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Oral History Center
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Dawnine Dyer

Dawnine Dyer on the Pursuit of Quality and Unity in Napa Valley

The Napa Valley Vintners Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Martin Meeker
in 2019

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Dawnine Dyer

Photograph courtesy of Dawnine Dyer

Dawnine Dyer is the co-owner and winemaker for Dyer winery in the Diamond Mountain district of Napa Valley. Dyer was born in 1950 and raised in California's Central Valley. After graduating from the University of California Santa Cruz she made her way into the California wine industry, working at Robert Mondavi Winery and, later, as winemaker at Domaine Chandon. She established Dyer wines with her husband Bill in 1996. Dyer served as board chair of the Napa Valley Vintners in 2002. In this interview, Dyer discusses the following topics: upbringing and education; California wine in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s; Napa Valley Vintners organization, administration, leadership, and branding; Napa agricultural preserve and winery definition laws; land use and the environment; and protecting the Napa name.

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Napa Valley Vintners Project History

The Napa Valley Vintners (NVV) Oral History Project was initiated in 2018 following a series of conversations between representatives of NVV and UC Berkeley's Oral History Center. In anticipation of the NVV's 75th anniversary year in 2019, the NVV agreed to sponsor an oral history project documenting the contributions of the organization to the growth and improvement of the wine industry in the United States; the establishment and protection of "Napa Valley" as a place known worldwide for the quality of its wines; and the people who made all of this possible.

The oral histories in this project were designed to be rather brief two-hour interviews; in these the narrators were asked about their interest and engagement with the wine business in general before turning the focus to their participation in and observations of the NVV. Interviews in this project are wide-ranging, touching on a number of issues and topics going back to the very beginning of the organization in 1944—in fact, two of the first project narrators were children of NVV founders (Michael Mondavi is the son of Robert Mondavi; Robin Lail is the daughter of John Daniel, Jr.). Narrators describe the growth and transformation of the organization in the 1970s and 1980s; during this time the NVV ceased being a small group of vintners who viewed the organization as a social club as much as an industry group and changed into something much more consequential. Narrators, including Bob Trincherro and John Shafer, tell how the NVV grew into a large and influential organization that impacted the law, policy, trade, and marketing of wine in the United States and abroad. Other narrators describe the organization's emerging and expanding interest in protecting the environment, limiting urban growth, preserving agricultural lands, and advocating for sustainable practices in the vineyards and cellars of Napa Valley. Key people and projects of the organization are touched upon in most interviews, with special attention paid to Auction Napa Valley, the country's premier charitable wine auction that was established in 1981 and now raises millions of dollars a year for community health and education organizations in Napa Valley.

The Napa Valley Vintners Oral History Project builds upon decades of interviews conducted by the Oral History Center that document the history of wine in California and, in some cases, the specific history of the NVV. These oral histories date back to the late 1960s and include interviews with NVV founders Louis M. Martini and Robert Mondavi, as well as Eleanor McCrae, Joseph Heitz, Dan Duckhorn, and several other NVV leaders.

Martin Meeker
Charles B. Faulhaber Director
Oral History Center of The Bancroft Library

Interview 1: April 18, 2019

01-00:00:00

Meeker: Let's get started. Okay, today is the eighteenth, I believe. Yes. Okay, I'd like to start over again. Today is the eighteenth of April, 2019. This is Martin Meeker interviewing Dawnine Dyer for the Napa Valley Vintners Oral History Project. We are here at the home of Dawnine Dyer and also the place of Dyer Wine—is that the label?

01-00:00:24

Dyer: Global headquarters of Dyer Vineyards. [laughter]

01-00:00:27

Meeker: This is our first session together. We begin interviews the same way for everyone, and that's, tell me your full name, and date and place of birth.

01-00:00:39

Dyer: Okay. Dawnine Sample Dyer—Sample is my maiden name—born July 3, 1950, in Modesto, California. Actually, that's not right. I was actually born in San Francisco, but my parents were students at Cal, and Modesto was where I grew up.

01-00:01:04

Meeker: So, you, I, and Bob Trinchero share a birthday.

01-00:01:09

Dyer: Are you kidding?

01-00:01:10

Meeker: Nope! July 3, yeah, his birthday is July 3 too. I learned that when I just spoke with him. [laughs] It's funny!

01-00:01:16

Dyer: Wow! And you too.

01-00:01:18

Meeker: Me too, yes; 1970 is mine. So, well, I'll wish you a happy birthday. I'll know when.

01-00:01:26

Dyer: So, did you grow up thinking that the parade was for you?

01-00:01:29

Meeker: Well, kind of, yeah, July 4 was always pretty cool.

01-00:01:32

Dyer: My parents actually said that. [laughs]

01-00:01:34

Meeker: Really. [laughter] I was six in 1976, and so, like that was probably my earliest conscious memory of it, and it was a pretty big deal, so I always was really

interested in history and Revolutionary War, and it could be that that was what sprung it off. Well, okay, so you said that you were born in San Francisco, but raised in Modesto. Tell me that story. Tell me about your parents.

01-00:02:06

Dyer:

Well my father was actually studying at the optometry school at Cal, and so they were living in married student housing in Albany, and I was born at UC Med Center in San Francisco, lived in Berkeley for, I don't know, maybe six months—it was sort of towards the end of that—and then they moved back to Modesto and took me with them. So my earliest memories are from Modesto.

01-00:02:33

Meeker:

So your father had finished his education, and then moved to Modesto.

01-00:02:36

Dyer:

Yeah, yeah.

01-00:02:38

Meeker:

And was he a practicing optometrist?

01-00:02:40

Dyer:

Yes, he was.

01-00:02:42

Meeker:

What did your mom do? Was she a homemaker, or—

01-00:02:44

Dyer:

She started out teaching, but her health was not very good. She had polio not long after I was born, and then she actually passed away when I was thirteen, so she had a combination of what we would probably now call autoimmune conditions that kind of culminated in her dying.

01-00:03:14

Meeker:

Yeah. Did you have siblings?

01-00:03:16

Dyer:

I have two sisters.

01-00:03:18

Meeker:

Okay. Younger?

01-00:03:19

Dyer:

Both younger.

01-00:03:21

Meeker:

Same mother?

01-00:03:22

Dyer:

Yes.

01-00:03:22

Meeker:

Okay. Well tell me a little bit about what growing up in Modesto was like. It's typically known as a farm community. Is that how you experienced it?

01-00:03:34

Dyer:

Yes. There was a vineyard across the street from us. The places where we played were the canals system. I didn't have farming relatives, so my grandfather—actually, my mother's mother lived next door to us. My father's mother lived down the street. My great-grandmother lived across the street. It was a very close community. I don't recall feeling it so much as a farming community. The guy across the street would bring asparagus home in the spring. My paternal grandfather was a carpenter, actually. My maternal great Aunt was retired but had been a court reporter, so there was a little bit more professional orientation in a small-town kind of way.

01-00:04:36

Meeker:

How did your family, the extended family, all end up in Modesto? Had they just been there for generations, or was there successive movements to that place?

01-00:04:46

Dyer:

My mother was born in Modesto, and her family was Basque, and also not terribly long-lived. So my name, Dawnine, was my great-aunt's name, so, Dawnine Darrenougue was her name, with all the *rs* and the *gs* and the double letters that are Basque, but she didn't live terribly long, and there was kind of nobody else in that generation. So I didn't feel a great sense of Basque-ness growing up. My father's family moved from Kansas during the Depression, so his parents left and came to California and lived everywhere. They lived in Napa for awhile, but when he was in high school, they made their kind of final move into Modesto, and that was where he went to high school. He and my mother were high school sweethearts, and then came back and lived in Modesto.

