

## Oral History Interview Cover Sheet

INTERVIEWEE: Peter and Ann Tolstoy

INTERVIEWER: Margo McBane and Margaret Finnegan

PROJECT: City of Rancho Cucamonga Oral History Project

DATE OF INTERVIEW: July 10, 2001

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AUDIO EDITOR Margo McBane

TRANSCRIBER: Monica Allen

### BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Peter Tolstoy was born in Los Angeles July 1, 1927. His mother was Vera Marie Demens and his father Andre Tolstoy. His grandfather Demens was a guard for Nicholas the last czar of Russia. Disenchanted with Nicholas, Demens left Russia for the United States, ending up in Florida. He began growing citrus and operating a lumber mill. A railroad developer contractor Demens to produce the wooden rail ties needed. When the rail entrepreneur defaulted on payment, Demens took over the company. He built the railroad to the outskirts of what is now St. Petersburg, naming the town. Needed more money to maintain the railroad, Demens lost the company to creditors. He went next to North Carolina where he started another lumber mill, and then headed west to San Francisco. His newly born daughter screamed for so much of the trip, he disembarked the train in Los Angeles. After selling his East Coast lumber mills, he invested in Los Angeles banking, a steam laundry and a soap factory. He had 8 children, 4 born in Russia, and 4 born in the United States. He yearned for more rural living, and bought a citrus ranch first in San Dimas, then sold it after a year, and in 1892, bought the house and 300 acre ranch in the Alta Loma region from a Chaffey cousin. He formed his own orange packinghouse, Hillside Groves, a member of Sunkist. He established a first class fruit label of Starlight Brand, and a second-class fruit label, Padre Brand. He befriended Huntington, who built a railroad station in Alto Loma. Many of his year-round workers and foremen were Russians. He helped to name the town as well. He sold the packinghouse during the Depression of the 1930s. He wrote articles for Russian, Los Angeles, and regional newspaper boosting the area. One of his daughters, Vera Marie, married Andre Tolstoy, a white Russian Guard with the Cossacks. During the revolution, he escaped to China, from where is got a job on an Alaskan fishing boat. In Seattle, a Hollywood friend encouraged him to go there. It was in Hollywood that he met Vera. He became a technical director on films depicting Russia. During 1941, he was asked by the U.S. Government to work on comedy films about Russia, for which his life was threatened. He retired from Hollywood, and first tried turkey farming in San Diego, then

became a citrus ranch on the family's citrus ranch in Alta Loma. During his childhood Peter, went to a different school in Los Angeles every year, finally he joined the Navy, then returned to his father's new ranching enterprise in Alta Loma and began Cal Poly, moving from the Pomona campus to San Luis Obispo and majoring in Chemistry and Bio-Chemistry. He completed an Ag Teaching course and began teaching Agriculture at Chaffey High School and College. By the time of the college move, agriculture was disappearing from the region and he switched to teaching Chemistry and serving as a campus counselor. He participated in the incorporation meetings, and spent the city's first four years on the Planning Commission, then returning later.

Length of Interview: appr. 1.25 hours Length of Transcript: 31 pages

## RANCHO CUCAMONGA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Peter and Ann Tolstoy

Interviewers: Margo McBane

Margaret Finnegan

Location: Rancho Cucamonga, CA.

Date: July 10, 2001

MF Can we begin by you telling us when and where you were born.

PT I was born July 1, 1927, in Los Angeles, California at the Bonnie Bray Clinic,

MF Can you give us your parents' names?

PT My mother's name was Vera Marie Demens and my father's name was Andre Tolstoy.

MF We're going to start by talking a little about the Demens family and what I thought you could do is tell us a little bit about how the family found themselves in Alta Loma.

PT Okay, can I go back a little bit further than that?

MF Please do.

PT My grandfather Demens was a guard of Nicholas, the last czar of Russia. He didn't agree with Nicholas in Russia so he decided to leave Russia and he came to the United States with a few dollars in his pocket and he ended up in a town in Florida. The only reason he went to Florida was because he knew somebody there. While in Florida he engaged in two enterprises, the first being a few citrus trees and the second being a mill operation, a wood mill, and he made sashes and doors. One of the things that he did while he was there was get interested in a

railroad that was being built by a particular person whose name I don't remember.

MF Henry Huntington?

PT No, I'll get to him later. So they struck up a friendship and he made the ties for the railroad. My grandfather, not knowing much about the railroad, did not know that the man who was putting the railroad in knew about as much as he did and was not making the right kind of tracks and so forth. But anyway, finally my grandfather went to him and asked him for the money for the ties. The man could not supply the money so my grandfather took over the railroad. He built the railroad from the place they were in Florida and ended up in a place in Tampa Bay. He built the railway all the way, and I don't remember the town, but anyway, he built the railway all the way to the outskirts of what is now St. Petersburg. When he got there he found that there was a man who owned the waterfront and so he talked the man who owned the waterfront into a partnership so that he could build his railway to the bay and build a bridge far enough out in the bay so that boats could come in and his railroad would carry the cargo up into the interior of Florida. When the partnership was consummated, they needed to have a railway station, so my grandfather built it, they also needed a post office and there became a little problem because each man wanted to name the post office. So my grandfather, the story goes, took out, we'll say a silver dollar, I don't know what it was, and they flipped it and if my grandfather won he would name the city and the other man would name the hotel that they built. My grandfather had, I'm sure, a 2-headed coin, and obviously he won the toss. So he named St. Petersburg, Florida, because that is where he came from in Russia. The

other man came from Detroit so he named the hotel Detroit Hotel. The Detroit Hotel is still there. The problem with the railroad was that no one knew really how to build a railroad and it really did not work well. Oh, by the way, he had to borrow money to build the railroad. He borrowed it in New York. How he did that I don't know but anyway, the creditors were after him so he lost the railroad.

