in the plant material they sell and are operating on less than an acre and maybe just a quarter of an acre. I think of ourselves as being fairly small because I compare myself to some of the big companies who are huge and sometimes I look at those big companies and I think geez I'd like to be there. And then I think ooh, do I really want that big payroll every two weeks to come along. Do I want those headaches that go along with that. Then I think, no, I guess I'm fine just like I am. So I would say we're probably medium, it's a little hard to compare because we're both wholesale and retail, we grow on a total of about 7 acres, depends on who's figuring it. one of the things I'm not good at is figures, so if you ask me how many thousands of square feet we grow on here or how many plants we grow, I honestly could

not give you an answer. And I've finally gotten to the point I just look at people and say, I don't do numbers. Other people do numbers, Oliver could tell you how many poinsettias we grow or how many pansies, I know how many pansies we grow because that's something I am very interested in so we planted a little over 20,000 and they sold out in almost totally a week in a half. But that's because that's a number that relates directly to me. If you ask me how many square feet of greenhouse we have, I don't know. Because I'm just not really good at that. Sorry. But we do, I would call it, a medium to smaller size if you think of it as wholesale and retail market.

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Yeah, one little thing. If I were going to give a message to -

As I look at our business today and having the past years, I look at how it has changed, we were talking about how the business changed, one thing has changed dramatically and that's what we call the big box retailers, the Home Depots, the Costcos, the Walmarts and I see that even though we'll sell some of those and we certainly may go there and buy because there is no competition left. I see a real threat in the to the smaller garden center, the independent garden center we call it. and I see the threat in two ways. We all like to buy things cheap. And I am no exception. If you're going only to the big boxes you are certainly getting your plant material cheap. You're not always getting quality depending on how long the plant has been in the store. But you are threatening the diversity. It's really important to us to keep diversity of the species and we're all ecologically in tune and so on, let's not tear down the amazon and all that stuff. We need to think about diversity in the plant business too. And if we lose the smaller independent garden center, we will lose a tremendous amount of diversity and plant material. We'll lose a huge amount of knowledge, where the big commercial big box company is not going to put the money in the budget to have somebody stand there and answer your questions. That's not bottom line. And it is a real temptation to assume that because the price is cheaper it is better off to go to a big company and get your plants there. You need to patronize your smallest garden center, especially in the middle of the summer, or when business is bad, that's when you need to go out and buy some stuff because that's when they're depressed and when they're gonna do enough business to stay in business. and if we don't and this goes across the board for all kinds of businesses, if we don't keep our business local and don't patronize our local independent businesses, we're going to lose them.

And then we won't have that diversity of choice. Because you can be very sure that the big companies could care less whether they carry three kinds of a plant or one. If they can sell it cheaper and buy it cheaper, they're gonna do it. and that's they're privilege and they're right and that's the way we do business in America. But the way we as a consumer and you as a person out there can help keep that independent, is to go to that independent garden center and buy your plants there. And if you're thinking of a career or looking at the nursery business as a career, there is no more wonderful business to be in. The growing business is one of the few businesses that I know about that you can go anywhere in the world, absolutely anywhere in the world, walk into another business like this, introduce yourself as being a grower from southern California or Timbuktu or Germany and you will be welcomed in as a fellow grower, treated respectfully, brought through the greenhouses and have an instant friend. And there is tremendous career possibilities that may not bring you a thousand dollars a week, but it will sure make you happy.

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Mary Weidner

We're Weidners garden, we're located in North San Diego County in a city called Encinitas, right alongside I5, we are seasonal. March 1st through Labor day and then November 1st through December 22nd. I do have, when we were kids, we owned a large nursery that just did rooted cuttings and shipped them all over the US, and of course we, as children were supposed to work in the greenhouses, we were expected to, every summer and we did that three days a week from 7:30 to 12:00 and we thought that was just awful that we would have to get up that early. And we would have to clock in and we got paid and if we clocked in late we were docked on our pay. We did various things, we were told all the workers were told that we were under their supervision so if we messed up they could take action, suitable action. So I could remember in the houses that they did cuttings, they used mist, and the mist comes on in timers and whenever the mist comes on , we'd run out and you're not supposed to do that, you're supposed to just stay there. One time when we did that, we got caught and we had to work an extra hour to make up for that. And if you wanted to go to the bathrooms that were at the back of the nursery, you would walk very slowly very slowly so you could stretch it out as long as you could. And of course we got nailed on that one because when you're kids you think you're

fooling everyone, but you're not. And then one time one of the big supervisors, I didn't realize he was standing behind me, I was at a trailer that had soil in it, that's how we potted, we just brought down one side of the trailer and I was potting I'm sure very slowly and then I realized that he was behind me so I started to go a little bit faster and he had a stopwatch and he said, oh good, you can do x number per hour. That's what I'll expect from you, and I thought, oh shoot, I should have gone slowly, and then I wouldn't have that expectation.