01-00:05:59

Meeker:

Did you go to that same high school?

01-00:06:03

Dyer:

No. By the time I went to high school, there were three high schools in Modesto as opposed to the one that there was when they went there. So no, I didn't go to the same high school.

01-00:06:14

Meeker:

Tell me about your high school experience. Were you a good student, or were there other activities that you were more interested in?

01-00:06:21

Dyer:

I was a good student, and yeah, I think I was academically focused, pretty much. I did go to high school in the sixties, so there were starting to be some sort of rebellious things happening, where academia was not necessarily the

most important part, but the way I kind of dealt with that was, I went to an alternative school.

01-00:06:44

Meeker: For college.

01-00:06:44

Dyer: So, I went to Reed College in Portland, Oregon, for a year, and then to Santa Cruz, which is where I graduated.

01-00:06:51

Meeker: Well, so you graduated high school in '68. Were the sixties actually being felt out in Modesto in—

01-00:06:56

Dyer: Oh yeah, absolutely.

01-00:06:58

Meeker: How so?

01-00:07:01

Dyer: Well, San Francisco wasn't that far away. The Fillmore Auditorium was not out of reach.

01-00:07:10

Meeker: So you went to concerts out in San Francisco.

01-00:07:11

Dyer: Oh yeah, absolutely.

01-00:07:15

Meeker: Do you recall any that were particularly mind-shattering? [laughter]

01-00:07:23

Dyer: Well, I remember seeing Janis Joplin fairly early on, I think. What I really remember, actually, is going to the Monterey Pop Festival. That was while I was in college. I think that was in '69 or '70, the big one that had—

01-00:07:44

Meeker: I think that was '67, the one with Jimi Hendrix, where he lit his guitar on fire?

01-00:07:50

Dyer: Yeah, that was not—That would be making up history. No, it was a couple years after that.

01-00:08:02

Meeker: And so you would go there and camp out, and—

01-00:08:05

Dyer: Yeah. But still (back to high school), I think, more of a reader. I never sort of thought that I wouldn't go to college or wouldn't graduate from college, or

wouldn't find a profession. My father was the first in his family to go to college, so there was a lot of focus on that.

01-00:08:33

Meeker:

So, it sounds like you had some interaction with the counterculture of the sixties. Was the political activism also of interest to you?

01-00:08:43

Dyer:

Yes, social justice, I would say, more than anything else, social justice was something that my parents instilled in us. They were good volunteers in lots of ways. My father was probably president of every local nonprofit that kind of fit into his area, and my mother was actually quite—like I said, her health wasn't particularly great, but Modesto Junior College, as we called them then, the state college there, must have had a good program—I don't really know this for a fact, but must have had a good program with English integration, because we had a whole chain of foreign students that came through our lives that were all displaced by some kind of difficulty in their home country. So we had Hungarians, we had Persians, we had people from Mexico, all kind of came through our house, and whenever she would go out to get somebody to do a job, whether it was around the yard, or some kind of a thing like that, they would always be there for dinner, and then their brother would show up. So we had that kind of a cultural focus from the family, and that actually really did stick with all three of us kids.

01-00:10:20

Meeker:

Did it inspire you, an interest in places beyond the United States or other cultures?

01-00:10:27

Dyer:

Yeah, absolutely, yeah.

01-00:10:31

Meeker:

And did that translate into your decision to go to Reed College upon graduation of high school?

01-00:10:39

Dyer:

Yeah. It's so interesting to watch people now, applying to ten colleges and all of that. I applied to one and got in, and I don't know if that was the first lucky thing that happened to me or not, but yeah, it was. It was a thinking about education as both important, but also as supporting a life, I guess, a bit more of a general education being important to understanding how life works, whether that's your culture, other cultures; that there are things in books where you find those nuanced answers and varying opinions of culture.

01-00:11:44

Meeker:

Were these questions that you were wrestling with at this time of your life, like, how and why are people different, and what is my place in the world, those kinds of questions?

01-00:11:58

Dyer:

Oh very much so, yeah. I don't think I've ever really stopped considering that sort of basic focus of what a life well lived is.

01-00:12:13

Meeker:

So you enrolled at Reed in 1968, which is up in Portland. What was that like?

01-00:12:21

Dyer:

Well, Reed was totally mind-blowing. First of all, there weren't many people from California at Reed. There were a lot of people from the East Coast. There were some people from the Midwest, Ohio. There was a lot of kind of back and forth between a couple of other—college professors' kids often went to Reed.

01-00:12:48

Meeker:

Oberlin College professor kids went to Reed, yeah.

01-00:12:52

Dyer:

Yeah. So it was really eye-opening to see that much diversity. It was very stimulating mentally. The small class size—I think every time I wrote a paper at Reed, you'd have to defend it with a professor. You'd have a one on one with the professor, not an aide, as I came to learn, was more the norm. So, you didn't just sort of take the shortcut on any of those things, because you knew you were going to have that opportunity or requirement to defend your thinking, to kind of expand how you—to learn something from it. That said, I didn't stay at Reed for four years, and that is, I think, culturally what was going on in the sixties. There was kind of a sense that there was more than this, and that people were traveling, not committing to particular careers or courses of study.

01-00:14:20

Meeker:

Well what was your next stop after Reed then?

01-00:14:23

Dyer:

Santa Cruz.

01-00:14:25

Meeker:

What attracted you to Santa Cruz?

01-00:14:28

Dyer:

Well, some of the same things, although I had friends at Santa Cruz, so I had friends from high school who were at Santa Cruz, and so it was a place that I kind of visited before going there. So I was out of school for a couple of years. I traveled, went to Europe, went to Mexico, did some other things, and then came back, and actually had to take some classes at the junior college—my father's agreement to pay for my college, my Reed experience, [laughs] kind of expired somewhere in there—and then, spent two full years finishing up at Santa Cruz, and I did that in 1974.

01-00:15:18

Meeker:

So you basically, between like '70 and '72, this was your time to kind of tramp around the Western Hemisphere, it sounds like.

01-00:15:28

Dyer:

Right, yeah.

01-00:15:31

Meeker:

Looking back on that time, do you feel like, was it profoundly influential on the person that you became, and were there any particular lessons you look back that you can take away from that period of time?

01-00:15:46

Dyer:

I don't know if I can really say that there's a specific lesson, but I think in many ways, all of us were somewhat privileged. I mean, there were people who didn't make it through, and there were definitely some situations where probably too much freedom was not a great thing, but I think that for me, and for many of the people that I know my age, it was really—there were a lot of times when we didn't have a lot of money, but we never felt poor. The schools were kind of always there. UC system in the seventies was an incredible thing. I will probably not remember it exactly right, but I was paying for it myself and I think it was like \$200 a quarter, something like that, to register, and then whatever your living experiences were. I didn't live on campus. I lived on campus at Reed, but I didn't live on campus by the time I went back to Santa Cruz, so those costs, again, were kind of offset by other things, and then, there was a lot of talk, a lot of commitment, a lot of moral outrage, but well-intentioned moral outrage, and a sense that you really could have an impact, that you could make a difference in the world, and I watch kids now and I hope that they still have at least a little bit of that feeling, but the idea that you come out of school with \$100,000 in debt is pretty mind-boggling to my experience.

01-00:18:00

Meeker:

Well, so in '74, you graduated from Santa Cruz, I believe, with a degree in biology?

01-00:18:06

Dyer:

Mm-hmm.

01-00:18:06

Meeker:

What part of biology were you most interested in?