He decided to leave St. Petersburg, Florida, and he went to North Carolina and he started a lumber mill, the only thing he knew how to do. He became restless because one of the things, back in Florida that he liked to do, was raise oranges. So he decided that he would get on the train. Oh by the way, he brought the rest of his family from Russia after he was somewhat successful and he loaded the family up on the train and his objective was to go to San Francisco for what reason? I don't know, there's no oranges up there. But anyway that's where he was going.

MM About what year is this? Do you know?

PT No.

MF Maybe around 1892.

PT No, not around 1892, we'll get to that date later. Anyhow, when he got to Los Angeles my mother, who had just been born, was crying the whole way across the country and so he decided that he had to get off the train in Los Angeles rather than going to San Francisco. When he got to Los Angeles, he had enough money in his pocket from the lumber mill that he started to invest his money in banking and he bought interest, or maybe he bought the whole thing, I'm not sure, he bought an interest in the steam laundry. One of the things that a steam laundry

needs is soap, so he founded a soap factory. So he had banking, he had a soap factory and a steam laundry. He grew restless in Los Angeles. He longed to live out in the country. Oh by the way, he built a couple of houses in the Los Angeles area, or actually near USC but in those days that was a pretty posh part of the city. He decided that he would take a wagon, or a buggy and he would come out into the interior of California and at the end of the first night he would stop and look at the land and see what he could find. So he ended up in what is now San Dimas, California, he saw that there were citrus trees planted there and so he purchased a ranch in San Dimas.

After about a year he found out that San Dimas was not a good citrus area so I guess he took to his buggy again and at the end of the second day he ended up in what is now Rancho Cucamonga. He bought a house, which is still standing, from a Chaffey cousin. The Chaffey cousin was attracted by the Chaffey brothers who founded Ontario and the whole area. He purchased the house and that was in 1892. The reason that the Chaffey cousin did not keep the house, which was interesting to me, he brought his wife from wherever she was, I think she was in England but she could have been in Canada. The first night that she spent at the new house she was fearful of attacks by Indians. Obviously there were no Indians but the cousin decided I better get the heck out of here because my wife doesn't like this place. That is when my grandfather met him and bought the house and a large acreage, probably about 300 acres. He prospered, he started the first packing house in the area. He grew tired of that because he had to work with other growers and he decided I can't do that, so he left that packing house. By the way,

I went to San Bernardino and into the archives there and found the association that he was president of and that he had signed his name to the founding of that packing house. He formed his own packing house in Alta Loma and he called it Hillside Groves. He packed his own fruit and he packed his neighbors fruit and that's it. So the house only ran part of the time and only packed oranges, navel oranges in fact. Where do you want to go from there?

AT He names Alta Loma as well.

PT One of the things that he thought was important was that he get his fruit to market. He heard that Huntington, the railway Huntington, who lived in Los Angeles, was going to run a railway to San Bernardino. The way he knew Huntington is he had borrowed money from him for his Florida adventure and of course, I don't know if he ever paid him back but anyway they were friends. Huntington said, "Yes, I can build my railroad out where you are, but in order for me to do this you have to buy the right of way or secure the right of way, not necessarily buy it." So what he did was he formed a committee, there were 5 people on the committee. He was the head of the committee, the chairman. He went to all the farmers along the right of way and he asked them to dedicate part of their ranches to the railroad and told them that the benefits were that they would be able to haul their fruit to market or their produce or whatever to market. So Huntington agreed that if the right of way was secured they would build the railroad. So they built it close to the ranch.

They had to have a name for a station because that is where they were going to have the station. The five people put their heads together and as I

understand it, each person presented a name. The name that my grandfather presented was Alta Loma, which is High Ground, but really in Spanish it's Loma Alta but he didn't know Spanish that well. The people voted on the names that they submitted and my grandfather won so the railway station was put there and then the tracks went on to San Bernardino through Etiwanda and the other towns along the way.

MF Before your grandfather came up with the Alta Loma name, I read that this was called, this area was called Ioamosa.

PT This area was called Ioamosa. There was another area I believe called Hermosa as well. That is how Hermosa got its name and Ioamosa kind of just went from Ioamosa to Alta Loma. Actually the Ioamosa post office, or general store, was on Helman Avenue at that point. But anyway, everybody moved downtown by the new post office. They had a PE Railway, and electric railway office there, then there was a hardware store and a market, Billings Market, which is where everybody bought their groceries. There was a general store, Blake's general store, I guess it was called, and there was a barber in town, there was a drugstore and the post office.

MM When he set up his Hillside Groves packing house, did he eventually join the Southern California Fruit Growers Exchange?

PT Yes, that's Sunkist.

MM Right.

PT And that's a cooperative.

MM Right, so he joined the district office or district association.

PT Yes, it's a cooperative so a cooperative is a number of packinghouses cooperating in the selling of their fruit.

