

## **MARK THOMAS PRODUCT Vera Productions Ltd**

### **Broadcast 13 January 2000, Channel 4, UK.**

**Mark Thomas:** Hiya .. Tonight's show is really two stories that sort of wind in together. We started by going back to Nestle. If you remember in the last series we went, we sort of chased Nestle around a bit, over the issue of baby milk powder. Because there is a problem with baby milk powder and I'm sure your all aware and you're go

*"Yeah Mark, the dealers are cutting it into the coke, its not a good mix man..."*

And, there is a problem because in the developing world, if you live near contaminated water, if you misuse the product, it could result in infant mortality. And the World Health Organisation believe that if you can reverse the downward trend of breastfeeding you could save 1.5 million children's lives a year. So, it's quite an important thing. And one of the BASIC things here, is to get the information on the packages in languages that people understand. And what we found was that in Malawi they hadn't done it, in South Africa they hadn't done it, in Pakistan there's problems, and we didn't really get answers that were satisfactory, as to why they were doing it. The main question we were saying is, how come you can print three languages on packages in Switzerland - French, Italian and German - in South Africa, just English, no Zulu, no Zhosa, no Afrikaans? How can you do it in Switzerland and but not in South Africa?

Then, we got invited out to Barcelona, to this News World Conference. Which is this International Conference of news gatherers, and investigative journalists and for some reason we'd been asked to give a key note speech.

*Laughter*

In front of all these sort of real sort hard-nosed investigative journalists. So, we get up on stage and I start talking, talk through what we do. And I thought, while we're here, we've got 250 journalists in the room. Lets use them.

*Laughter*

### **News World Conference, 2-5 November 1999, Barcelona**

#### **Mark Thomas voice of to Hans-Jorg Renk, Assistant Vice-President, Press and Information, Nestle S.A:**

*"...I'm standing in a room with 250 journalists and some of them wanted to ask you a few questions, and we've put through on speaker phones so people can hear, and I wondered if we could just ask you a few questions about the er,...so we can't ask you questions??"*

Well if you won't talk to me will you talk to this bloke? And I passed the phone over to this guy we were talking to beforehand and he said,

**Tony Donovan, Director of Television and Visual, Reuters:** *"Hello, I'm the Head of Reuters, Now, I would like to ask... we really are very keen to ask you some questions..."*

**Hans-Jorg Renk:** *“I can’t improvise the answers right now, I told you last time when we met here...”*

And he wouldn’t talk to this guy. So I cupped the phone and said, *“OK I’ll pass you to someone else.”*

**Richard Sambrook, Head of Newsgathering, BBC:** *“Hello I’m in charge of BBC World News. I’d like to know. I just want to check that Nestlé does comply with the World Health Organisation Code.”*

**Hans-Jorg Renk:** *“Of course we do. We have always said we do.”*

**Mark Thomas:** And another guy comes on. *“Hello, I’m from Swedish Television, 20 years ago I made a programme about Nestle and this problem, I am very disappointed that it is still going on.”* And another guy comes forward, saying, *“Hello, I’m actually African, I’m from Kenya, so I do have a vested interest in this.”*

**Faridoun Hemani, Linx Productions:** *“Sir, my name is Hemani, and I’m actually from Africa, and when I did find out today that some of these labels are not labelled adequately, In South Africa, particularly, the only language used is English and not in any other languages that are officially used, I find that quite difficult to believe, can you tell me a bit more?”*

**Mark Thomas:** Mr Renk is not having a nice time.

**Hans-Jorg Renk:** *“No, I will get answers to you.”*

**Mark Thomas:** *“Look I’ve got 250 journalists here, baying for answers. He said, “I’m not sure that they are.” I cupped the receiver and said to the audience, look, if you all want answers will you all shout, Yes.”*