01-00:18:13

Dyer:

Well, biochemistry is probably what I had the most affinity for, biochemistry and microbiology in terms of my background. I had been an English lit major, if you can be a major as a freshman in college, when I was at Reed, and took a lot of psychology and English literature classes. I still am a bit of a Victorian in my reading habits, but kind of by the time I went back to school, it was pretty clear to me that I was neither going to be a writer, nor did I particularly want to teach, so there was a need for a change. Math had always been

something that I was good at, and I think when I went back in biology, my focus really was, I was thinking more around natural history, natural biology. There's a good marine biology program at Santa Cruz, but it turns out, I'm not a very good memorizer. So, phylums and genuses don't stick with me. So, if I can logic something out, I'm okay, but if I have to memorize it, doesn't work, so I naturally gravitated more towards the more interesting logical parts of biology.

01-00:19:51

Meeker:

What kind of were you thinking in terms of what kind of job this might lead to? Were you interested in staying in academia, or maybe being a bench scientist or something like that?

01-00:20:01

Dyer:

I think, some of this is all in retrospect, but there, probably by the time I was a junior, I was thinking that I would do something, ultimately something in medicine, or some area peripheral to some good works with a scientific background. I really wasn't prepping for medical school. Along the way there somewhere, I met my husband, (I met Bill in 1969 when I first visited UC Santa Cruz) and when we left Santa Cruz in '74 after I graduated, our thinking really was: it's not good to stay in Santa Cruz, because it's a college town, (and a lot of people do stay), and unless you really are a committed surfer, you should probably be somewhere else where you can start to be a little bit more serious about life, and we had a little bit of experience in the wine business. Bill got a job at Bargetto's, which is a small winery in the Santa Cruz area after he graduated, and I had done some part-time lab work there. So we had some of that, and we thought that Napa would be an interesting place to just go kind of avocationally, while we sorted out whether it was going to be library sciences, or medicine, or law school, or whatever, but certainly, both of us at that time felt that graduate school was going to be required for us to do.

01-00:21:56

Meeker:

You make your way up to Napa, and yeah, this is '74, and can you tell me the story about how you met Zelma Long and ended up doing some work at Mondavi?

01-00:22:13

Dyer:

Well, I met Zelma Long because I went into the office at Mondavi—we were on our way to Alaska for the summer—and I inquired about harvest jobs, and was lucky enough to get an interview during the couple of days that we spent in Napa as we were heading north for this summer vacation, and interviewed for a job. They had several jobs that were available for the harvest. There was no commitment at that point in time. I left, as the contact address for to find out: “General Delivery, Fairbanks, Alaska,” [laughs] maybe it was Fairbanks, but at any rate, some place where we knew we were going to be, and was offered a job that summer. So I showed back up in August at the appointed date, and became one of four, I think, people who were interns during that

harvest. I'm not sure we were called interns at the time, that's what we would be called today, but I did basic lab work, titrations, wet chemistries, titrations, and—

01-00:23:43

Meeker:

Who were the other interns that harvest?

01-00:23:49

Dyer:

One of them was Lisa Van der Water, who went on to found a laboratory, one of the first, probably the first free-standing laboratory that did work for wineries who either didn't have the capabilities or the understanding or who simply wanted to farm out some work that they wanted done at different times of the day, and I think that Lisa, actually, when she did start her business, started it with a commitment from Mondavi, from Zelma, that they would give her a certain amount of business, that it made sense to Mondavi, from a business point of view, to let her do all of their whatever it would be. She got the research position. I got the production position. [laughs]

01-00:24:49

Meeker:

Can you describe for me Robert Mondavi Winery, and the harvest of 1974?

01-00:24:59

Dyer:

Sure. It was a pretty exciting place. There was a lot of experimentation. I think the things that Lisa was working on all had to do with phenolic analysis, coming out of a press that, if Bob himself were alive right now, he would probably say, "It was the wrong direction evolutionarily for presses," but it was an interest in finding things that were more efficient, more scientific, and the approach was quite along documenting things and observing them carefully, and being able to go back to compare the results of this batch with that batch, and to understand where they differentiated. At that time, my impression would have been that there was more focus on wine making than on viticulture. I think that really, in '74, was the case.

The comparisons though were incredible, because Mister Mondavi was always looking at his wines against European standards as opposed to his wines against other things that were going on domestically, which of course, wasn't that much, in '74. In my estimation, really, truly post-Prohibition wine making didn't start in the Napa Valley until mid-sixties, and it was with—you know, Bob Mondavi would probably be the person who has the highest visibility today, reputationally. It was with his firm conviction that we could make wines in Napa Valley that were every bit as good as the wines of the rest of the world, and that we were better off working together than we were competing with each other. So there was that, that was going on, whether it was—you need a spare part for something? Call the guys at Montelena. Before you'd even call the supplier, you would call your neighbors to see if they had something that would work in a pinch.

So there was the immediacy of harvest; you've got to get the grapes in today, and from a person like us who had, as I think we all did—this is, in some ways, this is our version of “back to the land,” right? That movement full blown didn't make sense to us completely, but this idea that we had the urgency of the seasons, and that harvest was the most important... and then, not long after that, you start to get more attention. There are the awards won. So the energy level in Napa has been, you could kind of say it's been—all of that has informed where we are today, but in 1974, yeah, it was—

01-00:28:50
Meeker:

I imagine a lot of the people that were around you, with the exception of Bob Mondavi, were all pretty young. I think Zelma was pretty young, and then you had the two Mondavi boys, Tim and Michael. They're both pretty young then too.

01-00:29:07
Dyer:

Yeah, yeah. Tim worked in the lab part of that summer. He was a student at UC Davis, and yeah, he was younger than me. I was twenty-three, something like that—would that be right—'74, no, twenty-four, yeah.

01-00:29:27
Meeker:

Did that harvest, did it feel like there was like a community that was, I don't know, like either in formation or already established that you could join?

01-00:29:41
Dyer:

I'd say in formation, and which definitely gives you an opportunity to participate in it.

01-00:29:50
Meeker:

Did you start to develop a friendship network in the Valley?

01-00:29:52
Dyer:

Sure.

01-00:29:53
Meeker:

Who were some of the people that you became friends with, at that time?

01-00:29:57
Dyer:

At that time, that I would still know now—

01-00:30:01
Meeker:

Or not even that you would still know now, like, who was your friendship circle at the time? What was your first group, if you will?

01-00:30:10
Dyer:

Well, it would have been people that I was working with at that time, so, Kristi Koford is still somebody that I see. Larry—oh my God, what was Larry's last name—has passed away, but he was sort of the director of the lab. Those would be people that we would share rides with, go to the movies with, have dinner with. The lab samples were a fabulous source— [laughs]