MM But it is usually one packing house per district?

PT No, there could be 3 or 4 in a big district. Actually in those days there were about 3 prominent associations to sell fruit. One of them was MOD, I don't remember what MOD stands for.....

MM Mutual Orange Distributors.

PT Okay, Mutual Orange Distributors. Then there was Sunkist which my grandfather had and there was a third one called Blue Goose. Actually in Alta Loma at one time there were 3 packing houses, there was a lemon house, an orange house and my grandfather's orange house.

MM But they were all Sunkist?

PT No.

MM Was MOD out here as well?

PT Blue Goose and Sunkist was here and I believe in later times MOD did come out here but I don't remember that for sure.

MM They were focused more in La Verne.

PT La Verne and Upland actually, yeah.

MF Did you ever spend time at the packing house?

PT One of my fondest memories is as a little boy going to the packing house.

MF Can you tell us, can you kind of paint a picture of what that would have looked like?

PT A packing house was a very long building along the railroad tracks. In one end of

the house the fruit arrived and as it arrived it was washed, it was coated with some kind of a wax and the word Sunkist was put on each orange after it had been graded. And the neat part about my grandfather's packing house was that he founded a label for his fruit. The label he established for his first class fruit was Starlight Brand of Hillside Groves of Alta Loma, California, and that was Sunkist. The second grade he established was Padre Brand and it had a picture of a mission and a padre and of course it said that it was grown at Hillside Groves of Alta Loma, California. Now most of his fruit went first grade and the reason for that was that the piece of property that he had purchased was on a little rise and it had perfect conditions for oranges. We never smudged, we never fought the cold, we did freeze about twice in my lifetime but that was one-year loss of production and it wasn't worth going to the smudge pots for that.

MM Can you explain what this grading means.

PT Oh, first grade is a fruit that is first class - no blemishes, no sign of any insect damage, just a first class fruit.

MM These are fresh fruits, they're not going to be juiced.

PT Yes, oh no. California oranges were almost, in those days, almost always shipped for eating. Florida oranges were always juiced, they were very seldom sold as fresh fruit. So anyway, the fruit was of such quality that most of his fruit during his business in the packing house was shipped out of this country. It had great shipping possibilities. His second grade, of course, was probably delivered to Chicago and Los Angeles markets.

MM Do you know what year this was that he established? This was in the 1890's?

PT Well, he bought the ranch house in 1892. One of the reasons he bought it, actually it was a beautiful house but there was some citrus and he then planted 60 acres more of citrus.

MM So his total acreage?

PT Of citrus was about 60 acres then they planted about 40 acres of grapes and he joined a winery and he planted some walnut trees, which never amounted to anything but nice trees. He couldn't sell the walnuts. He bought a piece of property on Archibald Ave. in what was then Cucamonga, right by the old historic church, right below the church. That was 10 acres of lemons and 10 acres of oranges. I don't know where he packed his lemons but he packed his oranges in his own house.

MM So his properties were separate pieces?

PT That's correct.

MM What kind of workers was he hiring? Were they Chinese? Were they white workers? Were they Mexican?

PT Well, the workers on the ranch actually were Russian. Because my grandfather came from Russia and knew some families in Russia he encouraged some of them to move to this area. One of the prominent families was the Cherbak family and another one was the Ted Cristo family. There were others, I can't remember who they were.

MM Did he provide housing at the ranch for them?

PT No.

MF About the Russian community here in Alta Loma, I thought it was interesting,

when I was doing my research, to find out that your grandfather would write to the Russian press about how wonderful things were in Alta Loma.

PT Oh, yeah. And he embellished on it.

MF Okay, do you want to explain what you mean?

PT Well, unfortunately I don't speak Russian. Let me say this that back in St. Petersburg, Florida there is a man doing research on Peter Demens only because he did write for Russian newspapers and by the way some of it was in the L.A. Times and probably some it was in the Cucamonga Times....

MF So not just Russian newspapers?

PT No, mostly Russian, however. And he didn't write under his own name for a while and then he did use [it]. Sometimes he used his own name, sometimes he didn't. Actually what he was trying to tell the Russian people was how wonderful America was. How easy it was for him to come to this country and make his living in the saw mill lumber business, the citrus business, which enabled him to buy the laundry and the soap factory. He was into a lot things. In fact he was at one time, and I know nothing about this because when I used to play in one of the closets I found a whole box of gavels. One the gavels was presented to him by the West Coast Lumberman's Association as being the president of that group. I've tried to look that up, I've tried to find out about that and I just haven't.

Let me though return to the packing house. One of the things they did in the packing house was to build their own boxes. They built them out of a material called shook and shook was pieces of wood cut to several dimensions that were supplied by the Sunkist Association, in other words you bought your supplies

from them. So one of the things that always fascinated me as a child was the building of boxes. Then putting the fruit in the boxes and wrapping each fruit in a piece of paper, sometimes each orange in the crate was covered with paper. Sometimes they did what they call blind packing - only the oranges that you could see through the slits in the boxes were packed with it. Then they were wheeled out and put on the train, on the box cars, on the siding and then they were sent to a central place and iced and off they went to wherever they were going.

MM One question I wanted to ask was, with his lumber connection, did he have any timber sites that were used to build the shook for the packing houses?