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The greenhouse was our second home and we used to go over there to play of course with permission, in those days they were very strict. We were playing with some of the other kids of the employees and we got into an area where they had bait for mice and rats and things because they loved to be in the greenhouse where it was warm, and we didn't realize what it was. It looked kind of like oatmeal and they caught us up there and I think they were more scared than anything and I think it really stuck in our minds and I have never forgotten that and to this day I remember what that bait looks like. And I think even now it looks the same but they died it a bright blue probably because of kids like me. And then we would come down, we'd play with the boxes, we were those kinds of kids that either read or played or swam, we didn't really have a lot of toys, we preferred to be outdoors. We had a long dirt path that would go down to the street and then we'd cross the street to the green house. We had orange trees, we lived in a orange grove, so it was all around us. I think we had a fairly lucky childhood. Nobody got terribly sick, nothing terrible happened. We had very loving parents. My dad was much older than my mother. Much older. And of course, as children, we didn't realize that, that never occurred to us, but looking back on it now, I can see how that shaped what we did what we were allowed to do . and I liked that, we were very different. He was also from the east coast, my mother was born in California, so he had a different ideas, he was much stricter and proper and my mother was more casual and informal.

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One of the advantages of having a father from the east was that he brought with him a lot of tastes that people here had not experienced at that time. We had artichokes and cracked crab and crab cakes and god knows what

else, I can't remember, they were things highly unusual - baseball or football with us. We really didn't care about that - he wanted to pack our lives as full as he could.

As far as going into the business with the family, I'm not sure that I ever really thought about it actively. There were so many things just expected for us, I always expected that I would help in the business doing whatever was needed. It was a very large company at that time, and so there was no sense of taking it over or helping as I got older. It was being run just fine without me and my father retired in 1968 and sold the nursery and quickly became bored, bought the piece of property we have now, and started the operation we currently have. It was a much smaller operation and my father liked that because what he really like was dealing with the plants and not with the book work and I can understand that. So I would come over and I would help him make cuttings and stick them in the soil and that was really fun, I felt really close to my dad at that point, before he was a little more of an authoritative father figure, the head of the company and wouldn't take anything from us. We were just like everybody else. I can remember, going back to the other nursery, having parties there, in the shipping shed and if it was for us -

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I worked for a big department store and became a sales rep and I quickly learned that I didn't want to do sales. I'm very good at retail sales, but wholesale sales I'm didn't like at all. And that was a good thing to learn. so I said when I came back to the nursery I said you know that's really not my strong suit so have somebody else do that. But it also gave me an outside prospective on business in the nursery business and I'm sure in a lot of businesses, you tend to be a little insular, you don't realize how much your business practices relate to other businesses so many things are the same you just have to apply it. I did my experience working in the department stores and that whole industry, going to gift shows and things, really opened my eyes allowed me to come back with some positive things for the family.

I was closest to my father. We were very much alike, very serious and I think that's why working with my mother, we work well together, and it's so much fun. My mother is very fun, entertaining, very creative, disorganized, would rather have fun than write a report or put paperwork

together. And I am the type who likes to stay in the background, make things organized, and correct papers and so she is also not the kind of person who takes offense easily. Since I am a very strong person, very serious, I tend to come out with some very strong statements and she understands and doesn't take it personally and she just thinks, oh, that's a good idea. And that helps me because it also teaches me these sort of boundaries, I can watch my mother and see how she handles things and think to myself, that's a great way to handle that. Her creativity in the nursery is unbelievable, we all say that if she had been a young person at this time, she would probably would have gone on to be a fabulous ad executive or in some sort of publicity PR, because she just stream out of her head, one after the other, and we have to contain her and say okay out of those six ideas, which one are we gonna pick. She would like to do three or four and we have to say no we can only do one. She's a frustrated PR person. We all think these are all great ideas. We can't implement them, so one thing that kind of came up was a behind the scenes flower tour that they do to let people see all the greenhouse businesses here in Encinitas. And she was instrumental in putting that together. A board of people. She's just all around a wonderful person.