- 01-00:30:41
Meeker: One of the few labs you could take the samples home, right?
- 01-00:30:44
Dyer: Right, and enjoy them, yes, that's true.
- 01-00:30:48
Meeker: Where did you live?
- 01-00:30:49
Dyer: Always in Calistoga, yeah. Actually, for the first couple of months that we lived there, we lived in the state park [Bothe-Napa Valley State Park in St Helena], but then we were campers, so that didn't seem so unusual, then we had spent the summer in Alaska, but our first rental was in Calistoga, and then when we bought our first home a few years later, it was also in Calistoga.
- 01-00:31:13
Meeker: So, this was just a harvest job, and then you moved on in 1975 to another position. Can you describe that?
- 01-00:31:22
Dyer: So I worked the harvest of '74 through the end of the year, and then there was a position that opened up at Inglenook, that was, well, it was being vacated by a friend who was going back to school – that's how those things happened in those days. So that was a full-time position at Inglenook. There was probably a couple months off in between, but I started there in '75, and then worked there through the harvest of '75, and through the winter, so I was there about a year, and then I—how it happened is I guess not as important is that it did—I was offered the job at Domaine Chandon to set up their laboratory and be more involved in the wine making, and I took that job then for the harvest of '76.
- 01-00:32:28
Meeker: And this is when they were still at Trefethen, correct?
- 01-00:32:30
Dyer: Correct.
- 01-00:32:31
Meeker: Yeah. What was it like to set up a lab there? It's a blank slate; I imagine you would have learned some lessons from working in other labs. What was your agenda in setting up your own lab?
- 01-00:32:48
Dyer: Well, first of all, it was a slightly different lab, because there was so much focus on the microbiology, on the yeast cultures and the secondary fermentation, that that area of the laboratory, to be honest, Inglenook, when I started at Inglenook—the Mondavi lab was very professional. The Inglenook lab didn't have hot running water, [laughs] and it had three counters, sort of on three sides of the laboratory room, and they had been put in by different

people, so one was for a short person; one was for a tall person; [laughs] and very basic analysis, and the lab that we set up for Domaine Chandon was more oriented towards being able to do the yeast cultures, growing those, and then of course, the whole list of basic analysis: sulfur dioxides and volatile acidities and alcohols and those things which, at that point, were still all wet chemistry, so those were all still things that you did in a lab with a sink, as opposed to some of the things today that are done with the auto analysers and the—

01-00:34:18
Meeker:

With the yeast, were those local native cultures that you were propagating, or—

01-00:34:23
Dyer:

We actually brought the yeast for Domaine Chandon in from France, from Moët, and they still use those yeasts. This is maybe pretty technical, but the yeast that Moët had as their kind of proprietary strain was very foamy, so in the fermenters, it would be, you couldn't fill them as full as you could with other yeast strains, which you could maybe take the 80 percent full, and then it would bubble and bubble and bubble, but ours had to be more like 70 percent full, because otherwise, they would like, foam out the tops of the tank, and it would be nothing more than foam, but it would be foam, and I was actually at Chandon not long ago, and Pauline, who is now the winemaker there, a French woman, was telling me that they still use the Moët yeast, but not on all the wines.

01-00:35:34
Meeker:

How did you learn how to make sparkling wine? Had you been exposed to that at all at Mondavi or anything?

01-00:35:42
Dyer:

No, no, Mondavi didn't make sparkling wine, nor did Inglenook, and the folks at Moët, I think one of the reasons why I was of interest to them was that I had a pretty good microbiology background, I'd worked for a few years in the business. They weren't so much interested in the UC Davis degree. I don't know that they were suspicious of it, that might be a little strong, but they were more interested in what they could teach. So I was, again, really fortunate. I got to spend time at Moët in France. At that point, Edmund Maudière, who I would consider my mentor, was coming over to California quite frequently, and sparkling wine—there's a reason why I spent twenty-five years there—you don't learn it very quickly, because your base wines don't bear that much resemblance to the finished product. You really need several years before you can kind of understand what the evolution of change is going to be, and start to be able to be even remotely predictive about how this is going to appear with another percent alcohol, and bubbles, and yeast autolysis, and that.

So from a tasting perspective, it was very, very important to have the resources from Moët there to work through the blending tastings, to look at base wines at the end of fermentation and say, “Yeah, we’re going in the right direction,” or not. We had lots of conversations about pros and cons of malolactic in the balance, and what things are going to be augmented with that secondary fermentation, what things are going to be incorporated. It’s complex. It’s not that it’s hard to do, but understanding where it’s taking you is a little bit more challenging.

01-00:38:28
Meeker:

What do you mean by “what things are going to be augmented, or changed with that secondary fermentation”? Is that a function of sugar levels or—

01-00:38:37
Dyer:

Malolactic, that’s just—so one of the characteristics of malolactic fermentation is this diacetyl, buttery kind of character. Well, diacetyl is not very stable during a fermentation, so diacetyl is transformed into other compounds. So if you’re tasting a base wine and it’s high in diacetyl, you have to know that that character is going to be gone, and then you have to understand if there are underlying characteristics that are going to be issues, one way or another. So there are some things in the base wines that make it harder to see the trajectory of the wine than others: oxidation, reversed in a secondary fermentation. So you’re doing something that’s literally transformative, with that secondary fermentation, and then, the bubbles themselves actually bring out more, so in a normal glass of wine, you swirl it, swirl it, swirl it. Sparkling wine, you don’t really need to do that, because the CO₂ is picking up everything and lifting it.

01-00:40:05
Meeker:

You said Edmund Maudière was your mentor. Can you describe him for me, now that he’s sort of a—

01-00:40:12
Dyer:

Sure. When I started there, I think I was twenty-five, yeah, twenty-five, and he was probably forty-five, but seemed like a much older person, and he really liked California, and he really liked the idea of making wine in California, but unlike Bob Mondavi, Edmund’s view was, we’ll make wine as good as, but it won’t be the same, and I guess I adopted that, because to me, one of the more interesting things about making wine is the whole idea that there’s something very special, and specific at least, if you’re lucky, special, about a different place, that it’s impossible to compare the soils, and if you can make the same thing in both soils, then what is terroir? I think it’s not possible to make exactly the same thing, and I think that we all, we have things that we may hold up as ideals, but anybody who has ever grown or made anything knows that, you know, the bread’s not the same here as it is in France, and why is that? Well, we can talk about the difference in the flours, but in some ways, that may be a model for you, but what you get and where you take it with your

own starters and cultures is your own, and ultimately, that's where you need to hang your hat.

So Edmund was very clear about that. He was a very—is, God, he is still living. He's very much a taster. Not so much a technical taster, he didn't describe things so much in terms of fruit references, but he could go on about how “it smells like my grandfather's basement when he's just racked the”—so he had the sort of whole aroma therapy sort of an approach to smelling and tasting flavors in wines that, to this day, is very important to me also; it's what things come up. Now I can taste, technically, and can describe the flaws, and can list fruits and flavors, and even worked on an aroma wheel for sparkling wine during the time that I was at Domaine Chandon, but I still love the evocativeness of an aroma and the story that it can lead you back to.

Edmund also had, has, four daughters, no sons, four daughters, and I truly believe that it is fathers of daughters who lead the charge for feminism, because the father of four daughters cannot think that they're worthless, and I have two sisters. We all grew up mowing the lawn, doing summer jobs, inside, outside, and I think that you—Bill, my husband, says frequently, “Dawnine's father told her she could do anything, and she believed him,” [laughter] and I think that is an element, and I think that just about the time that I would be encountering something professionally at Domaine Chandon, one of his [Edmonds] daughters had just encountered something similar, and he was supportive and sympathetic, and probably made it possible, made it easier for me to advance in my career.

01-00:44:58

Meeker:

It sounds like he was a mentor in the sense that he helped see your career progress, so I guess already by 1978, you were a winemaker, but part of that help was also working with you to address those who were getting in your way, or those who weren't interested in seeing you progress.

01-00:45:22

Dyer:

Yeah, yeah.

01-00:45:24

Meeker:

Were there many people like that?

01-00:45:26

Dyer:

Oh, to be honest, I don't recall too many major obstacles. The whole environment was— [phone call; side conversation deleted]

01-00:46:03

Dyer:

I don't have any really negative experiences. My sense is that women still, in a boardroom situation, will be the last person listened to. Sometimes you'll think you've said something or proposed something, and it just kind of goes around until somebody else, you hear it coming back at the table, and you go, “I said that!” But that's kind of minor, I think, at least in my—for what I wanted to achieve.

01-00:46:55

Meeker:

So you become winemaker in 1978. Do you start to begin to represent Chandon in the Valley too, as an entity amongst other entities, for instance?

