

STOCKTONSpeaks!

PAMELA SALMON

If there is anything fifty-five year old Pamela Salmon wants her children and grandchildren to know, it's that farming off the land is a wonderful way to bring families together and to feel closer to the earth. Some may think of it only as a business, but to her it is much more. While farming is not necessarily lucrative, it has special rewards that cannot be measured in dollars and cents.

While she was growing up, Pamela's entire family—her parents, siblings, and herself—worked together in the orchards that her family farmed, cultivating the soil, pruning the trees, irrigating the rows, harvesting the fruits of their labor. And the next season, you started the process all over again. Pamela and her family developed a special relationship with the land as well as with each other, through their experiences on the family's farm. This farm not only provided them with sustenance; it really made them a *family*.

Whether working on the farm or undertaking any other challenge, Pamela was always a hard worker. Farming was not the easiest way of life, but Pamela kept at it. She was the oldest child in her family, and that meant that oftentimes she was looked to by her parents as well as others outside the family as the leader of her siblings. It also meant that sometimes she was able to exercise her own initiative, as when she decided to help with the bookkeeping in the family business.

Working closely with her parents, observing what needed to be done, and then carrying out those chores helped her learn many aspects of farming and what is involved in agriculture. She learned those lessons well and transmitted that understanding to her sisters, so they too would be comfortable and knowledgeable about farming.

Pamela's grandparents were an active influence on her when she was growing up. They came to America from Italy in 1905, bringing with them their Roman Catholic faith and belief in God. It was a religion to which the family subscribed and was an important part of her upbringing. Her Italian

grandparents strongly influenced her faith and active relationship with God. She remembers attending Catholic mass regularly and studying religion as a child, a practice she continues to this day.

In Pamela's view, the crucial aspects of her family background and culture are family love and interaction, praising God for his blessings, and hard work in business. She remembers being told to "work hard, be honest, and keep your sense of humor."

Pamela has always considered herself to be part of Italian culture. She is well-grounded in Italian customs and traditions; her parents and grandparents teach Italian culture to foster an understanding and appreciation their background among descendants of Italians and other nationalities alike.

After World War II, however, Pamela's parents insisted that English be the primary language spoken within the home. They felt that in order to be accepted socially, their family would need to speak English. Pamela's parents often remind her of the differences between her upbringing and theirs. They spoke of the simple lunches they used to make to take to school, which consisted of just panini (a type of bread) and meat.

Pamela's parents always knew their oldest daughter was a capable person. They thought highly of her and believed she could succeed in whatever she wanted to do. Pamela always believed she would continue working on her family farm into her adult life. Her parents, however, had a different plan for her. They both encouraged Pamela to go to college and get an education.

When she left for college at California State University, Sacramento, Pamela was at first apprehensive. Her father supported Pamela by pushing her, giving her the confidence to trust in herself and her own abilities as a woman.

She was surprised to find her entire frame of mind changing. Once she broke out of her family's comfort zone and was on her own, she began feeling like an adult. When her college career began, she found that she not only started to feel mature, but also her parents began to treat her as an adult.

In addition to changing how she viewed herself, college helped Pamela find her life's work. She decided she should become an educator of children, a

career that had its roots in her experiences on the family farm, but was not directly related to agriculture. She was always leading and educating her sisters, setting the example and teaching them by role modeling and by instruction. It felt natural for her to make teaching her life's work.

Pamela feels her greatest joy was the birth of her daughter, Katie. Thirteen years before Katie's birth, Pam suffered a ruptured appendix, and the ensuing problems led her doctor to tell her she would never be able to bear children. It was a devastating message for the young woman, but Pamela never doubted her doctor's words. She prepared herself for a life without a child of her own. Imagine Pamela's surprise and delight when she found she was pregnant!

Giving birth was a momentous and heartwarming experience for Pamela. The birth of her own daughter was particularly fulfilling for a woman who had carefully nurtured her siblings and her pupils. She had been with children all her life, and now she finally would have her own child to love and cherish. As a mother, Pamela has finally entered the adult world.

Interviewer: Kimi Yamamoto

Author: Chris Bauer

Ethnic Group: Italian

Generation: Middle