Witness: Robert Thompson, Jr.

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Called by: Defense

Phase: Penalty

Examinations: Direct – Pat Harris; Cross – David Harris

Day 1 of 1 for this witness

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Direct Examination by Pat Harris

P. HARRIS: Good morning, Professor.

THOMPSON: Good morning.

P. HARRIS: Briefly on your background, where did you grow up?

THOMPSON: I grew up in Santa Maria, California.

P. HARRIS: Did you grow up on a farm?

THOMPSON: Yes.

P. HARRIS: You still live there?

THOMPSON: I still live on that farm. My parents are very generous and they gave each of us three kids ten acres to build a house on so we split that land off and all three of the kids still own the farm and my parents are still alive.

P. HARRIS: At some point in your life did you start teaching?

THOMPSON: Yes. I started teaching in 1978. I was farming during the 70s for seven or eight years and didn't make a lot of money and didn't get along with my brother too well, you know, business relationship. We get along fine now. So I quit, went up and saw my old department head at Cal Poly and said, asked him if he heard of any farm management jobs and he said why don't you apply for the teaching job we have open.

P. HARRIS: What year was that?

THOMPSON: 1978.

P. HARRIS: And you've been teaching ever since?

THOMPSON: Mostly. I did quit right after the first year, but went back to farming. I was too nervous I think to teach. But I learned to like it a lot better, I regretted my decision of quitting, and luckily they called me back and asked me to teach back in like '80 or '81 and I've been with it ever since then.

P. HARRIS: And what you do teach?

THOMPSON: I teach in the ag business department. I teach agricultural economics, agricultural finance, agricultural lending and, we put "ag" in front of everything. Agricultural managerial accounting.

P. HARRIS: And I don't know if I made this clear, this is at Cal?

THOMPSON: At Cal Poly, yes.

P. HARRIS: At some point during your career did you have a chance to have in your class Laci and Scott Peterson?

THOMPSON: Yes, Scott and Laci were both in my agricultural economics class at the same time in the spring quarter of 1996.

P. HARRIS: Was that the only class you had with them you taught them?

THOMPSON: Yes, either of them never took another class from me. And I don't know why.

P. HARRIS: I asked you I think last night if you had a chance, if you ever had a chance to actually pull Scott's transcript and look at his grades. What kind of student was he?

THOMPSON: Well, in my class Scott was a very good student. He got A's on both the midterm, he got an A on the final, certainly got an A in the class. We do have kind of a computer program where we can look at grades and I noticed that just wondering if he did as well in other classes, although, other teachers, you know, would say good things about him, and I imagined he did. I did look up his grades and he had a 3.38 GPA coming out of Cal Poly. That's like an A minus, B plus average. He was on the dean's list three times and he was a member of Alpha Zeta, which is a club I advised, which is an honor at a fraternity for excellence.

P. HARRIS: Did you become aware later on that he was actually also working while he was going to school?

THOMPSON: Yes, with the crating business. I didn't realize he was a waiter, but with the crating business and at the golf course.

P. HARRIS: At one point I think when you were interviewed you said that you had approximately 10,000 students over the last few years or so?

THOMPSON: Yes, I figured I had that many.

P. HARRIS: And Scott Peterson stands out in your mind; is that right?

THOMPSON: Yes. I don't always form social relationships with my students. I welcome it if it happens. I try to be friendly, but they also have to be outgoing and friendly and Scott and Laci certainly both were. And I think after, probably after I had them in class they invited me over to their house for dinner. Before that I probably talked to them in class and seen them in the hall, maybe they came by my office, but it was very nice to be asked to their house for dinner.

