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Oregon Wine History Project™ Interview Transcript: Dick & Nancy Ponzi

Dick Ponzi

Nancy Ponzi

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This interview was conducted with Dick Ponzi (**DP**) and Nancy Ponzi (**NP**) in July of 2010 at Ponzi Vineyards in Dundee, Oregon. The primary interviewer was Jeff D. Peterson (**JDP**). Additional support provided by videographers Mark Pederson and Barrett Dahl. The duration of the interview is 56 minutes, 58 seconds.

[00:00] **JDP:** We're going to be talking about the early years of the Oregon Wine Industry, the second time around after prohibition. And so, thank you very much, first of all. So why don't you start by just talking about what was it like? How did you come to be here? How did you choose this area and where did you come from to wind up growing wines here?

[00:29] **DP:** Well, an interesting part of that question is that we have different stories, but we're going to give you the real story. Well we came—we moved from San Francisco to Oregon and we had some familiarity with Oregon because we visited Nancy's parents who had retired here in Forest Grove. So, the holidays were spent up here, and winters, summers, and so we got very familiar with the seasons.

And while we were in San Francisco, we obviously got very close to the wines and the vineyards of California, of which there were not very many. And this is in the sixties, basically. And as I remember, there were only eighty wineries in California at the time. So it was pretty small and that area of Napa Valley was so different to what it is now. And I reflect back often because I think about Oregon, where it's at in its stage of growth compared to some forty years ago where California was in its stage of growth. And we followed that, I think, pretty closely—that is in terms of number of wineries, the influence of food, the influence of the distribution of wines. So when we moved here forty years ago, we were really lagging behind California, but California didn't have very much, so didn't speak much of Oregon in terms of restaurants and retailers of fine wines. So, is that an accurate story so far?

[02:28] **NP:** Sort of. The background is that Dick is a first generation Italian and all Italians think that it goes with the territory that they know how to make wine. So as we were raising a—our family was very young, he thought it would be nice to teach them the glories of winemaking. So we took these poor little babies out into the vineyard, we lived right next to the Navitia vineyard in Los Gatos and they allowed us to go pick grapes. And we did that and we crushed them by hand and it was so much fun. And it was so much fun that in the next couple years we decided that that's what we would do: we would throw everything in the air and go to a cool climate and raise Pinot noir.

[03:20] **JDP:** And so, what year did you move up here and how did you go about determining where to grow?

[03:29] **DP:** Well, I had a pretty good job in San Francisco and that is I started in aircraft, aircraft, aerospace and ended up doing kiddy rides for Disneyland. So it was a real jump in some direction, I'm not sure which. But it was obviously a real fun time for the kids who were very

young; they were two, four, and six, basically, so the kiddie rides were exciting for them. The winemaking wasn't quite as exciting. They lost a lot of excitement from the labors of picking the grapes and making the wines. But it did capture our attention and the smells reminded me of my childhood days. And I always said that I would never make wine at home because the wines that we did have at home, even though they smelled good during fermentation period, they didn't always last in terms of having good flavors.

[04:32] **NP:** If you like vinegar it's good.

[04:34] **DP:** Well, we did use it for dressing for salad but—So our study basically of moving to a cool climate took us to Mendocino, which was one area. And this started in the mid, about early sixties I guess, midsixties. And Mendocino is a much cooler area than say, Napa valley, so that was very attractive to us. And we also took trips to the Okanagan Valley, which was in British Columbia and that was also a very cool area—pretty isolated, we thought. And then we always came back to Oregon, basically, and Portland, and we knew what that was like seasonally. So we packed up all of our belongings on a flatbed truck and all of our belongings consisted of a piano, and a canoe, and about three barrels of wine that we made.

[05:43] **NP:** And we brought the children too.

[05:45] **DP:** And we had children, and a dog, and two cats. So we journeyed up. Actually, before we moved, I made several trips up here for a couple years and, interestingly enough, I circled right around this area. It was so beautiful and I remember the drives with Nancy's father, going over to the horse auction in McMinnville and traveling over the Chehalem Mountains and it was just a beautiful site. And so, when I did come up here on weekends, I'd look in this area, basically.

