

Transcription of Oral History Interview With

IVAN J. THOMASON

May 22, 1998

This oral history interview is being conducted on Friday, May 22, 1998, with Professor Emeritus Ivan J. Thomason, Nematologist, at UC Riverside.

My name is Jan Erickson. I work in Chancellor Raymond L. Orbach's office. He is the eighth chief administrative officer of the Riverside campus.

Erickson: Professor Thomason, would you start by telling us where you were born and a little about your family, please?

Thomason: Yes, I was born in Burney in Shasta County, California, on June 27, 1925.

Erickson: That's pretty country up there, isn't it?

Thomason: Very nice. Yes, it's a mountain valley at about 3,000 ft elevation. My mother was Ellen Greer Thomason. She was born in Cayton Valley about 10 miles from Burney, and it's about five miles from Burney Falls State Park. Incidentally, her mother (my grandmother) and my mother's mother (my great grandmother) are buried in what's called Pioneer Cemetery, right on the edge of Burney Falls State Park. The Pacific Crest Trail goes right past this little cemetery. My grandmother was born in San Jose, California, in 1875, and graduated from San Jose Normal School, which is now San Jose State University, and was a teacher in small rural school in Shasta County most of her adult life.

Erickson: That's so unusual to have all that lineage in California.

Thomason: I am a *third* generation Californian on my mothers side, but it gets pretty thin on my father's side. My father was a Russian immigrant, Boris John Thomason. He was born in Tallinn in Estonia in 1881 and was christened Boris Ivanovich Tomasov in the St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church in the old walled city of Tallinn. He left in 1906 after completing the gymnasium, or the equivalent of our high school, left on a German sailing ship and never got back to Estonia.

Erickson: Do you know why he left? Do you know why he left Russia?

Thomason: Yes. Number one, he had failed a subject in the gymnasium and consequently was not eligible to go on to any other academic training. He had a brother who was a university graduate and who arranged for him to enter the Maritime Academy, one of the oldest Maritime Academies in Europe, which is located in Tallinn in Estonia. And he went to sea for some experience prior to going into that academy but never got back. He came to the United States just prior to World War I after some five to seven years at sea, sailing all over the world on three rigged or three mast sailing ships.

Erickson: My goodness.

Thomason: I was with him down in San Diego one day, and the Star of India sits down there on display, and he said the ships he sailed on were much like that—iron hulls and three masts. So, he had quite an experience.

Erickson: I'll say. Where did he land then, in California?

Thomason: Well, I am not certain of that. To my best recollection, he said that the ship went aground off of Oregon, and they went ashore in Oregon. Of course, that was prior to 1926, when they changed the immigration laws so that it was much easier to come into the United States at that time than it was after 1926. In any case, he was working for the Pacific Gas and Electric Company in 1923 when he met my mother in Burney. And they were married in August of '23, and then they had from that

Thomason: marriage four sons. My oldest brother Gene was born in Burney in 1924, and as I said, I was born there in 1925. My oldest brother's name is Eugene Greer Thomason, my mother's maiden name, Greer. And I don't think my mother knew, but my father gave my brother a Russian name. Eugene is the Russian equivalent of Evgeny. Anyway, then my younger brother Jerome was born in Hat Creek, which is about ten miles from Burney. It's again, another rural mountain valley. And my youngest brother, Edmund John... Jerry was born in 1926, and my brother John was born in Davis in 1928. They are all still living, and they are all still Californians.

Erickson: Well, you were so close together in ages, I can imagine your mother was quite busy.

(laughter)

And then next, you probably all got along very well and played together?

Thomason: Fortunately, we did get along. We got along well as children and we got along well as adults, and that's fortunate. And we still communicate on a regular basis and see each other on a regular basis. My oldest brother was associated with a trucking industry all his adult life. Jerry worked for the Pacific Gas and Electric Company as my father did. My brother John and I graduated from UC Davis, both of us in 1950. He was associated with the dairy industry all of his adult life, and the last twenty five years he worked, he was associated with Dreyer's Ice Cream Corporation of which he was the Vice President for Production for a period of time. So, he did very well. The University served him well.

Erickson: Ivan, can you remember when you became interested in science?

Thomason: Well, to say that I was specifically interested in science as a young person would be to stretch the truth. I grew up in Davis, and it was a small town of 1200 people, but it was primarily a college town, although there was a small amount of industry

Thomason: there including the Pacific Gas and Electric Company where my father worked. But, what I really became interested in was something besides a workingman's background.

(chuckle)

You didn't have to live in Davis very long to see the difference in the life style of the people who were professors at the University versus the working people in town. I decided at an early age that I wasn't going to be working with my hands and my back rather than working with my head. So, that prompted me to at least pay attention in school and to get to the type of school and course work and grades that would make it possible to get an advanced education. I guess, if anything, I would have had an ambition early on to be a medical doctor. That was primarily prompted, I suppose, by an outstanding role model. Our family doctor's name was Leo Cronin and was an incredible individual and a good role model. But quite frankly, growing up during the Depression and under the circumstances I did, that sort of notion of being able to afford a medical education didn't really seem very realistic. However, we were around agriculture all the time. Davis, at that time was a very rural place. Many of the students in school were from the farms. We visited my grandfather's farm in Shasta County. In fact, when I was ten years old, I spent that summer on the farm in Burney. Unfortunately, my grandfather died that Christmas, but we spent the next couple of years ... my brothers and I were farmed out as cheap labor to either the farm in Burney or to my mother's sister, Verna.

Erickson: So, you probably spent months at a time, or the whole summer?

Thomason: The whole summer, farmed out as cheap labor, you know. My mother's sister, who incidentally was one of eight women students on the UC Davis campus in 1930.

Erickson: What did she do? How interesting.

Thomason: Anyway, she had married her high school sweetheart who came from a ranch, a true cattle ranch in Hat Creek. She had no sons

Thomason: early on, so they could use a couple of boys to help with chores on the ranch, so we got to spend the summers there. Work was hard, but there was lots of fun with horses and fishing and things of that nature. So, it was a pleasant experience. On the other hand, farmers were not rich then, if they are now. In any case, one could early on decide that the physical work and the other aspects of farming were less than attractive, so even though I was around agriculture, I didn't really aspire to be a farmer.

Erickson: Well, what did you study at UC Davis?

Thomason: Well, I came to UC Davis after being in the Armed Services during WW II for two and a half years.

Erickson: Right out of high school, you went into the Service?

Thomason: Yes. I graduated in June of '43 and entered the Armed Services in August and was in the Army Corp of Engineers and went to the South Pacific in March of 1944.

Erickson: Were you drafted, Ivan, or did you enlist?

Thomason: No, I enlisted. I would have been drafted, but I attempted to get some placement. Some of my fellow students at Davis High School and I took an exam that the Navy gave to either get into pilot's training or into what they called Naval Officer Training. I passed the exam, but it turned out I was red/green color blind, so...

Erickson: And you didn't realize it?

Thomason: I didn't realize it at the time. Two of my friends I saw recently at a reunion entered that program: one, Dr. Ed Proebsting, whose father was a horticulturist at UC Davis, entered training and spent several years at the University-level training as a meteorologist. Another, Art McCain spent several years at Berkeley in Engineering but later became a plant pathologist. He got a degree from UC Davis and was the Extension Plant Pathologist at Berkeley for many years. And Ed Proebsting is a

Thomason: Horticulturist at the University of Washington, Irrigated Agriculture Experiment Station at Proser, Washington. He is a second generation. His son is a Horticulturist at Corvallis, Oregon, a third generation horticulturist. From that small group, there were some folks that did reasonable well. In any case, I got out of the Armed Services on February 16, 1946, and entered UC Davis on February 21. I gave myself five days vacation.

Erickson: Did you use the GI Bill, too?