PT You know I don't know because I know nothing about the West Coast Lumberman's Association. I do know however that a lot of the lumber that he had something to do with was redwood and shook was made out of I believe pine.

MM So you don't know if he sat on, because Sunkist had a subsidiary that owned lumber up in Shasta and I wonder if he sat on any of those boards.

PT I couldn't tell you. I don't know.

MF Well we're on the subject of the packing house, a little while back you showed us the labels...

PT They call that crate art.

MF Okay, it's beautiful and I noticed that you mentioned the Padre label has the picture of a padre and it kind of speaks to the mission....

PT Second class fruit.

MF And you mentioned the Starlight one and we saw that label and we saw that label...

PT With an Indian.

MF That has a beautiful Indian women, do you know anything about the origins of that picture?

PT No.

MF It's interesting that the cousin's wife thought there were Indians here and then later it shows up....

PT No, I have no idea, maybe they were suggested by Sunkist, maybe they were his suggestion, I don't know. But there is a real neat story about that Indian on that label and let me tell you about it. One of the things that happens when the packing house was closed, there were a lot of labels left over and in those days those labels were worth nothing. I can remember taking, I'm going to say truck loads, I'm sure there was not more than one, but to the dump and just discarding them. In later years one of the things that I always wanted were the labels that we had thrown away. They have become very, very expensive, those labels, there are collectors that have catalogs and sell them for great sums of money. I looked everywhere for these labels.

The first label I got was in Florida, as a matter of fact, at the founding of Florida, it's centennial. I represented our family back in St. Petersburg and they have a museum back there that had quite a show of my grandfathers stuff, in fact we sent, or they asked me to send things that my grandfather owned, to Florida. I had a lot of correspondence with them. Anyway, I went back there and they had asked me about the crate art and I said, "Gee, I don't know, I've been looking all over for it, I just don't know where it is." When I got there they took us to dinner

the night before the ceremony was to take place. Let me tell you, that ceremony was a big deal, everybody in town was there, it was done in a park, they had a huge birthday cake, my uncle and cousins were there, it was a big deal. Actually St. Petersburg, Florida has a large Russian colony because of my grandfather being there and people started to come and bring their families so there's a lot of Russians there. Anyway, at the museum, or at the dinner actually, they presented me with a facsimile of the Padre label. I asked the professor there, Professor Parsons, where he had gotten it. He said he had found it in a collection of crate art that somebody had and he asked to buy the label and the label cost \$1000. So what he got was a very good picture of it, a reproduced picture. That is actually what I have here, that's not the real label and so I got that label back there. Then when I got home I said, "God, how am I going to find the other label?" So one night my wife and I were at dinner at, what restaurant Ann?

NT Applebee's, of all places.

PT Yes, Applebee's, it just opened and they had crate art on the wall and they had Starlight on the wall. So gosh, I couldn't believe it. I almost dropped dead at that time. It was really a thrill to see it because I could remember seeing many, many hundreds of boxes with those labels on it. So I asked the manager if he knew where the art in the restaurant came from. The manager said, "No, we have an designer." So I called Applebee's headquarters and asked who had done the decorating and they gave me the name of somebody in San Diego. I called the somebody in San Diego and we talked about it. They said, "Oh yeah, we remember those crate art labels, we found them in a collection in San

Bernardino.” I said, “Well can you give me the name?” He said, “Yes, I can give you the name.” So they did. I called the gentleman who had the collection. He said, “Well, I don’t know.” So I wanted to buy it but he said, “I don’t think so.” I said, “Well could you have a reproduction made of it for me?” He said, “Yes, I can do that.” I must have called him 15 times over about a year. He just never got around to it. Finally he got around to it and he called me very happily and said, “I do have your picture. I work at the Archives of San Bernardino and I’m a volunteer. I will be there on such and such a day; if you come by I’ll give you the reproduction of the label.” So we went over there and talked to him. I said, “How did you happen to collect this?” He said, “Well it isn’t really the crate art I like, I like the pictures of Indians.” So he gave me that and I have framed both of them and I am very happy to have them.

PT [Tape stops and starts] My grandfather’s packing house, so these packing houses all had labels into the ‘50’s and ‘60’s and some of them even went to the ‘70’s so a lot of their crate art is still available but my grandfather’s went out of business...

MM When did his packinghouse close?

PT That I don’t remember, I remember I was....

MM About?

PT I was probably 10 or 12.

MF So maybe in the 1930’s.

PT Sometime probably.

MF Did it have anything to do with the Depression or had he decided he wanted to focus his energy someplace else?

PT Since the packing house only packed my grandfather's fruit and one other person's fruit, I think it became a little uneconomical to own a house that only ran for a very short time, I don't know that, it's speculation on my part.

MF Can you speak a little bit about Inna Demens?

PT Inna Demens was my aunt. Actually the Demens family consisted of 8 children, 4 born in Russia and 4 born in the United States. Inna was my aunt and when my grandfather died, he gave the ranch to the 2 girls. He said the two boys that were here were able to go out and make their own living but the girls couldn't. So at his passing and his wife, Raisa's passing, my aunt actually ran the ranch and my mother was a partner and we lived out here much of the time but my father was involved in movie making. Whenever we would make a movie or when I say we, whenever my father would make a movie, we had to move to Hollywood. That was a kind of interesting situation because my mother was partner of the ranch but she wasn't always there.