On one of those occasions, I'm not sure if it was on one of these trips or after we moved, but we did hear of someone in Forest Grove—because that's where Nancy's parents were: in Forest Grove—had established a vineyard or was establishing a vineyard. And I thought that was kind of exciting. So we obviously made contact with Charles Coury when we came up here and that was in the late 1960s, 1969, actually. And so that was encouraging, to know that someone was thinking of doing something. And as we—after we moved up here, we realized that he was being very serious about it. And along with his efforts, there were other people on the other side of the hill—obviously the wrong side of the hill—doing something with grapes. With Charles Coury it was encouraging to know that there were other people who were at least thinking of the same thing. So that was an interesting exchange.

And when I did get up here it was, the question was how to feed the family and what to do because we just bagged everything and came up here. And, fortunately, there was an opening at the local college and I was able to get a position there almost immediately.

[07:55] **JDP:** Which college?

[07:57] **DP:** Community College of Portland. So that was fortunate because it gave me the summers to do the work in the vineyards and to establish the vineyards. And when I was there,

there was also a book salesman that came by the first year, and that was Dave Lett who came by. And he had heard I was doing something on this side of the hill so he stopped by my office and I bought some of my first plants from Dave, which I planted right out here. He said they were Pinot blanc but they weren't, we found years later that they were not Pinot blanc.

[08:40] **JDP:** What were they do you know?

[08:42] **NP:** Melon

[08:45] **DP:** It was Melon. And that was after we had visitors coming from Europe and we showed them our Pinot blanc and they said, Well wait a minute, that doesn't look like Pinot blanc. And true enough, I mean, they were selling it as Pinot blanc in California too. So we really helped California along by disclosing that to them.

And anyway, that was kind of a comforting thing: to find that there was a community of other people in the area. And we ultimately got together with them and did some really exciting things in the early days in terms of planning the future of the industry. I mean, that was pretty adventurous to think that we had, without even having many plants in the ground, to think that we're going to establish now an Oregon industry.

And so there were things that were done that we forced the University to do and that was to put a quarantine on rootstock or any material coming in from out of state. That we thought of Oregon being a very virgin area for vinifera plants and we wanted to preserve it and not have a problem with phylloxera. And we had the notion at that time that we could plant on our own rootstock because of no history of phylloxera in the area. And so, all of our vineyards out here are all on rootstock. And, fortunately, to today we don't see any problems with that. But we're not in a real congested area and I think that some of the sightings have been found in Oregon where it's because of the congestion of the plantings and the lax of the care in terms of who comes into the vineyard and what comes into the vineyard.

But anyway, so that was some of our beginnings, and we exchanged information and we shared a lot of information during those early days in terms of how to plant, and what to plant, and just the very basics of, How do you plant a vineyard? I mean, it was quite a new thing for us.

[11:07] **NP:** I think a thing that we came up with when we were developing all the material for Oregon Pinot Camp, which encompasses the history as well, was that we could very easily and quite legitimately call Oregon the Birthplace of New World Pinot noir—it really is. And while we talk about everybody's nice and self-deprecating, in fact, what's happened in Oregon has spread throughout the New World. There would not be the Pinot noir in New Zealand, in Chile, in South Africa, these other places without the foundations that were set for this variety here in Oregon. It's amazing! And the fact that the information has been shared so freely is, I think, something we should be very proud of and not kind of say, Oh yeah, well, we fumbled around and we figured out that we could—

Well, as Dick says, there's many ways to tell the story of those beginning days in the early seventies and you can either tell it like all of these people will—Dick Erath, Dick Ponzi, Myron,

all the people who were there and active in it, and, you know, they were having a great time, but the effect of it has been phenomenal. I think that we should be able—we personally are not going to take credit and nobody in this area is going to take personal credit, but they deserve the credit because there would not be the Pinot noir, it wouldn't happen. If you go back to when this was all beginning in the sixties, people were not drinking Pinot noir. No one in this country knew what Pinot noir was. Even when we started selling it, it was—that's why we sold Riesling because, who wanted Pinot noir? The most people knew about it, it was something called Hearty Burgundy that came out of Napa or Lodi or somewhere. So I think that's a really lofty thing to say, but I think there's—

[13:46] **DP:** Yeah, it's maybe lofty, but there was this intellectual group. I mean, it was people who, some went to Davis, some went to Europe—we basically went for our information to Europe, going to the research stations. But, just to elaborate a little bit on what Nancy is saying, is that the industry in the United States in the midsixties was looking a little bit to California because they were the most successful in growing vinifera grapes. But they also incurred or caused a lot of misconceptions, let's put it that way. They grew Pinot noir, they made Pinot noir, but it didn't taste like Pinot noir—the Classic Pinot noir in Burgundy, I mean. That's why we all looked to Burgundy for Pinot noir because of the tradition, and the success, and the true character of Pinot noir.