01-00:47:15

Dyer:

Yeah, to some extent. There really were probably three people at Domaine Chandon who had public faces for the business who were full time here. John Wright was the president, and John was very influential in getting Domaine Chandon, in getting the French interested in—that's not quite right. He didn't go to them. They actually asked him. He worked for Arthur D. Little before he came on board for Domaine Chandon, and he had done a study for Bank of America about the future of the wine business in California, and that got back to the folks at Moët who had at that point invested outside of France in South America, and were interested in what else they might be able to do. So they approached him about, just giving them some more advice on the potentials, and he had, already, he had a place in the Napa Valley with a small vineyard, and he brought them here and probably convinced them a little bit that this was what they wanted to do.

[side conversation deleted]

So he was a very visible face of Domaine Chandon, and was local and was out and about, and then Michaela Rodeno, who was I think employee number one after John, and had done a lot of work with the French group as they came up, and went on to be the head of marketing for the winery, was also very visible.

01-00:49:35

Meeker:

Are these the people who, for instance, would have represented Domaine Chandon at Napa Vintners?

01-00:49:40

Dyer:

John would have, yeah.

01-00:49:43

Meeker:

Can we switch gears a little bit and start to talk about that organization a little bit? When did you first become aware of that organization?

01-00:49:55

Dyer:

I think my earliest understandings of the Vintners Association would have been in the eighties, and it would have been of the Vintners Association essentially as a lunch club, sort of like the Rotary for vintners, and not a huge organization, and a group that frequently had lunch at Domaine Chandon when the restaurant was open there. With the early wine auctions, it became a little bit more visible, because then it did start to have more of the wine making inclusion of that.

01-00:51:05

Meeker:

Right, and the auctions began in 1981, over at Meadowood.

01-00:51:09

Dyer: Right.

01-00:51:11

Meeker: Did you attend any of those auctions early on?

01-00:51:15

Dyer: Yes, but I cannot tell you. I don't remember exactly which ones I did and which ones I didn't attend.

01-00:51:22

Meeker: What were your initial impressions of those early auctions?

01-00:51:27

Dyer: Well they were wonderful community events. The early auctions were—most of the buyers were either local people, or trade, distributors, people that the wineries could bring into the Valley. Everybody put together auction lots. The lots were nothing like the lots are today. They were a vertical of such and such, or a tour and tasting, and lunch with the winemaker, somebody's art along with their bottles of wine, and there would be hundreds of lots, and it would go on all afternoon, and it was under a tent, and you just kind of spent the afternoon eating and drinking and visiting with your friends, and—

01-00:52:26

Meeker: While the auction was progressing.

01-00:52:27

Dyer: While the auction was progressing, yeah.

01-00:52:30

Meeker: So, were there any Chandon lots that you participated in, in some fashion?

01-00:52:35

Dyer: Oh sure, lots, although I'm not really—let's see if I can think of any. Oh, I think we would do things like blending sessions, like taste the base wines with Edmund and Dawnine, and then we'll make you five cases of the blend that you put together, and we'll send them to you two years from now, that kind of thing.

01-00:53:07

Meeker: Can you tell me about the other side of the auction, in terms of the beneficiaries? Was that something that was aware to the community early on, about what the funds were going to, once they were raised?

01-00:53:22

Dyer: Well, I think early on, it was very clear where the funds were going, because it was healthcare, it was the two local hospitals, and it was, yeah, early on, it was an easier—the path to understanding the good that was being done was much more direct. And people volunteered, so you couldn't tell the difference between a volunteer and an attendee, in some of those areas, for better or worse. [laughs]

01-00:54:02

Meeker: So, it's later on in the nineties that you become more active in the organization, right?

01-00:54:09

Dyer: Correct, yeah.

01-00:54:10

Meeker: Up to that point in time, how would you describe the organization of the eighties? Who were some of the key players at that point in time in the group, do you recall?

01-00:54:26

Dyer: Well, yeah, sure. It would have been Bob Mondavi. It would have been Bob Trinchero. It would have been John Shafer. It would have been, oh, who else? This is the trouble with getting old. But you know, Guy Kay from Beringer's would have been part of that for sure. The Montelena folks, the Barretts, what first—well at any rate, Mister Barrett would have been—

01-00:55:18

Meeker: Jim Barrett.

01-00:55:18

Dyer: —Jim Barrett would have been part of that. Richard Peterson would have been part of that.

01-00:55:28

Meeker: Did you get a sense, like what these folks, what their goals were for the organization? Was it just like a men's lunch society, or were they trying to do something else?

01-00:55:44

Dyer: Well, interesting that you should ask it that way, because just as we're talking here, I'm thinking, so, what was I doing during that time, and in fact, I was very involved with another organization, which was the Napa Valley Wine Technical Group, and to some extent, the membership overlapped in some of those earlier days, and I think that as people moved into the Valley and the business grew, and it grew with more players and more people who didn't have a close technical or historic familial tie to the business. There was kind of a, well, where do you go to belong? You asked about the sense of community, and there was a period of time when I was very involved in Wine Tech, when we were getting a lot of the people who ultimately would have been better served by being members of the Vintners Association, but that were kind of—whether you're hobnobbing with the winemakers, or, who do you think is the most special, the winemakers or the owners, would have been a distinction, and I'm going to be vague about the dates on some of this, but that would have been going on in the eighties.

I would say that there were a number of years when I thought of the Vintners as the Old Boys' Club, and the Wine Technical Group as the place where

things were happening, and in fact, kind of were. At least from a winemaker's perspective, that was where we were hearing about different kinds of barrels, and the impact of temperature on fermentation, and cold fruit versus warm fruit, some of those things that, quite frankly, were important to the advancement of the qualities of the wines. There's a point at which the Vintners began to have more prominence and import, and probably with the auction, more community engagement, as opposed to the industrial side of the business and the region. I'm exploring that a little bit in my head right now, but I think that may be a point at which the Vintners gained some community relevance, that maybe it hadn't had prior to that.

[break in audio; side conversation deleted]

01-00:59:24
Meeker:

So, I wanted to ask: I know that you did some volunteer work for the auction, and you were becoming more aware of the Vintners. Also at the same time you were working with the Napa Valley Wine Technical Group, and I've heard several other people talk about that organization. It sounds pretty fascinating. When did you start to join committees for the Vintners, roughly?

01-00:59:57
Dyer:

Well, my memory of those earlier days of the Vintners was not of a very structured organization. I was certainly active enough in, whether it was exclusively the auction—I don't think really a lot of the community programs started until after we hired Linda. So, there have been three executive directors of the Vintners. There was Bob Dwyer; Elaine Mackie, whose tenure was short, and whose focus—

[phone rings; side conversation deleted]

01-01:01:11
Meeker:

Okay. As you were saying? Do you recall what you were just talking about?

01-01:01:17
Dyer:

Yeah, so during my time in the Valley, there were three executive directors of the Vintners Association: Bob Dwyer, Elaine Mackie, and then Linda Reiff, and my memory of it, and it's just my memory, as I became more and more increasingly aware of the Vintners and the role that they played in our industry, that Elaine was hired primarily to focus on the auction, and to make that as much of a fundraising vehicle as possible and to kind of add in a little bit more of the promotional aspects of it. But she, not long after she joined the organization, she developed cancer and subsequently passed away. During that time, my peers and I were maturing and started to be the winery owners and the winery presidents, and that my circle of friends began to be "the Vintners", and along about then, that, well Dick Ward is the person who asked me to join that search committee to find a new executive director.