**Barcelona Audience:** *“YES.”*

**Mark Thomas:** *“Did you hear that? They all shouted, “Yes.” Look, I’ll tell you what. I’ll get all their names and addresses fax them over to you, then you can reply to them individually.”*

**Hans-Jorg Renk:** *“OK...”*

**Mark Thomas:** It was great, because during the conversations we were having, you could hear all these journalists in the audience, saying *“He’s not answering the questions.”*

*Laughter*

As we’re there at the News World Conference, we thought, well look, there’s a basic problem here which is that Nestlé, is this sort of 50 billion dollar a year company, they’re enormous, 7 billion dollars a year just spent on PR and advertising, you know, a couple of people trying to crack it are not going to do it. We need to work together. And so I said to the journalists, in this spirit of trying to co-operate, we’ve got a nice little story that you might be interested in.

We've found a Patent, a GM Patent. **[SHOT OF THE PATENT ON SCREEN]** And the GM patent is for a company called PPL. And PPL have got a lot of financial links with the Rosslyn Institute who gave us Dolly the Sheep. Now, the patent is for a genetically modified cow that will produce the human proteins in human breastmilk in the cow's udder. And my first thought was, there has to be a baby milk company involved here somewhere.

Right? There has to be. Nestle said it had nothing to do with them, right, if you're making human breastmilk in a cow, you have to be looking to put it in powdered form and sell it in tins, because, the other alternative just aren't viable.

*Laughter*

You know you get sort of well to do couples in Islington, walking round with an au pair and a cow.

*Laughter.*

The baby's hungry, get it to the barn...you know.. Or maybe they want to introduce it for us, for wholesale consumption in our food produce. They were going to use human breastmilk to make things with. We're going into Starbucks, *"I'd like a frappucino latte, human breastmilk with cinnamon on the top, yeah.."*

There would be adverts with Sigmund Freud look-alikes, sitting there going, *"Oedipus, Schmoedipus, makes great cappuccino"*

*Laughter*

So I thought, they've got to be using a baby milk company here. And our hunch was that a company called Wyeth was involved here in the funding of the research programme. And Wyeth make SMA baby milk. It's Britain's top selling brand.

So we get back to Britain and we get this phone call, out of the blue. Someone phones us up and says:

*"I just thought you might like to know that the Chief Executive of Nestlé, Mr Brabeck, the man at the top of the world's biggest food corporation, is coming to England today."*

I said, *"Really?"*

He said *"Yeah."*

I said *"Where?"* They said, *"Oxford. Oriel College, 7.30pm"*.

*"Right,"* I said. *"We're there"*

So we rushed down there OK And its all being kept very secret, and hush hush. And I don't know if you know the Oxford colleges they're all sort of big walled compounds, medieval type things, with spikes and spires and you expect a few plague victims and a ducking stool. And I thought we're not going to get through. We're just not going to get through. And we were just waiting around, outside thinking, \*\*\*, we've got to try and do something about this.

And suddenly, the door opens, and this woman stands on the other side, this **student**, and says: *“You’re Mark Thomas, I know why you’re here, you’d better come in.”*

And we’re like, Wow. So we’re inside this Oxford walled college, right. You go underground and through this tunnel and come out on the other side of the street in a gated walled compound. There’s security guards everywhere. There’s these big sort of burly fellows walking round, because this is the Chief Executive of Nestlé, you know, he wants his security. At the door, they are saying you have to show your student union card. And we think like, *“Oh, we haven’t got one of those. Oh God, maybe if I talk about dance music enthusiastically they’ll think I’m young, you know, something like that. Yo happening, can I come in?”*

But I don’t know what young people are listening to. I still think its outrageous they use guitars. So I’m sort of, you know... So we’re standing outside and someone else comes up to us and goes:

*“I know who you are, I know why you’re here.”*

So, I’ve walked in to the room. And because they’ve taken bags and stuff, I’ve had to put the camera down my pants. So, hoping that... it doesn’t do my soul very much good - self image, quite boosting.