So, people were growing Pinot noir in California, they were growing it in Napa Valley, but what we proved, I think, and showed to the world to some degree, is that it required a cool climate. And it was always warm climate people were thinking, those who were planting grapes, I mean. From the early immigrants who came, the Spaniards, the French, they all tried planting vinifera grapes on the East Coast—all the way across the country side and it was never very successful until the Spaniards came up through California and Mexico and the climate was warm enough for those varieties they were interested in. Well, then, I think, California went beyond that and they just grew everything because everything would grow, but the distortion in the fruit and distortion in the variety was obvious to us. If you drank Burgundies in the sixties, then you drank Pinot noir from California. They were a world apart in terms of the wines, and the flavors, and the results.

So, the early people who came up here recognized that. They came to a cool climate and the cool climate was the first important component of making good Pinot noir, and then the growing of it, how you grow it. If you looked at what vineyards looked like in California in that period, they were all head-pruned, basically. Very few of them were trellised. And if they were trellised, they were trellised maybe twelve to fifteen feet between the rows. They just had all that space and they also wanted to shade that fruit, trying to avoid over-ripening of the fruit.

So, we did some amazing things. We narrowed down the row spacing and the spacing in the row and the spacing of the row in those early days. And we did a training system, a trellising system that was almost never used in California. We grew our vines up in a vertical pattern to expose the fruit because we wanted that sunshine, but we didn't want it to be shaded like the head-prune vines were in California.

So, those things were discussed. I mean, we had meetings—well, we had meetings in this room

where we would discuss the proper way of growing these grapes and we talked endlessly on spacing. What is the best spacing? You know, Burgundy is meter by meter and a half. My gosh, we don't even have tractors that size! So, we typically, in our vineyard we went as close as we could to match the tractor. It's the John Deere spacing, basically. We couldn't buy a small tractor like they had in Burgundy, or the overhead tractors; they weren't available.

So, those things were discussed over and over and over. And I remember doing a trip, Nancy and I did a trip into Europe and into Alsace and we went to several research stations. And there was a research station there that had all of the known trellising systems in the world. I mean, they had done research. I mean, we were so far behind in the United States; they had been doing this for centuries. And so, when I came back, I basically lectured on the types of spacings, the types of trellising, and which would adapt best for us here in Oregon.

So, we really educated ourselves. The university was completely at awe; they didn't know what was going on. In fact, we were told before we moved up here in the sixties that the university had taken out all of their vinifera plantings because they were not successful. They kept getting frosted out so they just gave up on it. Well, they planted on the valley floor, and so those vines never did mature and never did produce fruit; they would get frosted out practically every year. So we brought that notion back to the community of five people or more. And one of the groups, Charles Coury, spent a year in Alsace and came back with that knowledge. So we were somewhat teaching ourselves, and we did. And that's the kind of thing Nancy's talking about. We pretty much showed how to grow Pinot noir.

[19:47] **NP:** You know, see that's an example. You hedge. You say, "pretty much." You did. You did. I mean these guys are also—

[20:01] **DP:** I'm sure there was also some—

[20:03] **NP:** Oh, but, "one of," or "maybe," or—no! You did. You demonstrated how to grow Pinot noir.

[20:08] **DP:** Ok, as far as our world, yeah. I mean, our group—we taught each other and we decided on certain trellis systems. But there is a—what was I thinking of before you got after me? [Laughing]

[20:24] **NP:** Well one of the—

[20:25] **DP:** Oh! I know what it was! A great story. A great story that I've got to tell you because we visited Burgundy one time, one year, and this is in the early seventies, trying to learn, you know, bring back to the group what we could gather in these trips. And we visited some of the most famous vineyards in Volnay and they were so hospitable to us, they took us out into the vineyards and showed us what they were doing. About five to maybe ten years later, those, and I'm thinking of two very well known winemakers, visited Oregon and we were walking through this vineyard here. And they were asking me questions, Why are you doing this? What is this that you're doing here? And I said, "I don't understand you. Just a few years ago, I was walking through your vineyard and you were telling me these things." And so here they were looking to

me to explain what I was doing.