So my thoughts on how committees worked in the Vintners at that time: There certainly was no Community and Industry Issues Committee at that point in time. There may have been a marketing committee. Probably, that marketing committee's primary focus was on the auction. All of the things that are marketing programs now, if they existed in any form prior to '85, I would be terribly surprised, or they weren't on my radar, at any rate. So, the opportunities of joining the "lunch club" became more and more interesting as more and more of my peers reached an age and positions of influence in the businesses that suddenly, the organization started to have a little bit more relevance for me.

01-01:04:15

Meeker:

I think it was when I spoke with Beth Novak Milliken, she talked about one of the transformations from the eighties and nineties until today is that previously, the main work was done by the board, but now, a lot of that has been transferred to the committees, and so, whereas the committees before might have been areas for conversation or volunteer work, now they're actually areas in which issues are hashed out, and there's policy being proposed in those committees.

01-01:04:55

Dyer:

Yeah, yeah.

01-01:04:57

Meeker:

So you said that you were asked to join the executive director search committee in 1995. Can you go back to that time and give me a sense of what it was that the search committee was looking for? What did the organization need?

01-01:05:16

Dyer:

Well, we discussed it a lot—it was important. We discussed a lot whether the Vintners was a local organization, or a larger organization, whether it should be serving the industry in more than just a social, collaborative kind of way, and we talked to a lot of different people. I think my perspective, and I don't absolutely know this, but I think that my experience with the trade association in Champagne made me think of it as a very good structural model. The *Comité Interprofessionnel du vin de Champagne* is big, well-structured regional organization. It serves as a kind of quality control, promotional, governmental—works in all of those areas—and that was an organization that I was pretty familiar with from Moët, but I do remember a lot of conversations about just how political the organization should be, or did we want someone that everybody would be comfortable with, that would be sort of more folksy, and stick to the idea of an organization that just worked together—sort of. [laughs] I do think that the organization changed very dramatically when Linda came into it. There was a much clearer sense of responsibility for all aspects of the business.

- 01-01:07:37
Meeker: Do you recall, when interviewing her, if she had a clear vision for these kinds of things that you were talking about?
- 01-01:07:45
Dyer: Yeah, I do. Yes, I think she had a very clear vision of it.
- 01-01:07:51
Meeker: Do you recall what she had talked about, how she presented that vision?
- 01-01:07:55
Dyer: Well, her background now is highly evolved through the work at the Vintners, but at that point – she was a California girl, she grew up in an agricultural area, then she worked for a congressman, and she could understand very clearly the way policy affects an agricultural business—she saw us as value added agriculture, whatever you call it, but she clearly got the subtleties of that being the case – that there was a promotional side to it, that there was a social side to it, a community side to it, and she probably articulated that a little bit better than any of us could have.
- 01-01:08:56
Meeker: So when she came into the organization, what were some of the first changes that you noticed, do you recall?
- 01-01:09:10
Dyer: That people answered the phone! [laughs] I mean, it's gone on to be so many more things, but really, truly, you had, at that point in time, communication and networking were on a fairly basic level. It was kind of like, "Oh, I was having lunch with so and so, and he said this," or, "We were talking about distributors, and he recommended this, and she recommended that," but it was more of a networking organization than it was really a strategic trade organization.
- 01-01:10:29
Meeker: So, the fact of people answering the phone probably means that there were more staff available.
- 01-01:10:36
Dyer: That could be the case, too, yeah.
- 01-01:10:39
Meeker: I mean, the organization has expanded a great deal just in terms of head count.
- 01-01:10:43
Dyer: Absolutely.
- 01-01:10:43
Meeker: How did that happen? Was there concern about that? That requires greater investment, and—

01-01:10:53

Dyer:

I would say there was and probably still is. You could probably still find some people saying, "I don't know why they need all those people in that office."

01-01:11:03

Meeker:

Do you recall the justifications for the expansion, how it was presented?

01-01:11:09

Dyer:

Well, you know, there are a couple of things, and I, since we originally talked, I have thought about this, and I think that one of the things that has stood the Vintners in very good stead over the years has been their own internal financial stability, and the expansion of members has been part of that. So, it's not just prominent vintners or somebody who knows somebody. It really has become *the* important association in the Valley. It's an important trade group, and how it has recruited members and the way it's defined members, you can debate a bunch of that, but membership is clearly one way that makes the organization financially stable.

There's a chicken-and-egg part that goes on with the marketing programs, so, it's an easy way for a small winery to come in and to have access to kind of a marketing department that they wouldn't be able to have individually. Are there a lot of people in that marketing department because there was lot of need and there are a lot of members? Or, are there a lot of members because there is a good marketing department? You could probably argue it, but I think that the larger staff does provide more value to members. There's probably a certain segment of the membership who doesn't even quite know what they get, but they know that they should belong.

The relationship between the larger wineries and the wineries that are consolidated in larger groups and that have operations in multiple counties or multiple AVAs has been interesting to watch develop, and I think that one of the things that has been done very, very well is keeping one winery, one vote at the Vintners Association that would differentiate it from the Wine Institute, for instance, where you have a sort of a weighted value based on your production levels, and I think that insistence on "one vintner one vote" has allowed the Vintners to stay a little bit more community focused, because no matter how much you own, wherever you are, it's what you're doing in Napa County that's important to the Vintner organization.

The creation of Premiere Napa Valley has been a phenomenal one for funding the Vintners, because it's become a revenue stream that's independent of membership dues, that funds programming at the Vintners, and that's huge, to have that kind of financial security for an organization that's not just looking at ways to make it from your membership directly. It's been very, very powerful, I think, in allowing the organization and the staffing to grow. And again, it brings attention on the wines of the region.

Decisions have been made along the way. A decision that, or a debate that was happening just as I became involved with the Vintners was how you define a winery. It was the bricks and mortar versus the Type 2 License or custom crush, and the regulations that were changing at the federal level for definition of what a winery was, and the decision on the part of the Vintners to say that people like me, quite frankly—I mean, when I started, when I joined the board, I was at Domaine Chandon, which was certainly a bricks-and-mortar winery, but to be able to stay involved in the organization required being associated with a “winery”. Owning a vineyard and making and selling wine, was not something that I would have been able to do before ’80 something or other, because the idea of custom crushing was anathema to the feelings of the kind of the power structure. To really have skin in the game, you had to own a winery, and now many of us would say, “You’ve pretty much got skin in the game if you own a vineyard.”

01-01:16:37

Meeker:

So, by owning a winery, what that means is the production facilities, the—

01-01:16:41

Dyer:

The bricks and mortar, yeah, that was the term that we always said, “bricks and mortar, bricks and mortar.”

01-01:16:47

Meeker:

Can you flesh that out a little bit for me? Like, what’s at stake here? What were the debates like, and why were people lining up on different sides of it?

01-01:17:01

Dyer:

Well, I think the issue, really, is who’s invested. Are you fly by night, developing a brand, going to take it somewhere else, and just sort of tie up our meetings, and not be worth much to us? So the idea of long-term commitment to the Valley, to the wine-making community was the question. I think we came down on the right side of it. I think that, had it gone to just bricks and mortar, we would not have as many small members, and that that would be to the detriment of what the Vintners are today. It would not have been a way to represent the entire community, entire vintner community, and ultimately, either another organization would have had to form, or you would have the Wine Institute kind of model.

01-01:18:16

Meeker:

That’s super interesting, because we’ve seen, especially in the last ten or fifteen years, that’s the growth area, that’s where maybe new ideas are coming into the industry, that’s how young people can actually get started.

01-01:18:33

Dyer:

Yeah, that’s right.

01-01:18:35

Meeker:

Yeah, they're not able to build their own wineries, they're not able to buy their own land now, but they still have an interest in making wine with Napa Valley grapes.