Thomason: That was the fortunate thing, yes. We had not only the Federal GI Bill available to us as California veterans, but we also had California GI Bill. Most people don't know about that, but if you were a California veteran, the state had a program where you could borrow money for housing or to buy a farm, I guess, for that matter. Or a small amount of money to support education. So, I had access to both of those, and it worked out well since I not only did a four year degree at Davis but then was four years at Wisconsin. In any case, at Davis I took a degree in Plant Science, but the first summer I worked up in Shasta County for a lumber company running a tractor in the woods pushing logs and hauling logs around. The next year I took a Plant Pathology course and that's where I found out that I wasn't going to spend my summers in the woods any longer. I have here this book—it's on the life of Dr. Lysle Leach, well known Plant Pathologist at UC Davis. He and a man by the name of Byron Huston were teaching the introductory plant pathology course that all plant science majors had to take, and I immediately liked the content of the course as well as the two outstanding instructors who were teaching the course and decided right then that this might be the kind of thing that I liked. Fortunately, I was able to get employment in the Plant Pathology Department then as a part-time student worker initially correcting papers for Dr. Leach and doing other kinds of things and then over the years worked for Dr. Leach and Dr. Huston and also worked with Dr. Jack Oswald, who later became Vice President of the University of California and later President of the University of Kentucky and later President of Penn State.

Erickson: Oh, that's right. I knew that name. And he was here on campus for Rosemary Schraer's inauguration.

Thomason: Yes. She worked for Oswald at Penn State.

Erickson: Did you get a chance to visit with him?

Thomason: Yes. Al Paulus, do you know Dr. Al Paulus by chance? Well, he and I took him to breakfast one morning.

Erickson: Oh, that's great.

Thomason: Oswald was a remarkable individual. He was a compadre' of Kennedy's. He was a PT boat commander in the South Pacific, but he was a very bright energetic individual, had played football at DePauw University in Indiana and then came to Davis to do his doctorate in plant pathology and actually coached football as a volunteer at UC Davis and later went to Berkeley in plant pathology and became a close friend of Clark Kerr's and from then on it was history. He moved up in the University and, of course, was the president of two major universities in the United States, quite a remarkable man. In any case, I worked for individuals like that, and then another well know plant pathologist had just come from Wisconsin by the name of Ray Grogan. I worked for him, and then when I finished up in 1950, in February of 1950, they arranged for me to move to University of Wisconsin at Madison to work there for an advanced degree. I might say, I think that things were quite different then. Number one, Dr. J. B. Kendrick, Sr. at Davis was the Chair of Plant Pathology for thirty three years.

Erickson: I remember that name, too.

Thomason: Well, you are probably thinking of his son, J. B. Kendrick, Jr.,

Erickson: Oh, oh, maybe I am.

Thomason: ... who was here at Riverside and then became the Vice President for the Division of Agriculture at Berkeley.

Erickson: Yes. But you are talking about his father.

Thomason: I am talking about his father. It was remarkable that he stayed chair of that department for thirty three years and did an extraordinary job of recruiting and outstanding faculty and developing one of the strongest departments of plant pathology in the nation. But at that time, I don't even recall having sent the formal application to Wisconsin. I am not certain of that, but I don't recall having done it. I think J. B. Kendrick, Sr. just got on the phone and said, "I've got a student. Do you have a place for him?" I think that's what it was. So, I went back to work for a well-known cereal pathologist by the name of James Dickson, and it was interesting that ...

Erickson: Now what did you call him, I'm sorry I didn't get ...

Thomason: Cereal Pathologist. Works on cereals. You know what cereals are—wheat, oats.

Erickson: Oh, oh! I'm sorry.

Thomason: I thought you came from the Midwest.

Erickson: Oh, I do. Isn't that silly. I was picturing another word...I don't know, with an "s." Ok., sorry.

Thomason: It's all jargon. You've got to be careful of jargon.

(laughter)

Erickson: Now I am on the right track.

Thomason: In any case, it may be of interest to you that J. B. Kendrick's other son, Edgar Kendrick, is also a Plant Pathologist and was a fellow student at Wisconsin under James Dickson. He later went on to become a major administrator in the USDA's (United States Department of Agriculture) research program heading up research in the Southwestern Division out of

Thomason: Tucson and then later the Southeastern United States out of Louisiana. What's the big city in Louisiana?

Erickson: New Orleans.

Thomason: New Orleans, right. (chuckle) In any case, after he retired, they recruited him to be a dean at the University of Arizona in Tucson for a period of time. And he is retired there now but is a very avid golfer. Anyway, four years in Wisconsin and I got a degree.

Erickson: That's your Ph.D.?

Thomason: My Ph.D. there in 1954. Meanwhile, I had met my wife there in Madison. Her name was Harriet Braun, and she was from Washington Courthouse, Ohio, and had graduated from Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. I believe if I am not mistaken, it's the oldest university in the Northwest Territory.

Erickson: What did she study?

Thomason: She majored in Business Administration, and she had worked briefly for Proctor and Gamble in Cincinnati, Ohio, but found that boring, boring, boring. A classmate of hers at Ohio University who had been in Biology, was working in the Plant Pathology Department at Madison, Wisconsin, so she went up to Madison and went to work for the folks that had the 7UP and the Canada Dry Bottling franchise in Madison and was their office manager, and she liked that much more.

Erickson: Good.

Thomason: Anyway, through her friend Mary Lou Dye, who was in Plant Path at Madison, why she met some Plant Pathologists or Plant Pathology graduate students and finally me. And the rest was history! We were married in December of 1950 and have five children.

Erickson: That's nice. How many of each?

Thomason: We have four boys and a girl. Thank goodness for small favors.

Erickson: Uh huh. Is your daughter the youngest?

Thomason: No. She should be, but she isn't. We have three boys, a girl and then a boy. The oldest one works here on campus and has been at UCR ... he is starting his twenty sixth year. He is a Staff Research Associate in the Soils and Environmental Science Department. Our second son works for Computer Services Corporation in the San Diego area. He has two children—a daughter 15 and a son 11. He is my only grandson, Brett. And then my third son works at Patton Prison Hospital. It used to be a mental institution, now it's primarily a prison. He went to school at Chico State University in Recreational Therapy and Administration and went to work over there some seventeen years ago and is still there. He has since taken an MBA at Cal State University at San Bernardino and now has a management position. His wife works there also as a therapist. She took a music degree at College of Pacific at Stockton and worked there at Patton as a therapist. He met her there at Patton, and they have two children—Katie, who is now 8, I believe and Sarah, who is 6—something like that. I have a hard time keeping track of the ages.

Erickson: They grow so quickly.

Thomason: But they are doing well. And my daughter did her degree at Cal State Fullerton after spending a year or so at University of Redlands and then a year at Michigan State University. She took a degree in Business Administration, specializing in what they call Human Resources now. We would have referred to it as Personnel in the past. Her area of specialty is compensation, and she works for one of these MBO ... what do they call it?

Erickson: HMO?

Thomason: HMO. Right. Pacific Care over in Orange County. She is not married and has no children. My youngest son went to school and graduated from Cal State University Pomona. You get the

Thomason: message that I couldn't get any of them to go to University of California campuses, even though several were excellent students and could easily have gotten entrance. (chuckle)

Erickson: Maybe that's because Dad was here.

(laughter)

Thomason: Something to that effect. Anyway, I couldn't get any of them to go to good old Davis, my alma mater. I would have loved to have one of them ... But my granddaughter is talking about going there, so that will help.

Erickson: Well, it sounds like you have a nice family.

Thomason: Thank you.

Erickson: You talked about a reunion. You just went back to your high school reunion recently?

Thomason: Yes, the weekend of April 25 and 26. The Class of '43 at Davis Joint Union High School had a 55th reunion, and it was interesting to see what people had done and how they have changed. Fortunately, I haven't changed—they did!