And that's the beauty of raising or being a farmer: you exchange ideas and you are with the utmost humility, you know, you have a keen interest in what the other person is doing because you know you're fighting this together, the elements are all against you. So you're sharing, and you're looking for these little secrets and these little advantages that you can take against nature, and this kind of thing. So, and that's the way Burgundy is. Burgundy is really a group of—the winemakers are farmers first, and they look to the vine and the vine tells them a lot. So when they came here to look at our vineyards, they were interested in why we planted this far apart and I said, “Well, you know, we don't have your tractors, so we had to go as close as we could to our tractor size.” And why we went so high, “Well, we had to go higher because the rows were wider, so we could go higher and not shade the previous row.”

[22:46] **NP:** They also thought it was a really good idea that we made the trunks a little higher because you don't have to bend over. If you've been to Burgundy, their rows are very, very short so when you pick you have to stoop over. And they said, What a great idea. They can pick like this, they don't have to bend over and hurt their backs.

[23:05] **DP:** Yeah, they liked that idea.

[23:06] **NP:** You know, a lot of the stuff in Europe where they're supposed to know everything, some of it's just done because it's done.

[23:15] **JDP:** Well, I think that's one of the things that, as I've been talking with people, is that there's been sort of, on the one hand you had Burgundy as a resource and hundreds of years of wine growing, and yet there's a way in which maybe they had sort of become a little stagnant in terms of *why* things were done. And so, you all had an opportunity to pick and choose what you wanted to do. And then you had some of the folks being tied to Davis, and the California experience that some of you had, and then another thing is that it seems like there were different people who just had different areas of expertise as well. In that group of five or six people, you had some real disparate personalities and all of those things sort of—

[24:00] **NP:** The common thread was that nobody knew how to farm, but we all knew how to read real well. And that saved us.

[24:07] **DP:** If you go through the—I mean, just imagine yourself: you've got this plot of land and you're going to plant these grapes. Well, you don't want to make any mistakes. You know you've got to put the stick in the ground and a certain distance apart and you've never done anything like this except in your garden in the back yard. So, you've got thousands of plants to put in the ground, so what's the most efficient and quickest way of doing it?

And I did one way that was fast and that was pretty unique, but it created some problems in the vineyard. You mark out your rows at the top of the vineyard, you mark out your rows at the bottom of the vineyard, and then you hope that you can draw a straight line between the top and the bottom. And so, what I did was take a huge D-9 tractor with a subsoiler that goes down three feet, and drive down that row with that subsoiler to make a nice, long groove. Well, with that

groove I could stick a post down through there with my hands, it didn't take any driving force, and I could put the plant right next to it, and it would be planted, basically. Except that what I finally realized, as these plants grew, is that the top of the row was in line with the bottom of the row, but something was happening in between. Well, with the D-9 tractor I'm adjusting to keep that row straight. Well, in the back was this swing that was taking place. So it looked great from both ends but in the middle they have these weaving kind of things.

[26:09] **NP:** And that's what you're looking at out there. That's what a forty-year-old vineyard in Oregon looks like: it looks like a lot of trial and error.

[26:19] **JDP:** A lasting testimony.

[26:21] **DP:** But we also, you know, we realized we couldn't irrigate these young vines. Then we put these little milk cartons out there, and to this day people are using milk cartons to protect the vine and also to hold the water.

So, it was all done because of the need to do something, and what was in the text books didn't cover everything, or it was too expensive, or you just didn't think you were capable of putting that all together. So milk cartons worked. You saw your neighbor, and we talked about milk cartons, and we talked about planting, and all that kind of stuff. So it was very supportive to have this group and we innovated a lot of things. And when people came to this region—not immediately, I would say it took us ten to fifteen years to get it all worked out. And then, once the vineyard was somewhat established in terms of how you wanted to train it, then we went into the winemaking and tried to avoid mistakes in the winemaking as well.

And we spent years worrying about the cool climate that we're in and the acids that we were going to get out of these grapes. I mean, we worried about it, we had people do research about it at the university, we convinced them to do research, and we dug into the books and most of the literature coming out of California or out of Europe, and we feared that so much, at least I did. And I know we did because we had seminars on it: Reducing Acids in Wines, High Acid Wines, How You Treat High Acid Wines. And so, we had several processes that were done in the past by, much of it coming out of Europe, that we tried everything.

And I just can't emphasize how much effort was put into it. We must have spent at least five to ten years on that whole subject of high acid wines. And again, it was a small group of people trying to get the university to do something on that issue and doing seminars, even doing seminars in Washington because that industry was starting.