01-01:18:48

Dyer:

Yeah. No, I think that is exactly right, yeah, and I think that the ability to be kind of the umbrella organization for a whole range of sizes, shapes, flavors of wineries, has really stood the Vintners Association in good stead as it's grown and evolved.

01-01:19:25

Meeker:

How do the Vintners deal with such a diverse collection of wineries?

01-01:19:34

Dyer:

Very, very carefully. [laughs] No, I think you find those, you look hardest at the places where there's commonality, and that's not 100 percent of the time in anything, but I think that does work—what do we all have in common, what are the issues that we would all share—and ultimately, you do then become somewhat political, because a lot of our issues are political. A lot of our issues have to do with the fact that we are a highly regulated substance—rightly or wrongly—but taxation is a big one for us. The identity of where we're making the wines, whether there's value added to the location of Napa Valley, all of those things ultimately become things that are regulated by somebody else, and you have to explain your position and advocate for it.

01-01:20:41

Meeker:

Are these the areas that you're talking about with the greatest commonality, where people can come together?

01-01:20:46

Dyer:

Yeah, and things like the Napa Green Certification program, for instance, is one where the NVV can offer guidance and certification to a wide range of wineries, and those programs are good. They're ethically good in the sense of protecting the planet, but they also are kind of good for business. If you can educate the membership to understand conservation issues at that local level—take control of it and own it, themselves. Then when, say, a state agency is considering imposing new regulations, they can see immediately that you're already self-regulating some of the things that they're asking for, then the relationship changes. So there's good, thoughtful—again, I'd call it advocacy in some ways—taking responsibility in areas of resource allocation that all wineries large and small in the Valley have to deal with.

01-01:22:14

Meeker:

Well, so you had some personal interaction with some of these issues in terms of winery definition, and eligibility for membership in the Vintners, and I'm wondering if you can walk me through that a little bit, and it had to do with your departure from Domaine Chandon in 19—

01-01:22:34

Dyer: 'Ninety-nine.

01-01:22:35

Meeker: —'99, but you had just been elected to the board in 1998, which also fits into your purchase of this property in '92, planting of a vineyard shortly thereafter, and then eventually bringing the wine to market. Can you walk me through that whole constellation of events?

01-01:23:00

Dyer: Sure. So, just step back a little bit, both my husband and I had built pretty good careers in wineries that got quite large. He left Sterling, which is where he had been winemaker before I left Chandon, and he established, while we were developing the vineyard, he established a consultancy. So he got to the point where his work consulting was enough that it allowed me to consider stepping back from Chandon, and I kind of followed his—initially, when I left Chandon, the idea was that I would spend the time to build our business up. So at that point, we had some wine that we'd already bottled. You know, the vineyard had grown up, the wine had been made, and things had been bottled, so I kind of saw through the establishment of all the bonding and the this and the that, and this figuring out distribution and the website and those sorts of things, so I did that for awhile and then also did some consulting.

So that was kind of the transition, for me, in a, just how do you support yourself in what you're doing, way. I had joined the board of the Vintners in '98, so in '99 when I left, there was kind of a, is my leaving this going to jeopardize my ability to participate in the Vintners, and we had established in the years preceding that that members—let's see, what was the criteria exactly? You had to have a brand. You had to have at least, at a minimum, the Type 2 License, which meant that you were using someone else's facilities, but it wasn't directly custom crushed, that you were still in control of the production of that wine, and then you had to have been in the marketplace and reached a certain level of sales, before you would be considered a winery and eligible for membership in the Vintners, and we did that, and I had an uninterrupted term on the board. So that's essentially how that happened.

01-01:26:04

Meeker: So you met all of those requirements at that point in time?

01-01:26:08

Dyer: Yes.

01-01:26:09

Meeker: So, have those requirements changed? Have those evolved?

01-01:26:17

Dyer: I'm not sure. It's possible that the monetary value of the sales has gone up, that there's a slightly—simply because of inflation, and all the other things that have happened, that there might be a volume or a financial level, but

yeah, you have to have been in business for awhile, was the rationale for that, but no. I think in general, the Type 2 License and the established business is still the basic criteria.

01-01:26:53

Meeker: So they really want the vintner to be overseeing the making of the wine—

01-01:26:59

Dyer: Correct.

01-01:26:59

Meeker: —not just—

01-01:27:00

Dyer: Buying stuff on the bulk market, yeah.

01-01:27:03

Meeker: Slapping a label on it.

01-01:27:04

Dyer: Not a *négociant*.

01-01:27:07

Meeker: Okay, so there is still that element. So when you joined the board in '98, it's an election, correct? You stand for election. Did you have a platform or an agenda?

01-01:27:21

Dyer: We had statements, so we had candidate statements that went out to all the members, which were, “this is who I am and this is what I've been doing and this is why I'd like to serve,” but I don't believe there are many people who say, “I'm running because I want to change this or that,” so it's—yeah.

01-01:27:47

Meeker: “I want to bring hope to the Valley.”

01-01:27:49

Dyer: Yeah, exactly, [laughter] “and world peace.”

01-01:27:53

Meeker: Well, do you recall how you would have presented yourself?

01-01:28:02

Dyer: I could probably find that. You know, to go back to some of the earlier bits of our conversation, I have always kind of been “all in” on things. If I think they're worth doing. I kind of want to be involved. It could be said that I raise my hand a little too often, but in general, that would be kind of how I like it. And there were a lot of interesting issues at that point around winery definitions, the Napa Co ordinances control: What you can do at a winery? How much tourism is too much tourism? Do you want to have a winery in order to bring a lot of people in? Is it agriculture or is it lifestyle? What is it

exactly? These are still issues today. I think that any area, like Napa Valley, that's relatively successful and desirable to live in have those kinds of push and pull between the good old days and progress, but I think that those are, to me, those are interesting discussions. How they resolve themselves? I don't know that you're ever 100 percent satisfied with how they resolve themselves until you see it a few years down the road, but I'd rather be involved with it than just watch it.

01-01:30:01
Meeker:

So you were elected to the board, and my understanding is that then the board elects a chair. They used to elect a president of the board, or something like that. Is that how—

01-01:30:12
Dyer:

Yeah, the board elects officers, so there are officers, and terms.

01-01:30:19
Meeker:

And I think that year you were elected, Beth Novak Milliken was elected chair.

01-01:30:24
Dyer:

I think that's correct.

01-01:30:25
Meeker:

Was this kind of a year of the woman for Napa Valley Vintners, 1998?

01-01:30:30
Dyer:

Well, I don't know—it was at least a turning point. We have had a few women chairs at NVV. After years with none, we had a few in rapid succession: Margaret Duckhorn was chair, I was chair, Beth was chair, and that was it for awhile.

01-01:30:45
Meeker:

Yeah, I think Beth was the first woman chair, and the youngest as well, and also not just a few years before was when Linda was hired, although she was preceded by another woman. Is this something that is worth discussing, or is it, just happened to be a natural evolution and expansion of membership?

01-01:31:12
Dyer:

To me, it feels like just a natural evolution, yeah. I don't know, but yeah, I would say it was just a logical following of what was going on in the business at large.

01-01:31:31
Meeker:

So, board terms are three years—

01-01:31:34
Dyer:

Three years, and you can serve two.

01-01:31:36
Meeker:

Okay. And so did you do the full six years?

01-01:31:39

Dyer:

I did.

01-01:31:40

Meeker:

So what were some of the issues that you were most interested in while on the board? You had mentioned this kind of winery definition issue, and the Winery Definition Ordinance was originally passed by the board of supervisors in 1990. Can you, for the audience at home, tell me what that is, and how it's played out?