*Laughter*

**Lecture on Corporate Trust to University European Affairs Society, Oriel College, Oxford 30 November 1999.**

I walk in there with camera down my pants. I’m walking in the room and as I walk in there’s the woman who’s the Head of Corporate Affairs, sitting in the front row. And she’s clocked me. And, I quite like her, actually, on a personal level, because she’s quite a personable person. I saw her.

And she must have been thinking: *“This is great, the Chief Executive of the firm, the big man is here today, the security’s good, everything’s going to...what the \*\*\* is he doing here.”* And she came up to me and just went: *“Mark why, what, were, whaaa arggh..”*

**Mark Thomas:** *“I’m just here to listen to the speech.”*

So I sit down and Mr Brabeck starts talking about corporate trust. And they come to questions at the end. And I’ve slipped the camera out and given it to Jack. And Jack’s sort of like, *“Great, I’ve got the camera, why is it warm?”*

And, I’ve given him the camera, and I put my hand I and say:

*“Hello, my name is Mark Thomas from Channel 4, and I just want to pick you up on a couple of things. I thought it was great that you mention the Zimbabwe letter from Dr Timothy Stamps, because I spoke to him recently. And there’s a couple of points here, one is the fact that he actually criticised Nestlé in that letter, and actually said that Nestlé broke the Code with regard to marketing Cerelac.*

*Person whispering asking Jack to put the camera away.*

Suddenly they're swarming all over Jack, saying "you can't film here, you can't film here." and I think they're swamping the poor \*\*\*ing camera man. I just shouted across the room:

**Mark Thomas:** "Mr Brabeck"

**Peter Brabeck-Letmathe, Chief Executive Officer, Nestlé, S.A:** "Yes, What do you want? "

**Mark Thomas:** "Mr Brabeck, do you object if we film your answer?"

And he looked at the 20 students. Long Pause

**Peter Brabeck:** "I have no objection "

**Mark Thomas:** "Thank you very much indeed."

And all the security guards back off, and we film his answer. Now we'd raised a couple of issues, and we'd raised Zimbabwe, which was one of the things we'd talked about in the last show, about Nestlé. And he..., now, what Nestle have done is they've spent masses of money in getting this booklet made. They've written to all the governments that they sell the products, the countries of governments they sell their products in, they said, what is the state of play with us and the World Health Authority Code on the sale/marketing of babymilk substitutes. And they've replied to them and they've put them in this big book, and its like this PR tool, to prove that they're doing all right. And because I've mentioned Zimbabwe, he opens the book up and starts to go.. he says "This is what they've said about Zimbabwe, this is a letter from ..."

And it looked like the first time he's reading it, "This is the letter from the Nutritional Committee..." And its like a 5 year old: "I went on holiday, we had ice cream, it was good." He reads the whole thing out. It takes about 5 minutes. And then I said, "Why can you .. print three languages in Switzerland, but not in South Africa?" So he goes:

**Peter Brabeck:** "I will get back to you on this."

We thought great. We bum rush him at the end, get him on the podium, have a little natter and say we want an answer.

**Peter Brabeck:** "Yes, I will get back to you. I promise you. "

Then we get another phone call out of the blue. "Are you aware that doctor Timothy Stamps, the Health Minister from Zimbabwe is in Britain?"

I said "no." "They're in London. Would you like to talk to him?"

I said "Lovely." and I go and talk to him and said to him:

"Strange, strange, I should bump into you, because I've just heard Mr Brabeck, a few days ago, quoting the letter, using it as a PR tool."

He said, "Yes, well, that letter was written by my Nutritional Committee".

I said. "Really?" He said, "Yes."