And then ultimately, we realized that the fear wasn't necessary. That things happen naturally in the winemaking and we never had high acid wines. I don't know whether the weather changed, or whether we just all overlooked—we feared it more than the reality of it is what it was because we were in cool climate. And in cool climate, generally you're going to have a little higher acids, but we then found eventually that as the wines aged, those early wines, we realized that this high acid was the attribute; this was the beautiful part of these wines because that's what gave them the longevity, that's what let them develop and produce some of these wonderful qualities of Pinot noir. So what we feared, really, was to our advantage.

Really, those early days are overcoming some of the hardships, some of the fears that we had, and then planting the grapes, obviously the first thing, making of the wines, and then the selling of the wines. You know, in that order.

[30:16] **NP:** Well, and that took place, you're talking about the first fifteen years. During that period we had to figure out how to sell the wine too. And if there is anything to learning about the wine business is that that's an equal component. It's like painting a picture. You can paint a picture and if it stays in your attic, who cares what it is? You've got to figure out how to do it in order to even make enough money to go paint some more pictures. So that was apart from the winemaking, which was of course a huge, *huge* hill to climb, was what do we do with this?

And I think, again, Oregon came up with these incredibly innovative methods of selling a wine. This region was so unknown, really unknown. And I'm sure people have told you about our first thing about selling was to explain to people where Oregon was: it wasn't in the North Pole because that was sort of the assumption.

So the people who were up to, and that kind of narrowed out too, the people who could rise to this to figure out how to market it, because again, none of us were marketing people, there were no business people involved. I'm not sure, but I would put money on it, that nobody in those first years had a business plan. We didn't have enough money to care about a business plan. That was totally unknown. It's humorous to us right now when people start out with their business plan before they even buy any property. You know, they know how much wine they're going to make and probably what they're going to charge for it. It's hilarious!

[32:10] **JDP:** There's a couple of stories that kind of are, where you realize that some of it is almost a sort of blind luck or serendipity where, I think both Adelshiem and Myron Redford talked about the fact that OSU had just invented bush beans. So there were all these poles and all this netting available that, and Myron says, basically it was a subsidy to the wine industry because you guys wouldn't have been able to afford—

[32:38] **NP:** Oh yes, that was—We hauled a lot of those out of Salem/Silverton. Oh now we're going to plant some grapes in Silverton.

[32:46] **DP:** Yeah, those were those bush beans' poles—not the bush beans but the wire that came out of that for the pole beans. And we still have some of those poles out there that we drag out every once in a while because they've rotted, finally. But yeah, the idea of going out and buying the poles to put your vineyard up was nonexistent. We just, basically for one cent a pole, we could go down to Salem and come back with a truck load of these bean poles and wire that they used.

[33:26] **NP:** And we had really bad trucks too. It wasn't like you rented a flatbed; you borrowed. And we borrowed between each other trucks. And some of them would work.

[33:40] **JDP:** So what was—there are pictures of you also working out there so what was it like for you? Diana Lett kind of tells the story of her honeymoon is spent planting and so I'm curious

what—

[33:53] **NP:** Oh, I like Diana's story of decorating the house and she finally just put a red carpet in because they kept tracking in the red dirt all the time.

I think for the women involved in this whole thing, you either jumped in and were part of it or else you kind of stepped aside and let it happen. And I would say that those of us left that have kind of survived a long time managed to figure out to jump right into it, what we could do. And we actually did a lot. There's always the background work of who actually writes the testimony that you take to Salem to present, who organizes it, who makes the phone calls, who figures out who's going to take care of the kids that day so you can make a trip, who sets up the seminars, who calls the firehouse and says you want to hold a meeting there. There's all that kind of stuff.

[34:57] **DP:** Well and there's also the vineyard itself, truly.

[35:00] **NP:** And there was a vineyard itself. And my kids ask me, How did you do that? Because there were three kids at home and then Dick actually went to work sometimes, late everyday to his class and making up his speech on the way. But you just kind of filled in. And for a few years, I did all the pruning here, and I really liked it, but it took about three months. Now a crew goes out to this place and they're probably done in half a day, and they're good too. But I would do that, and then you run in and cook something, then you go pick somebody up from school, and then you go take the dog to the vet, and then you have a meeting at night. So, you know—

And the kids also are children, also wanted to know how we could live this way because, gosh, they had to share a room, and we lived out in the country, and the cars didn't always work, and wasn't that terrible, we don't even have air conditioning yet! I don't think anybody suffered; we really had a good time. It was a lot of social life going on but all these serious seminars that they were talking about, they were sitting around studying how to put the trellises up and down. Oh! Bird netting, you forgot to talk about the years of bird netting. But it was a lot of fun, a lot of drinking, a lot of eating. It wasn't really that hard.