So after I was born in Los Angeles I was brought out here. So essentially, in fact I unfortunately tell a little lie, I say I was born here but I really wasn't. But I was here probably 3 days after I was born. Anyway, my aunt was and my mother and my father, my aunt never married but my aunt and my mother and my father lived in the ranch house. I went to school in Alta Loma, the old schoolhouse for the 1st grade. My aunt was really the person who ran the ranch. There was always a Cherbak working on this ranch. The first person that worked here was probably Victor Cherbak. He worked here, not on the ranch but he did the wiring. There was no electricity here at that time, [so] he did the wiring of the

house and I think he did some of the plumbing. His brother, Val, ran the ranch up until probably 1941 and then when he left his brother George came and worked for us until George retired. So there was always a Cherbak here. However there were other workers here. There were two classes of workers, there were those workers that worked on ranches and those workers that were left over from the building of the railroad. They were Chinese and they, for some reason, after the railroad no longer needed them, they built a shanty town on the railroad track in what is now Cucamonga.

MF Do you remember where about that would have been?

PT No but the city knows, I don't know. I have an idea but I don't really know. Those people used to do some of the work in the area, they would put in pipelines, they were used mostly for construction of, actually crude types of construction. One of the features of this ranch was the fact that we needed water for citrus. Citrus only thrived where there was water. The canyon, which is directly north of here, and it has the name Demens Canyon, had water in it and in order to take the water from the canyon we had to build this pipeline that the Chinese built. Then they decided one of the ways to gain more water was to dig tunnels into the mountains. So the Chinese built the first tunnel, about 500 feet in and water seeped from the ceiling and the sides and rolled out. We had 7 or 8 tunnels by the time I was born. Actually, one of the real interesting things is, the citrus industry only flourished where there was water, obviously.

One of the reasons that Fontana and Etiwanda really weren't good citrus areas is number one there was no water and number two there was the north

winds that blew the fruit off the trees and scarred them up. So they were all second class fruit, none of them were first class. We, very fortunately, missed most of the winds here, we do get them and we had plenty of water.

MM So that would explain why the foothill community grew such great citrus here.

PT That's right, the absence of wind and most important, water, in various ways, some of them tunneled into the mountains, some of them drilled wells. In years of drought, the tunnels didn't produce enough water, so my grandfather formed a group of people to drill some wells. That was called the Hillside Wells, the Cherbak's were a part of that, the Toew's family were a part of that, they Toew's were Germans, and Rem Anderson, who was our next door neighbor, was a part of that. So we went to Deer Canyon and we had three wells drilled and we laid a pipeline all the way from there over here. During the drought periods we would get water from our wells. By the way, the interesting part of that is that I don't remember the year but where Chaffey College now is it was north of there, there was the Grey Ranch. The Grey Ranch was a kind of an interesting place, I don't think they ever did anything but build a house and plant a couple of trees but anyway that was the Grey Ranch. Below that was the rocky piece of property that the college now is on and it was offered to my father at one time for \$1 an acre. He said, "What could I do with that? I don't want that."

MM How did you parents meet?

PT Do you want me to tell you a little bit about how my father got here?

MF I was going to ask that.

PT In 1917 he was 17 years old and he, because the Tolstoy family was what they

called nobility, he was in the Russian Guard, actually with the Cossacks. He was the head of a group of Cossack riders. In 1917 he got on the train to move his troops out of the area where they were and actually just as, or just after he got on the train and the train left, his parents were shot. The only person left in the family was his sister whom we were never able to get to find after the Revolution. We don't know what happened to her. My father spent a lot of time and energy trying to locate her but they never did. Anyway, he got on the train, he fought his way across Russia, obviously he was a white Russian, and he fought his way across Russia to Vladivostock. In Vladivostock there was nothing for them to do so they went to China. A lot of Russians who fled Russia either went to France or to China. In China there was a town called Harbin where there was a camp for Russians.

He spent time there and the way he got to the United States was that Libby McNeil, the food people, did a lot of fishing in Alaska. They needed fisherman so they recruited some Russians and among them was my father. My father was on a fishing boat in Alaska and he would go to Seattle because the fish were delivered into Seattle. He got into Seattle and called a friend of his who was in Hollywood and the friend said, "Why don't you just come down to Hollywood, I'll get you a job in the movies." So my father moved, I believe, to San Francisco for a little while where we have some relatives and then from San Francisco to Hollywood. When my grandfather Demens came to this country he had 4 children and he brought a nurse. That nurse was a member of our family, she wasn't really but she was considered as such. So she was brought with the family

when they came to Florida and she came to California and she took care of my mother.

[End of Side A; Begin Side B]

After my mother grew up, the Russian nurse had nothing to do and stayed here for a while but decided that she would move and her name was Tawni, I don't remember her last name. She moved to Hollywood to a place on Orange Drive in Hollywood, which is right below Hollywood High School. She started a rooming house, that's how she made her living. My mother used to go and visit,

MF How would she get out there?

PT In those days she probably rode the big Red Car, or maybe she drove herself, I don't know. Anyhow, my father happened to have rented a room in Tawni's house and that's how they met.

MM And what kind of work did your father do in Hollywood?