Erickson: Of course not.
Well, Ivan, how did you get then from Wisconsin. Did you come back to California?

Thomason: Typically, of course, when you graduate with a degree like Plant Pathology, you normally don't just hang out a shingle somewhere like you would if you had a medical degree or a law degree, and you are waiting and looking for jobs. There were a few jobs around at that time. Actually my training was in Plant Pathology and Plant Breeding, and the other firm job I had ... I was interviewed at Madison by USDA Cereal Pathologists. They had a job open in Aberdeen, Idaho, for a winter wheat breeder.

Erickson: Were you tempted?

Thomason: Ah ... It was specifically in the area I was trained. I would have been interested, and in fact, actually had filled out a form and written a letter accepting the job—except I hadn't put it in the mail. And then I was interested in your questions here, you asked when I was interviewed at Riverside. Well, the truth of the matter is I was never interviewed.

Erickson: Oh, no kidding.

Thomason: Things were quite different then.

Erickson: Well, that's true.

Thomason: Dr. Klotz, Chairman of the Department of Plant Pathology, here at the Citrus Experiment Station at that time just called on the phone to some people in Madison asking if they had somebody who would be interested in a job. And they asked me. This happened to be a job in the Department of Plant Pathology but working on nematodes. The extent of my knowledge about nematodes was that I had been to the field when I was working as a student employee in the Department of Plant Pathology. I had been to the field with Dr. Lysle Leach twice, once to look at nematodes on sugar beets and once to look at stem nematode on garlic in the Salinas area. That was the extent of my knowledge.

Erickson: Well, you knew what they looked like!

Thomason: I was certainly interested in California, and I was certainly interested in the University of California. In Plant Pathology, of course, we have diseases that are caused by viruses and bacteria and fungi and also nematodes, so, a lot of people have entered Plant Pathology and worked from one to the other, and I thought it would be interesting to at least attempt to get informed and interested in this particular group of pathogens. And, if I didn't, I felt I could move on to something else. So, rather than living in Aberdeen, Idaho, my inclination was to live in Riverside, California.

Erickson: Sounds like a good choice.

Thomason: It was interesting. They kept me dangling on the hook for some three or four weeks while they negotiated with a well-known Nematologist at Wageningen in the Netherlands, Dr. Wilhelm Seinhorst. Fortunately, he declined to come to California, and that's how I ended up here. So, I joined the department in March, the first of March in 1954. I didn't officially get my degree until June of 1954, and the University was much different in those days. I didn't negotiate over anything other than to find out what the salary was, and they restricted my employment to being a Laboratory Technician IV. They wouldn't even appoint me as a Junior Nematologist until I officially got my degree in June. So, July 1, I became a Junior Nematologist. Meanwhile, of course, they don't pay removal costs for technicians and that sort of stuff, so they never even paid my removal costs, and I missed several months credit for retirement in the retirement system, too. But one was very happy to have a job in those days, particularly one with the University of California, so we didn't fuss about those minor details. Nowadays, somebody with a degree, and particularly if they've got a year or two of post doc training will want to be at least a top level Assistant Professor if not an Associate Professor. So, things are a little different.

Erickson: So, that was April, 1954?

Thomason: March.

Erickson: What was it like here when you first came, because that was the same year that the campus was started. Can you describe the surroundings for me?

Thomason: Well, of course, the Experiment Station portion of the campus was pretty much like it is today. The lower campus, of course, was under construction—a good bit of it was under construction at the time. Just several buildings and, of course, the library was just a small, modest building at the time.

Erickson: Was it where it is now? The location?

Thomason: The library?

Erickson: Uh huh.

Thomason: Oh, yes. The brick portion on one end, and what I call Fort UCR, the large building was an appendage to the modest library of that time. And, of course, that was the only library on campus. There wasn't the Bio Ag Library or the Physical Science Library, so it was quite different. Now that isn't to say that the Experiment Station didn't have a library resource at the department. They did, but the only organized library at the time was the one for the College of Letters and Science.

Erickson: Would you explain a little about that process... You were hired by the University of California but specifically to the Agricultural Experiment Station. Is that correct?

Thomason: It was quite different. In fact, in a sense, they were quite separate organizations. That is, you had here the Citrus Experiment Station that had been in existence since 1907 and was perfectly capable and did operate primarily as an independent institution. And I was hired into the Department of Plant Pathology, and I specifically was housed in the so-called temporary building—one of those buildings brought in from March Air Force Base that sits right behind University Club. The rest of the Plant Pathology Department was in what would be the west wing of what is now the Gary Anderson School of Business Administration. That was a research building at that time. At that particular time, Dr. Batchelor was still the Director of the Experiment Station, and it was not uncommon for us to gather on one of the porches. Dr. Boyce and others (myself) and have a bag lunch there, kind of a rural scene I would say. Another thing not uncommon is that they would have a volleyball court down below by the Entomology greenhouses and a large group that gathered to play volley ball including Dr. Daniel Aldrich, who later became ... and as you know stood about 6'4" and weighed about 240 lbs. and was a fierce competitor. So, one had to be careful not to get in his way.

(laughter)

Erickson He was quite athletic, wasn't he?

Thomason: Yes, he was quite athletic. No question about that. So, it was a relaxed atmosphere in a sense; but on the other hand, those that were in the Experiment Station had a responsibility throughout Southern California. I came to work specifically on vegetable and field crops, even though it was called the Citrus Experiment Station. Their assignment had broadened considerably. And for years, of course, they had worked on walnuts, citrus, and then avocados were coming on strong. And then, of course, Southern California was leading the state in the production of ornamental plants, so people were involved in that, too.

Erickson: Do you know when that started? When they branched out into vegetables and the other areas you were discussing?

Thomason: Well, I would say that some work, certainly work on walnuts and some of the other tree crops probably was going on right until World War II started. One has to remember that up to World War II, Los Angeles had the largest agriculture gross income of any county in the state. You know, we see it as a paved-over area, but up until 1945, it was the Number 1 agriculture county in the state, which made it one of the Number 1 agriculture counties in the nation. And so it was quite a different place, and they did have large productions of vegetables of various kinds. Even in Orange County, when I came in 1954, we were still growing in large areas dry lima beans in Orange County in the 1950s. Again, most of that ...in the area right where Disneyland sits right now had experimental plots over there, that sort of thing. In fact, I mentioned Dr. Jim Kendrick. That's one of the crops he worked on when he came here right after World War II. He came in 1947, I believe, and he was working on dry lima beans. It's a good illustration of how a university works in that some of us were working on dry lima beans from a disease standpoint, but there was another fellow student of Jim Kendrick's at Wisconsin by the name of Bob Allard who joined the Agronomy Department at UC Davis.

Thomason: In fact, when he first taught the introductory agronomy course at Davis, I took it as a student. And it was interesting because Agronomy I had a reputation for one of those courses where you could make up your grade point average, but after Bob Allard started teaching, it was the last time anybody thought they were going to make up their grade point average in that course.

(laughter)

He was a real rough task master. And interestingly enough, he was assigned to do a breeding of a lima bean varieties, and he had that responsibility, but he chose to get into the basic genetics area in an area called population genetics and used it to become an authority in that field and is now a member of the National Academy of sciences and one of the world's best known Population Geneticists. So, he can move in a lot of different kinds of directions. Even within the Experiment Station, the people did not confine themselves to doing just applied research. In many cases, they were doing good basic research.

Erickson: Well, the Experiment Station then had this new entity to deal with—this liberal arts college. In your opinion, how was that ... was it an easy transition? Did they merge together easily?

Thomason: Initially, they didn't merge.

Erickson: They were still two separate entities?

Thomason: They were two separate entities. There was some responsibility that crossed lines, but essentially, there were two separate entities and there was no ... The College of Agriculture was not formed immediately, I don't believe.

Erickson: No, I agree. I think that was in about 1960.