[36:51] **DP:** Well, it's a sharing of the hardships. I think that's—if we didn't have this nucleus of people, we would think that this was a ridiculous thing to do. I mean, you're fighting with nature and you're fighting it, you're fighting the weeds, you're fighting this rapid growth, and then all that pruning; yeah, the pruning took forever. We would start in December and we would end up, maybe, just before bud break.

[37:21] **NP:** Just before bud break. I remember trying to hurry up and then you'd finally get so you'd just barely touch it because they were so tender.

[37:32] **JDP:** You also mentioned kind of the idea of starting to talk at one point about, sort of, the notion of “organic” and I know a couple of the people have talked about, like Myron Redford and Diana Lett also talked about that this was also a sort of “back to the earth” movement, and that people were, I think read Rachel Carson's work and that was also part of the thinking for some people, not everyone but how was, kind of your view of the land and were you trying not

to use chemicals early on or—

[38:08] **DP:** Oh yeah, well, your first notion, I think everybody has this feeling that grape vines can be grown without any mildewcides, for example. You think you have the most optimum site, and the first year you can get by without doing anything, just weed and take care of it that way. The second year you might spot a few things, and the third year when you get fruit, then that's when the mildew appears. So you learn quickly. So you realize you need to get some spray equipment.

Well, I found some old dusting equipment that some of the berry growers used to use. Well with dusting, you have to make sure that you don't get over sprayed with dust; I mean you actually use a sulfur dust, basically. And usually you want to do that when the air is very still, which usually means very early in the morning. So before going to class to do my lectures, I'd have to get up early in the morning—like four o'clock in the morning, three to four o'clock in the morning—set up the rig, which was a monster of a device that sat behind this tractor, and you get these sacks of sulfur and you dump it into the hopper and go off and spray your dust and hope that the winds don't come up. And invariably, I'd be crawling underneath that damn duster trying to correct something, and the stuff was falling all over me, and I've got a class at eight o'clock. And I just dreaded that, but realized that that's what had to be done. I mean it really had to be done.

And then, the weed control was always a problem. You know, you see farms, you see orchards that are so neat and tidy and you say, “Well, I can do that.” And you realize that it takes a lot of effort and that timing is so important because the weeds can grow faster than you can get out there. So I built a piece of equipment modeled after what was termed a plow but it wasn't really a plow but it was basically a blade that would go through and oscillate between the vines and clear away the weeds, which is still done but this was a little different: it was a plow and now they're automatic. They miss the plant because they have a little trigger and I had a hand trigger that, with my head cocked to one side, I'm looking at the plant and every once in a while, oops! You slice a plant right down. But by the end of the day on that tractor, I'll tell you, you get a kink in your neck and you probably took out a good portion of the vines.

But we did, I mean, I would be so proud when I got it clean like all the other farmers had. It would heal up and cut away and it was just beautiful. To the point where we thought—this is how naïve we were—I would get the vineyard in pristine condition in June and we decided, Well, we're going to go to Europe and learn more about winemaking. And so it'd be pristine, it would actually look so beautiful as we drove away and we'd come back three weeks later after our trip and it was a jungle! Just a jungle out there! And we expected those vines to do their job, you know, we just thought they would take care of things. No spray, no cultivation and a lot of growth when we got back, so—

[42:12] **NP:** And we didn't know to call it “cover crop” at that point. It was just weeds.

[42:18] **DP:** Oh it was covered. But, you know, we managed to get through it all as badly as we did. But eventually, after about ten years you got into the rhythm of it. You improved your spraying techniques, and got rid of that duster, and did things a little bit more comfortably with good timing.

[42:46] **NP:** But we did do the dusting because that was the safest way to do it, other than using a real heavy-duty mildewcide. That was the reason. We were always trying to go—one year we decided we needed a little something in the soil so we got fish—that fish stuff. That was funny.

[43:08] **DP:** Fish emulsion. Yeah, so the whole vineyard just smelled of fish, you know.

[43:12] **NP:** It was so pure.