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In business, we are good together because we compliment. I turn to liking to be alone. I tend to stay, people say don't you call your mother everyday don't you go over there for dinner on Sundays and I think no I see her everyday and why would I do that? But that's not normal with other people and I call her Evelyn because it's weird to say Mom at the nursery sometimes. It's fine with her that I'm not with her all the time. My mother doesn't need other people to make her happy or to prop her up in any way. she is, now that I'm taking more over, she is increasing her societal role, she's out almost every night doing something, out to dinner out for a meeting, out to a party and she really loves that, that would exhaust me. but she can work all day and turn around and go to a party. And knowing that my mother is okay, I don't feel a ? to check on her or worry about her. I worry about her in the same way that anyone would. But not, oh my god is she laying there on the floor. It's more of, she's got a cough, she needs to -

In three rivers, and when they had to move during the war, they had one in Long Beach. I don't of course know the one in three rivers because I wasn't born yet -

to the point I worry about her, she's too fun -

For me? Yeah, that was, I can't really speak to that, the nursery name, Weidners, it's not going to continue on after me because I don't have children and I'm just thankful that I'm here now and it doesn't have to close when I'm young, that the name continues on. It will probably continue on with the wholesale department, at least, because we have people here that are working that part. I loved it when my mom and dad and I were working together, it was a sense of pride, my father was quite famous in horticultural circles and I was very proud to be a Weidner, and that's something you don't usually give up. Even now, I was in LA one time in a huge event and I walked up to register and this woman, this is before I was married and she said are you related to the Weidners down in Encinitas? And I thought, good grief, up in LA, how did you know? And she said, I'm one of your best customers. And that sort of thing is hard to give up.

We are very fortunate here at Weidners because my parents were very fiscally conservative and my father learned from other people's mistakes and he also took good advice and one of those is own your own land, because that's what you have when you retire is your own land, you're not going to make any money selling your business, if you can even sell it. and so my father always did own his land. There's one little ranch that we lease from somebody that we know but other than that we own all of our own property and that is a tremendous help that we don't have that big financial burden and we also never take out loans. We built our greenhouses from money that we accumulated over ten years. Other growers, like flower growers, cut flower growers, they often have to take out loans, it's just a part of their business, it's like being a farmer and if you have a bad year, that can really hurt you. And you can build up a substantial amount of debt very quickly. And if the economy is not good, the bank can call your loans. Here, we don't go out and buy the latest machinery, we just replaced our fax our copier and I think it was fifteen years old and I'm proud of that, I really like that about us and it also makes it less stressful that we don't worry that we're not going to be able to survive. There are tight times. In the winter time, it's really tight. We store money in the spring in the summer and it goes out in the winter. And that's what it's meant to do.

Pay the bills and when you see it go out in those huge chunks, it can be a little unnerving. I would say that the wholesale business seems to be more profitable than the retail and it is easier to control cost in the wholesale than it is in the retail. Retail is more fun, and that's why we do it and we certainly don't lose money. But there are things that you have to buy and resell, not a lot for us but some things, if you don't sell those, that amount of money is actually gone. Five dollars, ten dollars, whatever it cost you. Makes me more aware of how easy it is for retail shops to go out of business. I think my mother and I relate to people that are buying, we both are conservative when we shop ourselves, she'll say I'm not buying that pot roast, that is way too expensive. My mother can afford to buy any piece of meat she wants, but it's the idea that it's more than it should be. And I don't like to shop at all, I hate to spend money. I would stick every dime I had in the bank if I had the choice but I don't because I'm married. And I think having that philosophy helped. We have to have people to counter balance that and we try to balance it out because we can be too conservative. I have learned, I think my husband has helped me learn somewhat of a balance so I can come back to Evelyn and say you know we really need to do this, doing it the cheaper way is not going to be satisfactory we're gonna waste money because ultimately we'll have to come to this more expensive way or spending money on this particular thing is going to pay off in the long run. We did new signs, very expensive, we lit them and I can't tell you how many people came in from the freeway because of those signs. We must of made our money back in six months. and it's nerve racking, it's very nerve racking to spend money and I think that showed us something, that it pays to invest. I just had the telephone representative here selling advertising and he was good, I tell you I wanted to sign up for everything he had, but it's very expensive and you have to consider how much of it people are gonna see. I don't know how much people are going to use the yellow pages. Weidners is a difficult name to spell. People don't know how to say it and they don't know how to spell it. So we list our place in numerous ways, we list it Weidners gardens, Weidners begonia gardens, begonia gardens and we keep the begonia in the phone book because older customers remember that and they say I don't know it's the begonia garden , just look under begonia.