Thomason: 1960.

Erickson: Provost Watkins was brought here from UCLA, and he was the head of both entities. Am I correct? You tell me.

Thomason: I suspect that there may be some technical responsibility there but I would say that the Citrus Experiment Station operated relatively independently up till the time that a College was formed.

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The Provost and some of the early administrators while they were planning the campus were actually housed in the Horticulture Building, and I sure got closely associated with the people responsible for the Citrus Experiment Station at that time. I would say they probably got off to a good start, and since initially the thrust of the liberal arts college was to be a small college primarily focused on undergraduate training, I don't see it as posing any great threat to the Citrus Experiment Station and that sort of thing. The fact that the Citrus Experiment Station was established and had some traditions, including having some things like having put up the Faculty Club and other kinds of things helped initially for those who were interested to participate in those kinds of activities.

If there was any concern, it arose later when there was a perception that there was a bigger need for certain people, particularly in the biological sciences to get more heavily involved in research, that there might have been some perception of competition. That is, promotions are based upon a certain notion of teaching, research and public service, and people were brought here as faculty members in the college with the notion that they were going to be dealing with a small liberal arts college with a primary emphasis on quality teaching of which they did a great deal of quality teaching as reflected in the number of students that went on to professional schools and graduate schools.

But then they were soon facing the fact that you had people who were primarily focused on research with considerable resources initially to do that, and another group of folks who

Thomason: were primarily focused on teaching and then being asked to display a research record. So, some conflict may have arisen there. I personally didn't see it. I think I may not reflect the Citrus Experiment Station as a whole, but at least for myself, our focus was primarily on research. We had specific responsibilities we were assigned for research projects, and we wanted to do it in the first place, and it was fun to do it, and the resources were there to do it, and we did it. Our days were essentially free of most committee responsibilities, we didn't have responsibilities for students early on.

Erickson: I was going to ask you that. Until the college was formed in 1960, you didn't have any graduate assistantships or anything... or *research assistantships*, I mean.

Thomason: No.

Erickson: It was totally your responsibility?

Thomason: Yes. The University fortunately at that time provided staff research associates, and so we had one or more, as many as four I believe. We did, in fact, hire undergraduate students to work in the greenhouse and that sort of thing. The undergraduate students, at that time, at least in Biology (and I think throughout the college) were required to do a senior thesis. I had at least one student. He was a local Riverside fellow, and he did a senior thesis with me and got excited about Plant Pathology and got his degree in Plant Pathology and is now on the faculty at the University of Idaho. So, we had those students around, and many of them were extraordinary students and willing workers. So, it was a pleasure having them.

Erickson: Well, let me go back to this academic issue again so I understand it. When did you become a member of the ladder rank faculty?

Thomason: Well, I am not certain of that, but it would have been somewhere around 1960 to '62.

Erickson: After the college was formed. Because your title before that was?

Thomason: You were either ... it started as a Junior Nematologist and after two years went to Assistant Nematologist in the Experiment Station. You didn't have ... you weren't Assistant Professor of anything.

Erickson: You weren't professor at all until the college was formed, and then you became a member of the Academic Senate?

Thomason: Yes. You didn't get that unless you actually were put onto what they called the I&R budget. In the Experiment Station, we were all on the OR budget, which is called the Organized Research budget.

Erickson: And what is IR?

Thomason: I&R is Instruction and Research. At the most, when I was dealing with graduate students and teaching courses, only fifteen percent of my salary came from the I&R budget. 85% of it came from the Experiment Station budget. At that time, we were all on the OR budget. Now that may not have been true of very few people. I am not sure of this, but there may have been a few people from the Experiment Station that early on taught in the college.

Erickson: Something like a biology course?

Thomason: Exactly. But there were very few.

Erickson: Ok. Well, when did you begin teaching, Ivan?

Thomason: Teaching? Well, even in the College of Agriculture, there were relatively few undergraduate students and relatively few undergraduate courses. There was a major... You could major in Entomology, but I don't think there was a major in Plant Pathology. Soils had undergraduate students—that sort of thing, but in Nematology, we didn't even have a degree in Nematology. There is still not a degree in Nematology. All the

Thomason: graduate students we had in Nematology were either taking a degree in Entomology, Plant Pathology and in a few cases Biology. So, the degree was actually in their department. The students had to take their minimum requirements and pass their exams and then do their research, take their courses in Nematology.

When the college was formed shortly thereafter, Dr. Sher—Dr. Samuel Sher and I—taught an introductory Nematology course called Principles of Nematology. Again, it was a graduate level course and we had quite a few students because, at that time, the Entomology graduate students had to take an outside minor, and some of them chose to take an outside minor in Nematology, which meant that they would have to take our course. Plant Pathology required a good many of their students to take the introductory Nematology course, and occasionally, we would have a student from Biology. If the student was an upper division undergraduate student and had a good course record, we allowed him to take the graduate course. So, it wasn't uncommon for us to have over twenty students in the class.

Erickson: Would you describe a typical day?

Thomason: A typical day on campus or a typical day in the field?

Erickson: Either one—or both.

Thomason: Well, it was interesting. On campus, we usually got started before eight o'clock. If we were teaching, of course, I always preferred to have the class first thing in the morning—8:00 a.m.—because that meant I got it out of the way. And, of course, typically in science courses, particularly biological science courses, you had lectures and then laboratories. Usually you would have two to three one-hour lectures a week and then two labs, which were three hour labs. So, there was always preparation for both the lectures and particularly materials for the labs. And, traditionally, we didn't turn the labs over to the graduate students. We had some help in preparing materials from the technicians but usually ran the

Thomason: labs ourselves, so that took up time. There was the interaction with technicians in terms of experiments, and in many cases, the experiments were hands on, so both the technicians and myself were working in the lab or the greenhouse putting things together. There were, early on, various assignments to committees. Even in the Experiment Station, we had committees that dealt with land allocation. We only had so much land, and people were needing land and other resources.

Erickson: To conduct their research?

Thomason: To conduct their research, yes. Because if you look down the Experiment Station, somebody's got so many acres tied up with trees and wanting them for various kinds of things. The Entomologists wanting them for pesticide studies and other land open—a modest amount of land probably less than one fourth of it was actually not in some perennial crops, and so the demand for open space of annual crops was always a problem.

Erickson: Where was your plot of land?

Thomason: Oh, I had land on the Station in several locations. In fact, they allowed us to actually infest one piece of ground, and interestingly enough, there is a graduate student from Germany, Andreas Westphal, who is using the piece of ground that we infested in the 1960s, I think.

Erickson: He's using it now?

Thomason: Now. But a lot of our experimental work went on in the field in grower's properties, all the way from Ventura County to San Diego County and San Diego County to El Centro. I can tell you about – this is a gross exaggeration, but my technician and I left one morning about 4 o'clock to go to San Diego to take care of some work we had to do down at San Ysidro. We got that done, and then we headed across the hill to El Centro to take care of some stuff at El Centro and then came back through the San Gorgonio Pass in a snow storm and got back here in time to go to a social at what was then the Faculty Club.

Erickson: That's quite a day!

Thomason: Right. We were much younger and more vigorous then. A lot of work was done in cooperation with farm advisors; growers, provided land, resources, equipment and those sort of things on a cooperative basis.

Erickson: How did you share the results of your experiments with the average farmer? Was it always through the farm advisors?

Thomason: Generally through the farm advisors, but sometimes directly. And the thing about it, if you know California growers, you are not dealing with unschooled and unintelligent individuals. They could handle research data without any difficulty whatever, and often, of course, provided great insights into the kinds of problems that were there and even possible solutions. So, generally, it was a great pleasure to work with them. I enjoyed that. Now, we also have, as you know, a series of branch stations—they call them Field Stations: one is South Coast Field Station in Orange County, right by El Toro; another one down at Holtville, in the Imperial Valley; others in the San Joaquin Valley; one that was up in the Lancaster area at one time in the High Desert. So, there was a wide range in the kinds of facilities.