P. HARRIS: And did that end up starting a social relationship then with both Laci and Scott for a period of time?

THOMPSON: Yes. Yes. I must have been to their house for dinner four or five times. Scott and I would play golf maybe four or five times. I once went with Scott and Laci to a minor league baseball game for the local San Luis Obispo team. And since they moved to Modesto Scott has, the last time I probably saw Laci is when they came back to San Luis Obispo after they had already moved to take care of some business or something. We went out to dinner, had a very nice time. But Scott has called me and visited me on his business travels and stayed at my house in my guest room since they moved to Modesto.

P. HARRIS: What was, what was it that struck you about them as a couple as far as just their personality, what they were like, when you went over to their home for dinner, what was sort of it like?

THOMPSON: It's like everybody had said, they were both very friendly, very outgoing, polite, fun. They were fun people. Lots of laughing and joking. Just, you know, I don't make it a point to ask people to my house for dinner, students, I'm not sure that's appropriate or even to go out and get a beer, but they made the effort to contact me.

P. HARRIS: And did you appreciate that?

THOMPSON: Oh, yes, very much.

P. HARRIS: They seemed to be interested in a lot of different things?

THOMPSON: Yes, and they both had different interests and they, you know, they took interest in what was going on in school, you know, Scott with his golf, Laci with her cooking, their traveling, their families. They were easy to talk to and good company.

P. HARRIS: Let me talk to you about what as you got to know Scott and got to deal with him later on some of the characteristics or the attributes that you talked about. First of all, you told me he was kind and thoughtful?

THOMPSON: Yes, I think that's the thing I remember the most. He was kind enough to stay in touch, and not all students do that. He would call me, he would come by and visit and we'd just, you know, talk, we'd go out to dinner. It's just, and even while he was still a student he was kind enough to drop by the office. I remember once the first time I went to their house for dinner Laci was in the kitchen cooking. It was that little 800, 400 square foot house and Laci was cooking and Scott had chilled a large martini glass. I'm not a huge drinker, but it was a hard day at work and it was just a wonderful gesture. It was one of the best martinis I've ever had.

P. HARRIS: Were those the kind of things he did sort of frequently?

THOMPSON: Yes, when we played golf he'd remember to bring along cigars. I'm lucky to break 150. I'm the worse golfer ever and he didn't make me feel self conscious. In fact, maybe I learned from him to just enjoy the game because that's what we did when we went out there. He never made me feel like I was holding things back or,

P. HARRIS: I'll read you a quote and you tell me if this sums it up: Did you once tell us, I don't think about, I don't think about doing anything for other people the way that Scott did?

THOMPSON: Yes.

P. HARRIS: Is that accurate?

THOMPSON: Yeah, I only had them over to my house one time and I don't usually make the phone call to invite people, but he would always, and it was welcome on my part. I mean, I enjoyed keeping in touch with a former student.

P. HARRIS: Was he different from other students in certain ways?

THOMPSON: Yes, he was very intelligent, bright, but confident and able, productive. He seemed more mature at the time. He seemed more focused, like he was fully formed, like he was well raised and well rounded. The kind of student that sticks out. You know, with 10,000 students over the years you see a sea of faces, but he's one of the few that stuck out as rememberable.

P. HARRIS: You say he took on an interest, was there anything to be gained by after he got out of school about continuing the friendship, anything he'd personally gain from you?

THOMPSON: No. No, just friendship.

P. HARRIS: Did he seem to be genuine about the friendship?

THOMPSON: Oh, yes. Yes.

P. HARRIS: Did you ever hear others, you had a chance to be around other students, other teachers, did you ever hear anybody, anyone say anything negative about Scott?

THOMPSON: No. I'm sure there's three or four other teachers that can be here just like me. They probably just didn't have as much of a friendship with him. But he continued to support the department in the fact that we have a class called marketing communications. And I know on two occasions he was their client in this class where they do a marketing campaign and it takes

a lot of effort from the business, but they actually use a real world business and develop thorough marketing campaigns. And I think they did it for The Shack and I think they did it for one of his fertilizer or irrigation businesses that he was managing. And I've to talked to that teacher and she has wonderful things to say and so do some others.