[43:15] **DP:** I mean, we still use fish emulsion but it's a little more, not as concentrated. I mean one year we really put a lot on and it really covered the leaves pretty nastily. And then we even fed the vineyard with some sludge from—not industrial sludge but took King City sludge, actually, and just flooded the vineyard with that.

[43:36] **NP:** Then we had tomato plants.

[43:39] **DP:** We had a good crop of tomato plants after that.

[43:44] **NP:** Has anyone talked to you about the bird control?

[43:47] **JDP:** Nope, I don't think so.

[43:49] **NP:** Well there was many hours, many things spent on bird control because in the early days there were very few vineyards around here so when you had—the grapes are maturing at the same time the migratory birds are headed south, so they would find a vineyard and that was just lovely because there would be thousands and thousands of birds out here. So, and this was other, because there were little vineyards, you know, twenty acres was big. So they could take care of that easily.

And so we had all these different methods, everyone was trying to come up with some scientific wonderful thing to do. And I remember one that Susan Blosser did was the birdcall. It was mounted up on a big pole in the middle of the vineyard and it was a tape—this was very modern—and the tape kept playing a bird in distress like it said, “They're killing me here, they're killing me here, go away!” That's what it was supposed to say, but the birds actually would sit up on the top of that thing. We put up kites—I was just telling the kids about this—we would put up kites that look like hawks, because it's true: if you get a hawk come down and swoop over the vineyard, the birds just lift up. So we would put kites out that looked like hawks. And then the neighbors thought we were really crazy; we were crazy enough to plant grapes but now we were putting balloons out.

[45:18] **DP:** Well that was after the dishes, pots, and pans.

[45:21] **NP:** When the children came in, they had to walk through the vineyard to get to the school bus so they had to take pots and pans and pound them together all the way.

[45:33] **DP:** It was getting pretty desperate.

[45:36] **NP:** And then, of course, we got to the cannons, which we still use.

[45:42] **DP:** Yeah, yeah, the cannons are very good.

[45:43] **NP:** The cannons that make an explosion and we have these great little guns that make firecrackers go off and then we did netting. We did netting a few years and that's a huge save. This is a tiny little vineyard and people, I mean think about doing fifty acres of putting that up and so Dick had to make a whole bunch of equipment to put the net up and then take it down again. That was terrible.

[46:10] **DP:** We did seminars on bird control. And I remember Grape Day we would go through the whole thing: we would teach people how to prune, teach people how to avoid the birds and protect yourself from the birds, and how to cultivate, even how to establish a vineyard. After we taught ourselves, then we became teachers and taught other people during Grape Day.

[46:39] **JDP:** And it also sounds like when I talk with Adelshiem and a couple others—actually virtually everyone talked about sort of the land use, planning side where also there was the concern about, you know, making sure that a lot of this land was designated as agricultural land rather than for development. And so were you a part of that as well with going to—

[47:06] **NP:** Oh, absolutely.

[47:07] **DP:** That was, you know, one of the first things we did in the early seventies is, How many acres could we plant in this valley, Willamette Valley, that would be good for wine grapes? In other words, at certain elevations, certain exposures? And we came up with some pretty large acreage. And so, the idea of trying to preserve that for the future, again it was one of these, this far-thinking idea. Even though we weren't even, maybe, getting grapes then, but we had the concept, the idea that if we're going to preserve this, let's plant on our own rootstock. We'll protect it from phylloxera coming in, we would have quarantines on rootstock, we would try to protect the land that could be developed because it was being threatened for home sites. No question about it, these were home sites and people—developers were calling hillside property a Secondary Farmland. You know, you couldn't farm on that because no one's got—there's no orchards up there; it's difficult to farm.

And so, that was very important. And fortunately that was the—the land use laws were enacted and then the counties, once the state had enacted House Bill 100, then we had to make sure that the county abided by it. And that was the struggle because then you were down to your home turf battling it out with realtors or developers, basically.

[48:48] **NP:** And now we still do that with great regularity and lots of finances.

[48:52] **DP:** And we're still at that, right.

[48:55] **NP:** But, by and large, the wine industry has been fully supportive of the land use laws. And not only supportive financially, but sitting on boards, working with all of these

organizations, and it's had, obviously, tremendous effect. Now when we talk about what the wine industry has done for the economy of Oregon, we want a few more followers to that.

[49:27] **JDP:** And a couple people have actually mentioned that you all were particularly active in sort of getting, sort of the selling of Oregon as the tourism industry and I think Dick Erath actually showed me one of the first brochures with the very few wineries that were on there.