Erickson: When was the Department of Nematology formed?

Thomason: Well, actually, it was formed shortly after I arrived. I started in Plant Pathology on March 1 of '54, but come July of 1954, they formed a separate Department of Nematology, but it was a statewide department. The department was actually chaired by Dr. D. J. Raski at UC Davis, and there were initially Nematologists located at Riverside, Berkeley and Davis, and we were a statewide department. The impetus for that was, of course, that our friend, W. B. Orton, here in 1926 said that we needed Nematologists with the Experiment Station. The so-called Western School of Nematology got started. Early on there was a USDA Nematologist by the name of Gerald Thorne who was located in Salt Lake City, Utah, and he trained a series of young people in Nematology. One of these is a man named

Thomason: Merlin Allen, who came to Berkeley and took a degree there. I am almost certain that his degree was in the Department of Plant Pathology at Berkeley, but when he finished up, they finally decided they were going to hire a Nematologist, ala Mr. Orton's suggestion, and the likely or the most reasonable place for it to be would have been in Plant Pathology, but they weren't enthusiastic about hiring him, so E. O. Essig in Entomology and Parasitology at Berkeley hired him on, and that essentially started the training in Nematology in the University. He took a series of students including Dr. D. J. Raski, who I mentioned; he was one of his students. Also Samuel Sher, S. A. Sher, who came to Riverside and several others. One was at Oregon and then Maggenti later went to Davis. They were all trained by Merlin Allen at Berkeley. Merlin Allen and Raski and others were active in Kern County because they had serious problems with root knot nematode on cotton, and they got acquainted with a man by the name of James or Jim Armstrong. I think Mr. Armstrong, perhaps, had been in the State Assembly. I am not certain of that, but in any case, he knew his was around, and he brought pressure to bear in Sacramento, and consequently from Sacramento to the University to get involved in nematode research. In his case, probably specifically, to get involved in nematode research on cotton. So, funds were appropriated and the department started. Now Merlin Allen was the logical person to be the Chair of this department, but Merlin Allen was a very conservative sort of person, and when he was a little show making up his mind whether he wanted to chair this, why the powers to be decided that perhaps D. J. Raski would be the logical chair, and that's what happened.

Erickson: Was he chair for a long time?

Thomason: Raski? *Five or six years.*

Erickson: Raski, uh huh.

Thomason: Well, he just retired from Davis some ten years ago, I guess, but he was still active until just the last year or so. He was always at his lab. I saw him recently in Davis at the memorial

Thomason: service they had for one of the extension specialists. So, he is still in good health and doing well.

Erickson: Well, did Mr. Allen stay on then?

Thomason: Allen stayed on at Berkeley for several years, and then they closed the Nematology group at Berkeley and moved them to Davis. It started here in Riverside actually in 1947, when Dr. Richard C. Baines was brought here in Plant Pathology to work on citrus decline. There was a major problem with citrus decline in California, and they put together I guess what you would call a task force for people to look at these problems.

Erickson: This was in the forties?

Thomason: This was in the forties. Dr. Jim Martin was brought into the Soils Department. Dr. Moje was brought in to look at certain aspects of it, and then the other folks that were here already, whether they were virologists... Dr. Klotz and Mr. DeWolfe were working on root rotting diseases of citrus. They were all looking at this problem, and part of it got to be a virus problem and, of course, fungi were involved. But the major culprit... Trees were going down and dying with viruses. Consequently, there was a need on the part of some of these growers to replant the citrus acreage, and when they did that ... put new trees back into the soil, they wouldn't grow well. They did very poorly, and so consequently, the push was to find out why they didn't do well. Dr. Baines was brought in to look at the nematode aspect of this. Interestingly enough, there was a man by the name of Smith who was a member of the Citrus Experiment Station staff back in the late '20s who had suggested that citrus nematodes were a problem, but he was essentially laughed out of the place because he said that citrus nematodes were a problem on citrus, but the trees looked beautiful. They were large trees, you know, and they had nematodes on them. At that time, of course, what they did was that the citrus trees or the nursery trees that were planted had nematodes on them, but they planted them in clean soil. Essentially, the trees sort of grew ahead of the nematodes.

Now, in the late 1940s, what they were doing is taking clean nursery trees and planting them

Thomason: in soil that was heavily infested with nematodes. So, they couldn't grow away from the nematode at all. In any case, Dr. Baines ... and there was a fortuitous circumstance as things have a habit of coming together. At this same time, the Shell Chemical Company and others had responded to a need by the pineapple industry in Hawaii. They were having a hard time with nematode problems on pineapple. Earlier on, they had experimented with chloropicrin, which you know is tear gas. Large quantities of it were available from WWI, and they tested it and found it worked well to control nematodes, but it was terribly nasty stuff to work with—corrosive and caused tearing and that sort of stuff. So, the chemical companies were asked to look for a similar sort of material that might be useful for controlling nematodes. Shell Chemical Company came up with a material, and it was called DD Mixture. It was a mixture of a couple of chemicals, and they actually were byproducts of the production of glycerin. This material (I was told, whether it's true or not ...) was normally just taken out and dumped into the Gulf of Mexico in the water. In any case, this mixture, which was a nasty mixture of several materials proved to be very, very efficient and relatively economical to control nematodes, first in Hawaii and then here in the Mainland of the United States. Dr. Baines was using that and demonstrated a remarkable response with trees to preplant soil treatment with this chemical DD. Then about that same time, Dow Chemical Company came up with a material called Ethylene dibromide, and it did a good job of controlling nematodes and/or wire worms. Wire worms were insect worms in soil that would attack the seeds of lima beans and other crops—sweet potatoes, white potatoes, those sorts of things. So, these materials came on the scene at about the same time, and they, in essence, clearly proved that nematodes were real problems. In other words, there were other *technical* people that understood that before, but any farmer or any layman could look and say there's cotton growing on nontreated soil and look at it over here and it's twice as big and the yields were twice as large. So, it made a very dramatic effect, and nematodes became real important throughout the world. So, anyway, Dr. Baines was here in '47

Thomason: and Skip Sher (Skip was his nickname) came in November of 1953. He had gotten his degree under Allen at Berkeley as I had mentioned and had worked in Hawaii for a short period of time and then worked in a laboratory for the Canadian government in Ottawa for a period of time and then moved to Riverside. His specialty was systematics and taxonomy. He was responsible for research on nematodes on ornamental crops, but primarily his interest was dealing with identification and description and naming of nematodes. And he was world class at this. I came (as I mentioned earlier) in March of '54, and the department was formed in July of '54. Dr. Baines was the Vice Chairman here at Riverside initially. Merlin was Vice Chair at Berkeley and Raski (as I mentioned) was the Chair at Davis. They had Raski and three other people at Davis, and Merlin at Berkeley plus his graduate students and then the three of us here at Riverside. So, that was it. We had, through Mr. Armstrong's efforts and others, a significant budget including some special funds appropriated for several years that made it possible for us to get off to a very good start. We were very well supported.

Erickson: Ivan, you wrote an article in 1973 that was in *INSIGHT* magazine. Would you talk about this?

Thomason: Can we correct that?

Erickson: Oh, yes.

Thomason: I gave a talk and a reporter from the magazine was there and he wrote the article and sent it to me for editing.

Erickson: Ok, I'm sorry.
In the article you mentioned that you have identified more than twenty five thousand species of nematodes.

Thomason: Now, we've got to be real careful of our language. You said, "You identified..." I didn't begin to identify twenty five In fact, I am not a taxonomist. Up to that time, the period was 1973, the general consensus was that there were some twenty five thousand nematodes that had been described by that time.