**Dr Timothy Stamps, Minister of Health & Child Welfare, Zimbabwe, Vice President of the World Health Assembly:** *“The Advisory Committee comprises, fourteen people, three of whom are from the food marketing association and I know that two of them are from infant formulae companies.”*

**Mark Thomas:** *“Would one of those companies be Nestle?”*

**Dr Stamps:** *“Yes”*

**Mark Thomas:** He’s also the Vice President of the World Health Authority. And I said, I want to get a feel of what they feel about it so I said to him, *“If Mr Brabeck, the Chief Executive of Nestlé was here, what would you say to him?”*

**Dr Timothy Stamps:** *“Why do you want to destroy my children? Are you interested in ethnic cleansing, to the extent of eliminating all African children? That’s what I would ask him.”*

*Long Pause - Laughter -*

And like, I’m sitting there going, \*\*\* me, that’s strong....Nestle are going to want a right to reply to this one. You know, I don’t know whether he’s right or wrong. And Nestle said, basically, *“If Dr Stamps feels this way, he should talk to us about it , and um, basically, he appointed the man on the Committee and yes, there is a man from Nestle Zimbabwe on that Committee, we have had lots of meetings with him and he has never said this before.”*

**Dr Timothy Stamps:** *“We know now that the breast is actually the follow on of the placenta to feed the baby and carries the same hormones that the placenta has.....it doesn’t merely produce antibodies. Breastmilk actually produces the stimulants in the body of the child to make it grow in the right direction. And that makes, to me, breastmilk, breastfeeding, so much more important than it ever was. Not less important, not something to be substituted.”*

**BREAK**

**Mark Thomas:** Then, we start getting faxes and letters from Mr Brabeck. He writes a letter to us and in the fax he says, “I’ve issued an order that all Nestle companies have to put the primary languages on the labelling. And we’re thinking, “Yes” (applause) *“This is kind of cool.”* We’re thinking *“Yes! Yes!”*

**On the screen the fax is shown with the following text highlighted:**

*“I am issuing an order to all our companies that all our formula products , must have the required elements on the label in the primary common language”*

And then, we get another little thing that says. *“In Malawi, we’ve put the Chichewa on the packaging.”*

There you are. He shows the Malawi label on the screen:

Then we get another phone call. The person says, *“I was at the Barcelona Conference.”* I said, *“Oh Yeah”*

She said. *“The um GM cow... Human milk?”* I said *“Yes?”* She said, *“PPL?”* *“Yes”* *“Wyeth”* *“Yes”* *“There’s a herd of the cows in existence”*. I said, *“Really?”* She said,

*“Yes. PPL Therapeutics, in Virginia, who are the sister company to PPL in Britain, are running it out of the University of Virginia, and there’s a herd of cows up and running and Wyeth, the baby milk people, are sponsoring the research.”*

I’m thinking “Wow”

So, we dressed up one of our offices like a BBC sort of radio recording studio, and I dressed up in a tuxedo, and I got this animal impersonator from the music hall to come along with us.

We phone up PPL Therapeutics in Virginia where they’re conducting the experiments, and we think, well, let’s see what they have to say, because the Americans are slightly more Gung Ho about GM than Britain.

You know they kind of *“Oh Yeah, America First, Dolphin’s head in a tomato, whoa, way to go....”*

Britain says, *“No I don’t want a camel’s tail on a grape, thank you very much.”*  
So, we phone up PPL in Virginia, and I get through to the Vice President of Research there, and I said *“Are you the bloke to talk to?”*

**David Ayares, Vice President of Research and Development, PPL Therapeutics, Inc.:** *“Yes I am”.*

I said, *“er, this...the cow with human breastmilk?”*

He said, *“Yes”*

I said : *“You’re conducting the research”*

He says, *“Absolutely, Yes“*

**David Ayares:** *“Em, we put a human milk protein gene into cow zygotes...fertilised zygotes, and we now have a mini- herd of transgenic cattle that are making er, human alphasalalbumen...in their milk. So this is a humanised milk product that would be used for infant formula.”*