PT Well he was a technical director. He was the person that made sure that Russian pictures were authentic. As a child I can remember him designing matchboxes that might be from Russia. Today they don't do anything like that. So when they were making a picture in those days, everything on the set was authentic, the food, the dishes. Another thing my father did was hire people from the Russian community who danced and who did other things in the pictures. So he was, he was kind of a big wheel but when you're in the movie business it's always feast or famine - you either work or you don't. So when we worked we lived in Hollywood. In times of famine we did several other things, we either came to the ranch or spent time at the ranch. By the way, I spent all my time at the ranch

other than going to school. I went to school in Los Angeles but whenever there was a Christmas vacation or whatever I came on the Red Car and I believe it cost \$.50 for a child from Los Angeles out here, I can't remember. So my parents would move out here and then they would go back. The interesting thing during the Depression, even though movies paid a lot, there were very lean times. So they would buy a house and when my father wasn't working or out here, my mother and he refurbished the house and sold it. Then we would buy another house, therefore I went to different schools every year until I got into the 8th grade.

I have to admit, I was not a good student. My mother decided that she needed to help me and the best thing that ever happened to me was that she put me in a Catholic school, I'm not Catholic, and the nuns made a student out of me. I was very thankful for that. My first class that we had was 3 boys and 3 girls.

MM You got the attention that you needed.

PT Not only did I get the attention I needed, if I didn't do well, Sister Aquintis, who was my teacher, said, "You know, I don't have to be back to the convent until 5:00 so you can just stay until 5:00." So school got out at 3:00 and I wanted to get out at 3:00 so therefore I learned something!

MF Did you have any siblings?

PT Ann and I have a daughter.

MF No but did you have any brothers or sisters?

PT Oh no, I'm an only child, I'm sorry, I didn't understand your question.

MF So you grew up sort of in Alta Loma and you grew up in Los Angeles. At a

certain point did you decide “I’m going to live in Alta Loma”, how did you decide to life out here?

PT Well, I never decided that, I always lived out here, wherever I put my head, this was my home but I wasn’t home all the time. We just lived in houses.

MM When were you born?

PT In 1927. I’m 74.

MF You worked at Chaffey for a while right?

PT Well, first of all, I was in the Navy.

MF We’re going to back up a little bit and can you tell us about your father’s retirement from the movies?

PT Yes, in ‘39, ‘40 and ‘41, he was asked by the U.S. Government to help make some propaganda films for Russia because we wanted to be friendly with Russia. So my father did several pictures, one was called “Song of Russia,” the other one was called “Comrade X” and there was a third one I don’t remember the name of it. It was very interesting because he got threats from Russia. The FBI actually used to help him go to the studio in the morning.

MF Why would people be threatening him?

PT Because he was making pictures that made Russians look kind of funny. “Comrade X” was a comedy about Russia and it was not very flattering to Russia. Actually it was made to help American’s understand what was going on in Russia and it was kind of a funny picture. “The Song of Russia” was really a pretty nice picture and the third one, I don’t even remember. The Russians did not like the fact that Hollywood was turning out this kind of movie and he was a very

prominent name because they said Count Andrey Tolstoy was doing this. Of course he dropped his count, his title, when he became an American.

So anyway, after my father retired, he decided that he wanted to go into farming. He wanted to get away from it. So we had some friends in San Diego County and we went to San Diego County and he purchased, an old run down turkey ranch. At that point my aunt was very sick so they came back from San Diego. By the way, I was in the Navy at this point. Actually I helped him a little bit in building up at the turkey ranch and then I went into the Navy.

Then when my aunt died, they decided that they had better sell that ranch down there. This ranch was probably a better deal for them and so that's when they came here and stayed. The movie business was in the past and so anyway, they came here. My father became a citrus rancher, trained by Val Cherbak. I can remember the discussions that they had. He learned well, he was an excellent farmer. He used to get awards for his cleanliness of his ranch. He was well known in the community and it was kind of neat. He made a great success out of his being here. One time he missed the turkey ranch and he said, "Well we've got a lot of acres that aren't under anything, I'm going to start a turkey ranch." Then he thought better about it. So we lived here from, full-time, from 1941 or 2, no it's got to be '42 because she died after the war started, or maybe '43 even, I don't remember but anyway they moved from San Diego. When I came back from the Navy I came here.

MF When was that? When did you get discharged?

PT Well, I never actually was discharged from the Navy, I was separated, in 1946.

Well, that's a long story. In my childhood, just before I went in the Navy, I learned to fly. I learned with a family who had 2 boys and the father had an airplane and flew it and so I went along and I learned to fly and got a ticket. I know my wife does not want me to say this, she's a little ashamed of it but I got kicked out of high school and I was 16 years old when I got kicked out. I talked my mother into letting me go to the Navy, which I shouldn't of at 16 but I did. I was what was called a white hat, I was a seaman. First of all I went to corps school, hospital corps school and I did real well there and I was allowed what I wanted to do because I was 1 or 2 in the class. I was interviewed and they found out I had a pilots license but they didn't find out that it was just a license, I had very little flying experience. So they sent me to, I was a 90 day wonder. After 90 days I was an ensign in the Navy. I got out of the Navy in 1946 but I had a specialty that very few people had and they didn't want to discharge me, they wanted to get rid of me but they didn't want to lose me so I got separated in 1946.