Thomason: Again, when we talk about nematodes, it is a very, very broad group including human parasites, animal parasites, a large number that are what they call “free living” that just live in soil or water. They feed on bacteria and fungi, and they feed on each other, and they feed on other microorganisms or small organisms in soil. So, there is a vast array of these and they run all the way from nematodes that would be, you know, a foot long to microscopic form. Most of them would be microscopic, but there are a number that would be quite long.

Erickson: My goodness.

Thomason: One that most of us have dealt with at one time or another is pinworms. Did your children ever have pinworms? That’s a nematode.

Erickson: Well, in this talk that you gave, you mentioned that we would probably not be able to eradicate nematodes. Is that still true today? Do you see any change?

Thomason: I think that it is probably better understood today than it was in 1973. One of the problems we had was the sort of notion that perhaps we could eradicate nematodes from properties, and in fact, we attempted to do it. In some cases where they were an introduced pest and in a very small locale, we went in with chemicals like methyl bromide and chloropicrin in large dosages and covered it with tarp, and in those few examples, we might have eradicated the nematode. But generally speaking, our efforts to “eradicate” nematodes in a citrus orchard with large volumes of chemicals were not successful. The few survivors built back up after five or ten years and still pose a problem. So, our philosophy began to change to one of just managing nematodes rather than eradicating nematodes and to get a better picture of what numbers meant, numbers of nematodes per unit of soil meant, in terms of the amount of damage they would do. So, then to manage the nematode either by chemicals or by crop rotations or other means and move the population down below a level at which they would do

Thomason: economic damage—an altogether different sort of philosophy than the one of eradication.

Erickson: And was biological control a possibility for nematodes?

Thomason: That brings up a good point. One of the other staff members who came on in the 1950s was Dr. Reinhold Mankau—Ron Mankau. That was his specific responsibility, to deal with attempts at biological control of nematodes. He, I would say, struggled with that area for years and was one of the pioneers in that area. And only in recent years, now that we lost most of our nematicides to environmental actions, as a possible environmental or human danger, there is a major upsurge in this whole area of biological control. There are some examples where biological control using nematodes have worked very effectively on the control of insects, some soil insects. But there haven't been any dramatic examples of biological control of nematodes. I should change that in the sense that some biological control is probably going on in all soils all the time, so that there are biological agents in there reducing the populations. They don't reduce them sufficiently to provide economic control unless it's used in conjunction with some other treatments, whether it's fallow periods or some inherent resistance in the plant.

Erickson: I see. Let's talk about the deans who you worked for. The first dean was Dr. Webber, is that correct?

Thomason: He wasn't dean, because, of course, there wasn't a college at that time.

Erickson: Oh, right. Thank you.

Thomason: He was the director—and that was Dr. Batchelor, not Webber. Webber is the person who was originally brought here early on when they first had the School of Tropical Agriculture here—or the Institute of Tropical Agriculture.

Erickson: Oh. Actually, I am not aware of that.

Thomason: The Institute of Tropical Agriculture. So, then students could come here and take their thesis work for their Ph.D. They were students at Berkeley or students at UCLA or whatnot who

Thomason: could come here and work with some faculty member here and do a thesis and then get a degree.

Erickson: Approximately what time period would that have been?

Thomason: I will put it between 1920 and I think the thing just died its natural death somewhere in the mid 1930s.

Erickson: Ok. So Dr. Webber was attached to that.

Thomason: Yes. Webber was brought here from Cornell to do that. His name is on Webber Hall and there is a picture of him on the first floor of Webber Hall.

Erickson: So, Batchelor was the first Director of the Citrus Experiment Station?

Thomason: No. I don't think so. I think Webber was here before Batchelor. It would have been Webber and then Batchelor. And Batchelor was just finishing his career when I arrived. If I am not mistaken, Boyce probably took over as Director. When I arrived in 1954, Boyce was the Chairman of the Department of Entomology. He was, as you know because of his history on the campus, was a very vigorous individual and had developed an incredible array of friends in the agricultural industry itself as well as within the university. I think it is fair to say that he knew every person in the university who made things happen.

Erickson: Umm. He was quite a man. And does Homer Chapman fit in there too?

Thomason: Well, Homer was the Chair of the Soils Department. Again, a person who had a broad range of knowledge of both the agriculture industry and the people in the university in the academic circle. I don't know whether it would have been the same level as Boyce's or not. They both, I am sure, would

Thomason: have been candidates for the Directorship of the Experiment Station.

Erickson: Maybe it was that he was Acting Director for a time. I thought that I had read that somewhere.

Thomason: Well, it's possible that when Boyce was gone, he would have been a logical candidate to be Director or Acting Director. Historically, the department chairmen were much stronger positions than they are now. Dr. Kendrick at Davis was Chair of the department for thirty three years. They used to laugh that people would come in and say that they had a job offer from Cornell or whatever. And he would look them straight in the eye and say, "When can we arrange the going-away party?"

Erickson: Oh. Goodness.

Thomason: They didn't scare very easy. And their attitude was that you were working for the best university there is, and if you could find something better, then perhaps you should go. I know of one specific instance where a person went and six months later came back to the university. I was surprised they let him in, but he was a very good man. But Dr. Kendrick had a reputation for no nonsense, and I think that would be fair to say for both Dr. Boyce and Dr. Chapman.

Erickson: No nonsense.

Thomason: No nonsense.

Erickson: Now, let's see. Was it when Dr. Boyce was the Director, is that when the transition occurred that ...

Thomason: In Nematology?

Erickson: Well, I was thinking of the College?

Thomason: Yes. He was the Director initially and then became Dean and Director. He had both those titles. That would have been true of Davis. A man that I knew there, Dr. Briggs, was the Dean of

Thomason: the College of Agriculture and also the Director of the Experiment Station. Now, in the case of Dr. Boyce, he had such a wide acquaintanceship in agriculture... When I say agriculture, one has to be careful not to pull the image of man with overalls with suspenders. We are talking about agriculture running all the gamut from that individual farmer up through the whole system of those farmers who were leaders of various farm organizations whether they were a citrus growers organization like Sunkist, including the professionals who ran those organizations. And not only the farmers who were the elected presidents of the organizations—California Cattlemen’s Association, on and on, the Beet Growers Association. But all the people who ran them or processors like the people who ran Holly Sugar Corporation or other major agriculture organizations, an endless number of people who influenced. Early on, up to the explosive growth of California and a lot of the real political power in California was in the rural area. I have heard it said, I don’t have specific evidence for this, but I have heard it said that if the university budget was having trouble in Sacramento, some people like Dr. Boyce just needed to get on the phone and call a few people, and things got shaken up. I think there was truth to that.

Erickson: Well, that’s power.
After Boyce, then was ...

Thomason: That would be Mack Dugger, yes.

Erickson: And he is retired now?

Thomason: Mack Dugger is retired now. I want to back up one minute to say one thing. Dr. Boyce prided himself on the way he operated, and he often would let you know that he was here at seven in the morning and didn’t leave until after everybody else had left. I was the department chairman between 1963 to 1969, and I don’t know how many times the phone rang at five minutes to eight, and he said, “I just need a little information ...” what he really wanted to let you know was that the shop had opened.

Erickson: He was on the job!

Thomason: Yeah, you'd better be there. (laughter)

Erickson: He was waiting for you. (laughter)

Thomason: Right. He was a remarkable man and did a great job in the sense that he knew where the buttons were to push and pushed very hard for agriculture research in general. I would say that was statewide and was certainly a great supporter of the Nematology Department.

Erickson: Good.