**Mark Thomas:** I said, *“That’s amazing! The commercial thing here is incredible, ‘cos surely the aim has been to get human breastmilk in powdered form, into a tin for infant formula?”*

**David Ayares:** *“The ultimate goal would be to, er have a completely humanised milk product where you would milk a cow and almost human milk would come out”*

**Mark Thomas:** And so I said, *“so that’s how it’s going to be - just like your mamma used to make?”*

He said, *“Well, nearly, yeah”*

**David Ayares:** *“What we’re doing now is looking for a development partner to take the product, basically to expand herds, and do a level of purification required, which is not high. This will be a nutritional product, so it will be oral product, so you don’t need to go through the same type of clinical trial process that you would for a pharmaceutical, which is what most of PPL’s products are.”*

I said, *“that’s incredible, ”* I said, *“how far are you of this from launching it”*

He said, *“Oh we’re about 30 months from launching it, 2 and a half years”. “We are talking to all the major infant formula companies at this time and are negotiating with....”*

**Mark Thomas:** *“So who are you talking to?”*

**David Ayares:** *“Well, we’re not allowed to discuss that, because it’s price/quite sensitive information, but we’re in discussion with three right now, the major infant formula companies both in the US and in Europe.”*

And I said. *“I’m actually in a farmyard now.”* Mooh

**David Ayares:** *“Cow’s knocking you over?”*

**Mark Thomas:** *“Well, I’ve actually got a cow here, that we are going to do our own experiment on..um..to try and do the protein.”*

**David Ayares:** *“To try and do what???”*

**Mark Thomas:** *“To try and create the human protein...We’re actually going to try and do our own one.”* Mooh, mooh noises, heard in the background.

**David Ayares:** *“Oh Yes?”*

**Mark Thomas:** *“Oh yeah. That’s absolutely right. What we’ve got. Can you bring the cow over, Tony, can you just bring him over. And what I’m going to do, I’m going to start, and you can correct me if I’m wrong, here, OK, I’m just going to start by... do you know what gaffer tape is?”*

**David Ayares:** *“Hello?”*

**Mark Thomas:** *“Hello? Do you know what gaffer tape is?”*

**David Ayares:** *“No”*

**Mark Thomas:** *“Its a very, very strong industrial tape. OK. And what I’m going to do I’m just going to start by taping up the udder. OK? (Sound of contorted cow - Moooh ) OK, Just hold it, hold it. Lovely (more sound of contorted cow - Moooh ) OK now, we’ve got those in place at the moment. OK. Are you there?”*

**David Ayares:** *“I don’t understand. What are you doing here?”*

**Mark Thomas:** *We’re just doing our own experiment here, on how we might create the human protein. OK? Now, we’ve got here in this small freeze box, some breasts, [holds up a sheet of stiff card - wobbling it about] Alright, and I’m just going to get those, just pass them over, there we are Graham, can you just start putting those...if you can just get a needle and thread...lovely...OK..no, hang on..what... did it not take it? Sound of an electric drill and more sounds of a contorted cow - Mooooooh)*

*Dialling tone as the phone is hung up.*



We then phone up **PPL Therapeutics**, the main company in Britain. Right They're the people who basically own PPL in Virginia.

I said, "Hello, Mark Thomas, on the farm yard."

**PPL** "Hello. Where are you?"

**Mark Thomas:** "Oh, Cheshire. Um. We're just wondering. You're making the cow with human breast milk?"

"Yes, well we've done the research into that.."

**Mark Thomas:** "And Wyeth sponsored it?"

" Yes they were the sponsorship partner, yes."

**Mark Thomas:** "And you're ready to launch it commercially?"

"Oh no"

**Mark Thomas:** "So, You're not going to launch it commercially?"

"No, no no no no"

**Mark Thomas** so I said, "the ultimate goal isn't to make human breastmilk in a powdered form in a tin?"

"No, no no, no no "

*Laughter*

**Mark Thomas:** "Would it would be fair to say that PPL has say a vision of creating human breastmilk in powdered form?"