I came to the ranch, I was not a high school graduate. A girlfriend of mine, who was a girl from a prominent family around here, asked me if I wanted to go to Cal Poly because a relative of hers, it wasn't her brother, was at Cal Poly, which was at the Voorhees unit in San Dimas. I went to what they called Poly Royal, it's the day that they recruit people and I kind of liked that over there. I have to admit, I hate to write, so I became a scientist. That was my bent because I loved the laboratory and I loved the research but I didn't like to write so the best way not to write is to become a scientist where I used math and all the other things. They had a program over there, which when I started was called Citrus

Fruit Production. It turned out to be Subtropical Horticulture because we studied not only citrus but all tropical fruits. The first two years of Cal Poly at the Voorhees unit in those days was the first two years you went to school you did practical things, the second two years you went to school you did academic things. So when I got through with the practical things I was ready for the academics. Because Cal Poly Voorhees unit didn't have 4 years of college, I had to go to San Luis Obispo for my last 2 years. The dreaded thing I took at the Voorhees unit was bonehead Chemistry. I had a teacher who was superb and the reason that teacher was superb was that he told me I did not have to learn the periodic chart and to me that was a real good deal! Of course, by the time I got out of his class I knew it but he told me I didn't need it. He said, "I will always in a test have the chart out so I could see it." He said, "I even have to look things up." He said, "I don't expect you not to." So I did and when I went to San Luis Obispo I had to take a lot more chemistry, I had to take inorganic and organic and qualitative and quantitative analysis. I fell in love with Chemistry so I graduated with two majors, one in Subtropical Horticulture, which actually was aimed at fruit, we learned about every fruit in the world, some that you have never even hear of. I loved plants and Cal Poly had a plant major and so I learned a lot there. When I went to San Luis I took the rest of my chemistry, fell in love with it and also graduated with a bio-chem degree as well.

After graduation I looked at myself, and said, "Well, I can't go back to the ranch in Alta Loma because my father just doesn't need me." So I decided I would go into teaching and I went into a very unique program at San Luis Obispo

which was ag teaching. I spent I think a year and every summer going to school, after my graduation. I became an agricultural teacher under the Smith Hughes Label. Smith Hughes was a special label of vocational people. Now you got to remember that I was pretty academic at that time because I dug the academics in the last years of school. So I became an ag teacher and the first thing I had to do was spend one half a year as a cadet teacher and that's under Smith Hughes and so I picked Chaffy High School. At that time Chaffy High School and College had a huge ag department. In fact, with the veterans coming back, we had maybe 18 teachers there. It was a big ag department, it was well known. The teachers who taught animal sciences were excellent, the teachers who taught viticulture because of the returning veterans, it was just a real great program. I went to the college and I did work in the college and the high school, it was a combined department, we had a school farm. Chaffey has a long, long history in agriculture and it actually was started by the Chaffey brothers as an agricultural school for USC. Then it evolved into an academic school. They even used to raise pigeons for WWI, carrier pigeons. They also produced several varieties of peaches, one of them is the Babcock peach, which is an absolutely worthless peach because you can't market it. It's an excellent peach to pick off a tree and eat but the minute you pick it off and pack it, it rots, it can't take it.

While I was there as a cadet teacher, one of the teachers passed away and they needed somebody to take his place and so I did take his place. Now, as I said before I was in college as well as high school, I went down to the high school, I took over that teacher's responsibilities. I was still a cadet teacher by

the way at that time but they hired me. I graduated from Cal Poly in the teaching program after that. Then Chaffey wanted to keep me and I spent several years going back and forth between college and high school. Finally the college department, the head of the college department, his name was Rex Wignal, and he is actually the guy who hired me, he's actually the guy that kept his arm around me and helped me. He got kicked upstairs and so they needed a head of the department so they made me the head of the agriculture department at Chaffey. At that time Chaffey knew that it had to move and the handwriting was on the wall. Agriculture was not as big in those days as it had been, this community was an ag community, the ag department raised all of the eucalyptus trees that you see planted here and gave them to the farmers.

I mean we were big in agriculture but you could tell in 1960 that this area was going to grow and that groves were going to go and so when we moved, I moved myself right out of a job. I sat down with the president of the college and said, "You know what, this is not an agricultural area anymore." Of course he was happy to hear that because he didn't want to spend money on an ag department, ag departments are very expensive. So there I was with no job and Chaffey at that time was very devoted to its people. So instead of letting me go, I went to the college, or I was in the college at that point, we had a school farm, we sold the farm, I was in the planning a little bit of the campus right up here on Haven Avenue and I went into teaching in the biology department.

Also in those days counseling was starting and I was selected as one of the three first college counselors at Chaffey College and that was kind of neat. I was

also in charge of the Dental Assisting Program and that's another story but I don't want to go into that. So I ran that department and half the time I was a counselor, or I was to be a counselor. Dr. Clark, who was a woman, called me one day, she was head of counseling, and said. "I'm sorry, we can't have you as a counselor because we needed to pick three people and one of them had to be a women and since you are the junior man that we picked, we don't need you but the next time we add another counselor you will be first." So they got two men and one woman and they became counselors, a year later we needed to add another counselor so I was a half-time counselor, I taught in the biology department. I was a jack of all trades!

In fact one time, it always breaks me up, the only class I ever dropped in college was typing and one time the typing teacher was not available so they asked me to take the typing class and the Dean of Instruction's name was Olaf Snyder. He came to me and said, "Hey, you're going upstairs and you're going to teach typing!" I said, "You know what, I don't know how to type." He said, "It doesn't matter!" So I went upstairs and I got the textbook and I found out where the students were, not telling them that I couldn't type, but I told them do this exercise and you do it this way and I got through it.