[49:48] **NP:** That again was written in this room. Yeah, that first one. I knew that we needed a brochure and I personally have worked a lot with that. I helped start the Visitors Association in Washington County, which is done a lot as well as feeding into the state tourism and working with all that. That's the instate thing. I believe here we did the first, this was before the Thanksgiving Day thing, we started a thing over here with the idea that instead of having people come to your tasting room, we would do it cooperatively and make it fun to go to different people's tasting rooms. And we did it over the fourth of July, and it was a barrel tasting, and our slogan was, Taste of Wine Before Its Time.

[50:00] **DP:** Catchy.

[50:02] **NP:** Very catchy. With the fireworks, and the flags, and the this and that, special little glasses. Came up with the idea of make them pay for a glass. We always knew we couldn't serve our wine in plastic cups, so what do you do about that? Well, you sell them a glass.

That's been a wonderful thing for Oregon. Look at what's happening with our instate tourism, of course the out of state is tremendously important now, but just the instate tourism. Every day—we're open seven days a week here; most tasting rooms are.

[51:34] **DP:** And some of that was modeled after things that were done in Europe. I mean, we saw the routes, for example, the wine routes. Every wine region has a wine route in Europe, basically. So we tried to establish that here where people could drive through the vineyards. I mean our vineyards were way apart from each other and it wasn't quite as dense as it is now, but inviting people to come to the winery and to change the laws so we could have tasting rooms where people could come to the winery. That was very important; part of the legislation efforts that we put forth to the legislature, and they were supportive. And that's brought people out to the country.

[52:25] **NP:** We still can't call it a Wine Route in Oregon, though. We can't have a Route des Vins. They can maybe put a little cluster of grapes on the side, but it has to be called Scenic Route or something like that. They can't because, you know, you don't want to go too far and call it a Wine Route. We're working on that; that will be an achievement when we get that one going.

[52:50] **JDP:** So what's the moment for you all, maybe, where, because you've talked about all this early period and making due and one of the things I've sort of asked every one is: When's the moment when you felt like maybe you'd made it? Or is there a moment or a year or a period where, you know, ok, you've worked at getting the wines and —

[53:20] **NP:** Well, our story is a little unique from the rest of the people in that along in the

eighties, the first thing that happened was—

[53:30] **DP:** Well there was '79.

[53:34] **NP:** Well, what I'm saying in the eighties is that we bought our first Mercedes, used. But that was kind of a deal. And then in 1983, we actually had made \$50,000. We had \$50,000 cash in the bank. So we took that \$50,000 and started a brewery.

[54:01] **DP:** That was a lot of fun.

[54:03] **NP:** That was a milestone.

[54:06] **JDP:** And what happened in '79?

[54:08] **DP:** Well in '79—well, leading up to part of the marketing was this small group realized we had to market together. So we travelled across the country as a group of bandits trying to spread the word, and identifying where Oregon was, and identifying that we're growing this great Pinot noir, and not many people understood Pinot noir. So, when you get something written about your product, you get pretty excited. So in '79 our wine was written up in the *New York Times*. So we thought, Wow! We hit the East Coast! That's great!

But nothing really happened too much except people would come out or people would call just out of curiosity, You have this wine and where can we buy it? Well, you couldn't buy it anywhere because no distributors would take us on. So that was a major effort for many, many years: to get distribution even though we didn't have a lot of wine, we had to get distribution. So that was always exciting when your wine was being presented or focused on in the press of any kind. Even local press, there was always some local press about somebody doing a vineyard or making a wine or having a festival. But to get it from New York or San Francisco, that was a big thing.

[55:40] **NP:** And also, I think it's still true. I think it's great for us personally to get written up in the *New York Times*, but it's also great for everyone else to get written up in the *New York Times* because this is—we were in this together. So it all reflected on Oregon and as long as Oregon got some sort of attention and profile, that works for everybody and even in the world at large. I think that's why people who make Pinot noir are so, almost fraternal about it, easy to exchange information and experiences because there aren't that many of us. If you look even now how much Pinot noir is produced in the world? Not all that much compared to Cabernet Sauvignon. So we don't have any real fear. You're of course competing to get on the wine list here or there, but you don't have this fear that somebody else is going to do really better than you because it all works out for everyone. So even now, if *Vanity Fair* writes an article about Oregon wine, it's great, even if you aren't mentioned.