**Voice of April D'Arcy, PPL Therapeutics (Scotland) Ltd:** "Ah, well no, no."

**Mark Thomas:** "Well, I'm on the farm right now, and I'm making my own adapted cow and what we've done, this is what we've done so far, the cow's in a bit of pain, because we've taped up the udder's with some gaffer tape, and its a bit horrible actually because it should have been milked first, so there's a lot of milk and blood and gaffer, and we're now going to ..."

**April D'Arcy:** Are you being serious??

**Mark Thomas:** "Yes and what we're now going to do, is I'm now going to try and drill some breasts, OK" ( more sounds of a screaming cow and a drill..)

*Dialling tone as the phone hangs up*

**Mark Thomas, reading from a PPL statement shown on the screen:**

"PPL headquarters in Edinburgh, claim that the company does not have, and never has had plans to produce a cow which produces human breastmilk. The PPL cow's produce their own milk, but with the human protein, alphasalalbumin in. This has potentially life-

*saving benefits for premature babies and will be subject to clinical trials and licensing as with pharmaceutical products, before being made available as a medical nutritional product. It will be 30 months before the research is at a stage when such trials can take place. The use of this human protein as an additive to conventional infant formula is only a long term theoretical possibility, and no decision to seek to use the product in any way has been made. PPL currently has no agreements with any manufacturers to commercialise the product, no tax payers money is being used in connection with this product. Finally, say that there are only 3 cow's involved, not 20, and it is therefore wrong to call it a herd."*

But we're now in a very, very weird situation. Where, one bit of the company is saying, "yes, we're going to launch it - we're 2 and a half years away, its mamma's breastmilk in a can that's been GM produced." And the other side goes, "No, no, leave us alone, go away. \*\*\* off."

Then we get a spate of faxes from Nestlé. This time what they say is that in Pakistan they are going to put stickers, all over the packages, that we raised their attention on, in Urdu.

We then think, right, we're on the home straight, we just need to find out a couple more facts. Because the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, give money to Rosslyn, who have financial links with PPL. So we think we ought to go round to MAFF to find out a bit what's going on.

**MAFF, 21 December 1999 Shots of a tanker arriving supposedly full of expressed breast milk.**

**Subtitle running along the bottom of the screen states: "MAFF insist that they are not putting any money into the breastmilk cow project."**

**Mark Thomas cleaning the MAFF windows: "I need some milk. Have you got the breastmilk. we'll start with these ones here...whistling. Oh its coming along quite nicely"**

MAFF: "turn it off now and turn off the sound..."

You can't wash windows with breastmilk, etc etc .

MAFF promised to find out about the funding of the research.

**[The rest of this scene is still to be transcribed]**

**Back in the studio**

**Mark Thomas:** We got another little bit of information from Nestle. And this time they've written saying basically that they are going to try and print up all the languages on the tin and if they can't do that, they say they're going to repackage it, and if they can't do that - worldwide - they will withdraw the stock.

*Applause*

Meanwhile, you've got the future of baby milk staring you in the face. You know. On the one hand you've got the state of play when you get problems with selling baby milk substitutes in developing countries. And on the other hand you've got this product that's going to be breastmilk in a tin. And because all the tins have to have "breastfeeding is

*best for the baby*”, but now they might have, “*Breastfeeding is best for the baby, but this is breastmilk.*” So you’re entering a whole new unknown realm of problems here.

I don’t know, it quite weird. I mean, people sort of have this whole sort of, GM is going to feed the world, and we’re going to save people lives, I sort of think, well, hang on a minute. If, you know, if you’re going to fiddle around with human bodily fluids and make things do what they shouldn’t do, well, at least do something useful, like making men’s semen taste like chocolate. That would be handy.

*Laughter and applause*

Thanks very much for coming along. Cheers. Nigh, Night.