MM And you learned to type.

PT No! I only did it two nights! But in those days the college was a really wonderful place. Everybody loved the college. We all chipped in wherever we were needed. We did whatever we needed. We never had a teaching day. We stayed late and did all kinds of things. It was a really wonderful family in those days.

Then the college decided it needed to move and so they purchased a property that was offered to my father for \$1 an acre. They built the college. We moved up to the college, I believe it was '65. It was a wonderful move, we engaged a van company to help us but every teacher had his car full. I had a Volkswagen bus at that time and so I was the first one on the trip! And we were going to do that in a week. Imagine moving. I think we had to move into 7 buildings and it was really an experience to move the college. We went back and forth to move everything and it really was an experience. We were on a rock pile, there were a lot of rocks over there. I remember one of the first contests we had was between freshman and sophomores - who could build the biggest rock pile. So they went out on the grounds, picking up the rocks because there were rocks all over the place. That partly how we cleared the campus and I want to tell you, the winning team, I don't remember which one it was now, the winning team had a pile of rocks taller than one of the buildings. Then of course over the years they cleared the rest of the rocks.

MM Did the students help in the move?

PT Yes, everyone helped in the move. Even people off the street.

MF Wow, you know we are going to have to wrap this up but I wonder if there are any other final thoughts or....

PT Well, one of the questions here you have actually is - what were the major changes that you saw?

MF Yeah, do you want to talk about that a little bit?

PT Yes, I would like to, in fact I would really like to. In fact to me that is the most

interesting thing that happened. Alta Loma, in my remembrance, had 50 mailboxes. Every inch was in oranges or grapes, mostly oranges, as was Cucamonga. They even tried to grow citrus in Etiwanda but their water ran out and the wind blew the oranges off the trees. I can remember lots of things that were interesting and I will try to recount some of them. One of them was the iceman used to come every other day to the ranch house. Another one was that one of the Cherbak's used to go down and get our mail. Another one was that Billings' grocery used to deliver twice a week. Another one was that when we really had a treat we went to Upland. I always remember going to Upland because I got an ice cream cone for a nickel.

MF Where did you get it?

PT Mac the medicine man, he had a drugstore. The hardware store was there. Cucamonga had a hardware store. That's an interesting story, one thing I learned from my grandfather. The Klusman family had a hardware store down there and of course we would always go down there and buy what hardware we could or we had to go to Upland for other things. One day Klusman's closed and a new person took over the hardware store and I got to be real good friends with him and he said, "By the way, I want to show you something that is interesting." He said, "I have the Klusman books." He said, "I want to show you something here in these books." He said, "All the grape farmers who bought from Klusman never paid him but for once a year. Your grandfather, Peter Demens, Captain (he always called himself Captain), is the only person that paid his bills every month." My mother told me that was because my grandfather said that when you

deal with people you need to pay them, they need their money right away. That is something that always stuck with me. I always pay my bills, I don't borrow money and that was a real part of my grandfather that I never knew but I did know through my mother.

So anyway, going to Upland was a big deal. Going to the doctor was a big deal. Everybody had one doctor, it was Dr. Webber. We went to the San Antonio Community Hospital and by the way, I broke my arm while I was in Hollywood and I had a orthopedic surgeon set it, it didn't work, came out here and Dr. Webber fixed my arm. So even the country doctor, who used to come to the ranch when anybody was sick, was able to do something better than the guy in Hollywood who was the doctor that did that. We had people like that in our community. Everybody worked for the community. As orange groves got old, farmers started selling off and we started to grow. I have many wonderful remembrances of going to Upland and even to Ontario. If we went to Ontario we had lunch at Ford's Lunch, which was a prominent little restaurant in those days. We would go to the movies in Ontario. It was a wonderful life. I have tears in my eyes just thinking about it, it was really great.

Finally it became uneconomical to raise oranges, so we were selling off and the county was our planning agency and the people out here got mad at the county because they didn't care what we were doing. I can remember when we wanted to build a shed, we had to go over to San Bernardino and get a permit. Then nobody would come and ever look at the shed, nobody knew if we ever built it. So there were a lot of buildings built like that around here and people didn't

like that and people didn't like what San Bernardino was doing so formed the city of Rancho Cucamonga. It was interesting, one of the big deals in 1977 - what are you gonna call this place? The people from Alta Loma said, well obviously we were going to call it Alta Loma and people from Cucamonga said well, it's Cucamonga. But Jack Benny put Cucamonga on the thing and so they picked Rancho Cucamonga and I told my mother about it and she said that's a great name. I thought she would be upset because of my grandfather naming Alta Loma.

I was real interested so I went to all the meetings and in 1977 we incorporated and I became a planning commissioner for the community. There were five of us, I was one of the first. I spent 4 years as a planning commissioner, I got off the planning commission, I was asked to come back on and I've been on the planning commission and I'm still on it. I compare myself to my grandfather. He laid out the city of St. Petersburg, Florida and I'm one of the people who helped, helped because I didn't do it, but I helped lay out this city. It kind of makes my teary.

MF Big changes.

PT Yeah. So we're like 127,000 from 50.

[end of the interview]