P. HARRIS: I asked you last night when we talked briefly that there was an image, there's been an image portrayed of Scott as someone who only cares about himself. Do you find that accurate?

THOMPSON: No, no, no.

P. HARRIS: Why?

THOMPSON: Well, from what I said, I mean, he's thoughtful enough to make that martini, thoughtful enough to bring cigars, thoughtful enough to call me. He, when you talked to him, I was thinking just recently, would always try to find the good in people, would always say nice things.

P. HARRIS: Did you ever hear him say negative things about others?

THOMPSON: No.

P. HARRIS: Is this the kind of student you enjoyed having?

THOMPSON: Oh, yes. I wish I had more of them.

P. HARRIS: Did he make you feel good about being a teacher?

THOMPSON: Yes.

P. HARRIS: You got to see Scott after Laci's disappearance. You had a chance to see him at least what one occasion, two occasions?

THOMPSON: Two.

P. HARRIS: At that time where was he living?

THOMPSON: Well, I think he was on the road a lot. I don't know how much time he spent in the house in Modesto. He stayed, one of those two occasions he said at my house and he was on his way down to be with his parents in San Diego. He also mentioned staying with a half sister or something up in the Bay Area, but he was kind of living a nomadic life, I got the impression.

P. HARRIS: I know that you continued since Scott's arrest, you continued to have a writing relationship; is that right?

THOMPSON: Yes, we've exchanged letters.

P. HARRIS: You've exchanged letters?

THOMPSON: (Nods head.)

P. HARRIS: Do you continue to do that to this day?

THOMPSON: Yes.

P. HARRIS: When you get the letters, what are they like?

THOMPSON: Well, they're like Scott. I mean, it's amazing to me how he could still be himself and try to show interest in me and my problems. And the first letters he would talk about missing Laci and how horrible the experience was. And the later letters he's, I have a condition called Meniere's disease. He shows a lot of interest and concern in my Meniere's disease. And we talk about, we write about books we've both read.

P. HARRIS: Do you feel like, given what you know about Scott and given from the letters you've seen, do you feel like he could still have a positive contribution in other peoples' lives?

THOMPSON: Yes, he's always been a productive person. A person who tries to do good. I think he could still do that.

P. HARRIS: Do you think he could have a positive contribution in your life still?

THOMPSON: Oh, yes. Yes.

P. HARRIS: You look forward to the letters?

THOMPSON: Hm-hmm.

P. HARRIS: If given the opportunity would you like to visit with him?

THOMPSON: Yes. Yes. I would feel a certain amount of guilt that I haven't made an effort in the last two years to visit.

P. HARRIS: You've seen him interact with others and sort of deal with students, do you think he could also be a positive influence even in jail?

THOMPSON: Yes.

P. HARRIS: Do you feel like he has that kind of a personality?

THOMPSON: Hm-hmm.

P. HARRIS: Ultimately, how would you feel about the question that we're here about, whether or not Scott should be executed, how would you feel if he was executed?

THOMPSON: Oh, I'd feel horrible. It would be a, like somebody just ripped out my heart.

P. HARRIS: That's all I have. Judge Delucchi: Any questions? D. HARRIS: Yes, just briefly.

Cross Examination by David Harris

D. HARRIS: Professor,

JUDGE: Wait, Wait, Professor, he's going to ask you some questions.

D. HARRIS: You were describing for us the relationship that you developed with Laci and Scott, bringing students into social, how has Laci's murder affected you?

THOMPSON: Well, I've been grieving ever since. I was close to Laci and she was such a, as everybody says, warm, just lit from within type of person and so I miss her terribly. At the beginning of all this, like everyone, I had my doubts, but I, about could Scott do such a thing and I just had to go with what I know. I have eight years of experience with this fine young man. I have to believe what I've seen, not what I see in the media. Yes, I'm still grieving for Laci.

D. HARRIS: Thank you. The People have no other questions.