Thomason: Mack Dugger came through from the Air Pollution center if I am not mistaken. He came here to work in the Air Pollution Center and then moved over into the Biology Department. I don't know whether he moved there directly as the Chair but soon became the Chair of the Biology Department and then into the Dean's Office. By that time, there was a College of Agriculture and then moved into that Dean's position and then into the position of the Director of what was then changed to the Citrus Research Center and Agriculture Experiment Station. It was the recognition that there was more than just citrus here. You know, it was already clearly established that there was a broader picture, and in fact, it covered almost all plant sciences. The only clear thing they did was to stay away from animal sciences. That was a clear demarcation that Davis was the campus that would deal with animal science. Now, having said that, there were people here in Entomology who did a tremendous amount of work in pest control in poultry and dairies and that sort of thing. They dealt with flies and those kinds of problems.

End of Tape 1

There was a gentlemen's agreement that that would be handled at UC Davis. There was also a general understanding that Riverside was responsible for plant science in Southern California and that might include Kern County. That didn't

Thomason: mean that people didn't do work further north, particularly in the area of citrus, which of course, began to move from Southern California to the San Joaquin Valley. But generally there was that sort of understanding. And that was interesting in the sense that if you looked at the early records, over half of the gross income from agriculture was generated from Fresno south. But two thirds of the research scientists in the Experiment Station were in Berkeley and Davis, so Riverside was certainly carrying its share of the burden, particularly relative to the gross income from agriculture. Part of that was colored by the fact that both dairy production and poultry production were major items in Southern California. So, Riverside did quite well.

Erickson: Am I correct then that the next person was Irwin Sherman?

Thomason: Yes. Irwin Sherman, of course, came out of the Biology Department. He is a Parasitologist. We have, in Nematology, and have had for years a Parasitologist by the name of Dr. Ed Platzer. He and Irwin Sherman have shared the teaching of the introductory course in Parasitology for many years. And of course, that is the one of the primary courses that the Pre-Med students would have to take. Both are excellent teachers, and Sherman's research area has been on the malaria mosquito. He has received a lot of support from the national level for that research. He has always had a very strong research program. I would say that he has a reasonable understanding of agriculture.

Mack Dugger has a good understanding of agriculture but was never enthusiastic about working closely with the agricultural industry as Dr. Boyce was. It was part and parcel of Dr. Boyce's total being that he worked closely with them. Mack Dugger had an Associate Director, Lowell Lewis, who came out of the Plant Science Department, Horticulture originally, and he had an agriculture background and he carried that load for Mack Dugger.

Erickson: Next was Seymour Van Gundy?

Thomason: Yes. I guess that's it. I hadn't thought of that. Of course, Seymour, early on had administrative experience as a Vice Chancellor. At that time they called it the Vice Chancellor for

Thomason: Research. He was in that position for, I think it could have been a year to two. I think originally that position might have been filled by Robert Metcalf.

Erickson: Oh.

Thomason: You know that name?

Erickson: Yes, I do.

Thomason: Then he left to go to Urbana, Illinois. Part of that was related to the fact that his father, Metcalf Sr., was the head of Entomology at Urbana for many, many years. So, Van, took that over and they changed that and put the responsibility in the Graduate ... Dean of the Graduate Divisions Office—something like that. But Van is part of ... if you will pardon the expression—part of the Wisconsin Mafia. Do you know the Wisconsin Mafia?

Erickson: No.

Thomason: Can you name them?

Erickson: No, I can't, but I did know that Van went to Wisconsin. It's a wonderful school, isn't it?

Thomason: Well, at that time when most of us were there, it was probably considered the best school for Plant Pathology in the nation. There were three Plant Pathologists in the National Academy of Sciences then, and they had two of them at Wisconsin. When I was there, I don't know how many graduate students there were, something in the neighborhood of forty or fifty Ph.D. students in Plant Pathology. I know my major professor had ten of them at one time when I was there.

Erickson: How many members of the Mafia are there?

Thomason: Well, early on Jim Kendrick was a Wisconsin graduate and Clair Calavan.

Erickson: Oh. Retired also.

Thomason: Yes. Then more recently ... Oh, and interestingly enough, Bill Bitters ... do you know that name?

Erickson: No.

Thomason: He was a Horticulturist here and worked on citrus and citrus root stock, but he actually took his degree in Plant Pathology at Wisconsin. At one time all of us: Al Paulus, Lou Weathers, myself, Pete Tsao, Van Gundy, were all at Wisconsin at the same time and then came here. So it was affectionately referred to as The Mafia.

(laughter)

Now that I think about it, I think Noel Keen, too.

Erickson: Really.

Thomason: In any case, Van had experience as an administrator and as the Vice Chancellor for Research and then was Chair of the Department of Nematology for ... I am sure over ten years and then went into the deanship. And he had the right name for it. His name is Seymour Dean Van Gundy. His mother was pre science ... or what's the word?

Erickson: Prescient.

Thomason: That's the right word. (laughter)

Erickson: That's cute. Let's see. And then we are presently with Mike Clegg.

Thomason: Mike Clegg. I don't know whether you know or not, Mike Clegg is a second generation university. His father was on the Davis campus, and Mike Clegg grew up in good old Davisville,

Thomason: my hometown. He was in the Marines for a while. He looks like a Marine. I heard him give a seminar the other day about management problems in agriculture, and I thought he did an extraordinary job.

One of the things I do want to say is that there is a perception that the sort of conflict between different colleges and resources. And what has happened, of course, is that in a sense, agriculture has been almost too successful. If you will recall, Henry Kissinger came back from Rome in 1973, and the sky was falling, right? We were all going to starve to death. What is it...twenty five years later, and one of the real problems of the world, and certainly the United States, is that food is running out our ears. In my opinion, in fact I wrote a letter. I saw something in a newsletter of the International Society of Plant Pathology saying they had another meeting in Rome and it was the same sort of thing, that we were all going to starve to death. It is certainly true that the population is exploding, but there's a million acres of wine grapes in Italy, and there's a million acres of wine grapes in France, and probably close to a million acres in California or at least some six hundred thousand, also in Chile and other places around the world. Most of that acreage would grow something else. If you gave up your glass of wine and I gave up my glass of wine ... I don't know how many thousands of acres around the world there are of tobacco, but at one time there were four hundred thousand acres of tobacco in North Carolina alone and that could grow something. Have you been in the Midwest lately?

Erickson: Last Christmas.

Thomason: And what do you see? I mean all these houses on the countryside now with five to ten acres of grass around them. Does that make an impression on you? Have you ever been to China? I've never been to China, but I have been to Taiwan, and the average farm size there is three or four acres. The average farm size, not the three or four acres of grass. If they were here, they would have cabbages and half a dozen other things growing on those lawns, you see. All I am trying to say

Thomason: is that there are all these “set asides.” My brother in law had twenty acres of ground that the government was paying him not to grow anything on and that sort of thing. So, agriculture has been incredibly successful; consequently, it is very difficult to get legislators to get very excited about putting more money into agriculture research. Consequently, the budgets of the Experiment Station, not only in California but throughout the nation, have been shrinking. So, that has posed some problems. When you see these resources being moved about, people get exorcised and that sort of thing.

Erickson: Do you see it as competition with another area within the university when another department or another program is new and maybe getting a little more attention, do you see that as taking money away from agriculture?

Thomason: Well, it’s a truism probably in any university in the nation, any one of the fifty land-grant universities, that the pecking order is medical schools. We are all concerned about what is happening, and we are all subject to getting cancer or whatever. And so, when they make noise, they get money. Then the next one is law schools, even though we have more law schools and more lawyers than we know what to do with. Riverside is dying to have a law school ...

Erickson: Yes, they are.

Thomason: ... and they will have a pecking order higher than anything but medicine. And it just bumps down that way. Within the Experiment Station, there was a pecking order, and Nematology was at the bottom.

Erickson: Really.

Thomason: Well, we were the new kid on the block and a small department. We were nicely housed on the first floor of Webber Hall West, the old original Webber Hall. But when Bio-Med wanted that, guess who moved, and moved in a hurry?

Erickson: They were No. 1?

Thomason: So, there are these kinds of pecking orders, and they are the reality of life. I mean you can get all excited about it, and you can say that the one true thing you can depend upon is change.

Erickson: Very true.

Thomason: And if you are willing to deal with that reality, no problem. My reaction is that the University of California was the most incredible organization ... it's like getting paid for what you like to do. It's like being a basketball player and loving to play basketball and getting paid for it. Being in the university was that was my sort of view of the world.

Erickson: When did you retire?

Thomason: 1989. Just before VERIP.

(laughter)

Erickson: Oh, I was just going to ask that. Oh, dear. If you had only known.

Thomason: Yes. Well, I didn't know it, although it's interesting that I was the Chair of the statewide Welfare Committee the last few years before I retired, and it was kept pretty quiet. There wasn't a lot of noise about it, and interestingly enough, in the Welfare Committee, we knew that the average age of retirement with faculty members was 62.

Erickson: How interesting.

Thomason: It's biased by the fact that medical doctors and medical faculty leave early. They can just go right out into a practice. Lawyers tend to leave early because they can go right out into practice. Some people in business schools can move right into a very good job. So, it is distorted by those people who leave at an early age, even earlier than 60.

Erickson: Why did you decide to retire?

Thomason: Well, I had thirty five years in, and I wanted to have more freedom of motion.

Erickson: Do something different.

Thomason: Yes. You know, my wife said my real problem is that I never learned to say “no.” And so, you are on different committees and that sort of thing. And it wears on you after a while.

Erickson: Well, one of those committees ... not committee but organization ... is the Retirees Association. You were chair of that? When was that?

Thomason: Well, I am not absolutely sure, but it would have been '89 to '91 or something like that. I was glad to do that. There are some folks here that did a very good job with it early on. And then fortunately, there were some other folks that saw it as a vehicle for benefiting the retirees vis-à-vis the university, and they formed CUCEA, which is the Council of University of California Emeriti Association. So, there is a group that represents all nine campuses, and in that association, there is more strength than just any individual campus.

Campuses differ considerably in how they view Emeriti. UCLA and former Chancellor at UCLA and graduate of UC Riverside, Charles Young, saw the Emeriti in a very positive way and actually provided university monies to hire a coordinator, a woman who does a fantastic job. They had an office there and all kinds of things. But he saw the Emeriti as a real resource and wanted to look at it in terms of distinguished Emeriti like John Moore, who still works on a daily basis and does incredible things. And there are other people like that. That would be former Dean Sherman who comes in on a regular basis and still does research. He is still a young man yet.

The other aspect of that is ... I always remember that there was a man named Claude Fawcett who was active in the Emeriti

Thomason: Association from UCLA, and he said one time when they were concerned about the kinds of benefits that faculty and Emeriti were getting, the survey of the investment income and other things of Emeriti...the one thing they learned is that they couldn't use poverty as a leverage ...

(laughter)

Thomason: for anything. In general, they were incredible stewards of money. That only brings me up to the point that you are very familiar with is that a positive attitude toward Emeriti might lead to a positive attitude of Emeriti toward their campus that they were either a student with or associated with, that sort of thing.

Erickson: Here on the Riverside campus, the Retiree Association is handled by the office of the Executive Vice Chancellor. Is that correct?

Thomason: I am really not certain. The only thing when I was Chair of the Emeriti is that the Chancellor's office did provide secretarial service and mailing service, that sort of thing. So, they were good in that way.

Erickson: You are our treasures, so we want to take good care of you.

Thomason: (laughter) Right.

Erickson: Absolutely.
I was going to ask you another question about what you like to do in these retirement years?

Thomason: Well, I have always enjoyed reading and unfortunately I have always been interested in history and political science, so I waste too much of my time following that sort of thing in newspapers and/or reading books. I am just finishing a book by a professor at Berkeley on the history of China during the Mao Zedong period.

Thomason: I am an avid bird watcher. I like birding and I like the fact that you can't see all the birds of the world from Riverside, so that means one must travel. And I do like travelling.

Erickson: Where have you gone?

Thomason: Well, I have been to Australia recently. I usually use some scientific meeting as an excuse to go there. I have been to South Africa and, of course, I have a former student from South Africa who is very close to the Kruger National Park, and he and his wife toured me through Kruger for several days and we had a great time. There were some other Nematologists—"worm types" we call them over there. One fellow, Juan Heyns, who happens to be a Wisconsin-Mafia type. He and his wife are real enthusiastic birders, so we did some birding at the meeting. It was right on the edge of the Kruger National Park. And then I have been to South America, but I am hoping to go there again. This fall, they are having some meetings down in Argentina. And I have a former student down there, so I may go down and see him and a few Argentine birds.

Erickson: That would be wonderful. Very colorful.

Thomason: My wife and I just got back from over in the southeast corner of Arizona, which is a birding hot spot over there in the Chiricahua Mountains. And then the other thing I am interested in is woodworking. I have built myself a woodworking shop since I retired. I am a would-be "woodbutcher" and also do some bird carving. I belong to a group that meets on Thursday nights and carves birds.

Erickson: What kind of wood do you like to use?

Thomason: One of the standard woods for carving is basswood. It comes from the Linden tree. And then there is another one that is used commonly: tupelo. It's a tree that grows in swampy areas, and the buttress part of the stem is used for carving. And then some carvers, and I am interested in that aspect, just use natural woods that have good colors and don't paint the birds, but just carve them in the natural wood colors.

Erickson: You don't stain them?

Thomason: Well, there are two ways to go. One is where they do elaborate painting. Some of them, of course, do a realistic sort of bird.

Thomason: They look like they fly away, and they do all the details of all the feathers and that sort of thing, and elaborate paint. I am not interested in that. I have done what they call "smoothies" in which you just paint and then attempt to paint some impression of the feathers. But I guess my preference would be to just do them more abstract in natural woods of various kinds, that sort of thing.

Erickson: I see. I'd just like to ask you one more question about the campus and the special sense of pride that the early faculty has. I think that's the thing that I admire most about the early faculty, is that you really have endeared yourself to the campus and hold it in your heart it seems. Can you describe that?

Thomason: Well, I thought about that, and I wrote something down. It may not be very good, but I think that generally it was a commitment to a great university and a desire for Riverside to compete effectively with any of the campuses in the system.

And if, in agriculture, to particularly compete effectively with the University of California at Berkeley and the University of California at Davis, this was reflected first and foremost in the quality of the undergraduate students turned out and then the graduate students attracted and trained.

Many of our faculty—examples would be Dan Aldrich and Jim Kendrick—went on to important positions in the University of California and many other institutions. In general, we had pride in the quality of our teaching, research and public and professional service. Many of us have served as presidents of our professional associations, that sort of thing. We have done work for various kinds of governmental investigations.

One of the things that is done—we are required within land grant universities, particularly in agricultural, those receiving

Thomason: funds from the Federal government in agriculture, have to have the departments reviewed every five years by outside review teams. You probably are familiar with that. I have served on those kinds of committees at Cornell and Texas, Arizona and other places. I have twice been on aide-sponsored investigations of pest management, once in Egypt and another time in Southeast Asia, so I think everybody I know feels strongly that they need to contribute to that sort of thing.

Finally, I think we would not accept the notion that size alone dictated the quality of the work done by the students or the faculty and staff. We have clear examples of that in terms of the people I know, specifically like George Zentmyer and Noel Keen in Plant Pathology, who are members of the National Academy of Sciences. John Moore, distinguished professor of Biology, who was a member of the National Academy of Sciences. We had and have had outstanding people in Chemistry, Physics, Math, Humanities and Social Science and in Physical Education. To use one last example, the campus was blessed by people like Dr. Franklin Lindeburg, who I think is a first-class gentleman. So, that's it.

Erickson: Thank you very much.

End of Interview

(Text printed in *italics* indicates edited portion).