01-01:32:07

Dyer:

So the Winery Definition Ordinance is an overlay on the Ag Preserve, essentially, so that much of the land in Napa County is—zoned exclusively for agriculture, the Ag Preserve and Ag Watershed areas, and those are considered appropriate for use primarily as agriculture, or for uses that are in service to agriculture—I'm not saying that exactly right, but you know what I mean. The issue of what activities are truly supporting grape growing/winemaking is where we get into the divisiveness. So, original thinking might have been that we're kind of on the farm trails, and that you can buy farm products at the cellar door, and the expansion of that is “how much food can you serve?”, “how many wine glasses can you sell in addition to the product that you make from the agriculture that's there?”, then “how many cars?”, and “how late can you play music?”, and “can you have weddings or not at wineries?”. But fundamentally, it's that the activities should be in the service of the agricultural product, and where that line is drawn, what activities are considered to be promotional—educational is kind of the big one. We do tastings because they're educational. [laughs]

Our public needs to see that, and I do think that a lot of that's true, that there is—wine is a personal enough decision, the decision whether you like wine or want to drink wine, how you use it at table, but it is a value added, and to some extent, a luxury. It's not something that many of us would say, “You need it,” but it's the understanding of it as an experience. Experiencing it at the source definitely, definitely, definitely influences purchasing decisions: I was there. I saw that. I've stood in that vineyard. I touched that place. I had a conversation while I was drinking this wine, or, oh, it goes delicious with goose. I don't know, whatever it is, those personal points of contact are very important to our consumers, and how you keep that authentic is the purpose of defining a winery in a way that allows you to make that connection with a consumer, without changing the model of your business. Your business still should be the wine business, not Riedel Crystal or—

01-01:36:10

Meeker:

T-shirts.

01-01:36:10

Dyer:

—or parties, yeah, and so that is the perennial question. It's kind of, how much tourism, and I don't even know if it's really tourism. How much, what

level of activity is appropriate on that land that has been deemed and zoned for agricultural purposes?

01-01:36:36

Meeker:

How are these decisions best made? Maybe the question I'm asking is, what is the appropriate role of the Vintners in addressing these concerns that are clearly spread throughout the industry, throughout the Valley?

01-01:36:55

Dyer:

Well, I think that it's a combination of things. When I think that, in terms of helping our board of supervisors, let's say, or our planning commission understand how proposed regulations will impact the wine industry, it's educating them. It carries more weight if it comes from an organization than if it comes from a series of individuals, because you can focus on those things that are common, as opposed to the things that might make Joe over here want to do weddings, and Jim over here want to sell wine in gallon jugs out of tanks or something.

So we're trying to pull that together to speak with one voice, and I think that from an industry perspective, it's important that you have a forum in which people feel free to talk to each other, and *do* talk to each other, because those things can get pretty divisive, if you don't really work hard on keeping everybody kind of filled in on what their responsibilities are to their neighbors and what their opportunities are to business. In that same way the Vintners programming on marketing would function to promote the entire Napa Valley at the same time dealing with the various needs of members, small and large to access and be effective in the market place. One hundred percent successful? Probably not, but at least tackling, asking the right questions.

01-01:38:59

Meeker:

Hmm, interesting. So, these conversations, how do they happen? I know that there's the Community Industry Issues Subcommittee.

01-01:39:08

Dyer:

Correct.

01-01:39:09

Meeker:

I think that's the correct name of it.

01-01:39:10

Dyer:

Yes, Community Industry and Issues, CIIC, Community—

01-01:39:18

Meeker:

Community Issues and Industry? [laughter] We'll put it in the transcript [side conversation deleted]. Is that one way that the organization has institutionalized these conversations, and provided a forum.

01-01:39:37

Dyer:

Yes, absolutely. Yeah, absolutely, and that's a committee that I would not miss—I mean, that is a valuable resource to me as a vintner and as a

community member, and it's, that committee will get the presentation from the transportation director at the county, before anybody else sees it without going into the office. They, the powers that be in the County, are very good at making those connections, and looking for vintners' support, politically, so it's a two-way street, a very important thoroughfare, I think, for the board and for the industry.

01-01:40:31

Meeker:

Well, the organization has had to deal with some pretty thorny issues for which there maybe hasn't been a fully satisfactory solution yet, and Prop C was certainly one of those quite recently. Do you have any comment on that whole process, by which the organization was—

01-01:40:52

Dyer:

Personally, I think it was not the most successful vintner engagement, as I think, in that particular case, that the association tried to weigh in a little bit before all of the information was out, and tried to weigh in, in part, in response to the sense that there was some political realities that they needed to respond to maybe before they responded authentically to the science. There was a little breaking, I think, with protocol in that particular one. It's certainly something that can be recovered from, and I think has, in fact, resolved itself mostly but not completely. The board of supervisors has in fact passed some regulations—actually changes in regulations, that will help towards some of the environmental issues that were of concern to the people who put Measure C on the ballot, hopefully avoiding the initiative process which has the disadvantage of being hard to modify and needs to be defended legally, if there's anybody who wants to challenge it legally, and also can't be changed without another vote of the people. I think that there's a lot of kind of moving parts right now, and that the board, if they're smart, will be planning to review and revise the stuff on a much more frequent basis than they have in the past. I think that the problem that the Vintners had with it was that there was not unanimity in the vintner community and that they didn't work hard enough on creating that unanimity, or finding, again, finding the place where people do have common ground and only weighing in on those things.

01-01:43:27

Meeker:

Is that the main lesson learned from this moment?

01-01:43:33

Dyer:

I think so, yeah. I mean, it gets more and more complicated the more people you've got. There are a lot of members, over 500 members. You're going to have diverse opinions within that 500 members, and then you've got a higher population now. Back when all these ag laws were originally put in place—you didn't have American Canyon. American Canyon was in the unincorporated part of the county, and that's gotten to be a very large populous and a voting base that, I think the Vintners do a lot of good work to try to stay relevant and visible in that community, but without question, when you start to talk about voters, there are relatively fewer farmers and relatively

fewer people depending upon the farming community for their livelihood than there were twenty years ago.

01-01:44:51

Meeker:

One of the things that I find increasingly remarkable is that, just within the population of the Vintners, so these 500 vintners, these 500 individuals or organizations, how not just diverse they are in terms of opinions, but I imagine—sort of look at the political world in which we live in today. It's deeply polarized, and my suspicion is that that polarization is well represented in the demographic group of the vintners in terms of, if you think about some very wealthy people who are probably very conservative, and then some people who are more drawn to it because of the agricultural life, and had maybe been here for a longer period of time and are protective of the way that things have been. I'm not sure that I would relish running an organization like that. Are those conversations had, and how are those kinds of divides addressed?

01-01:46:21

Dyer:

Well, that's a really good question. I would defer to Linda Reiff for that one, [laughter] completely. I think, again, and this may be the Pollyanna in me, but I think, again, what you need to do is to look at what we all have in common, and that becomes the basis, and then you nibble at the places where we disagree with a certain amount of care, and yeah, I have very good friends that I disagree on this particular issue, about not politics in general, but the property rights, right-to-farm folks versus the regulation-for-the-good-of-the-whole people. I tend to actually agree with this particular one. I think farmers *are* very good environmentalists. I think there's no reason whatsoever for there to be distrust of an agricultural community by an environmental community, but for some reason, there is, and it doesn't take more than a couple of bad players to make that seem like that's the norm. So you have people who simply will not believe, for instance, that most growers no longer use Roundup, that we got that message at the same time that they did, and that we found other ways around it, and that we're as concerned about our soils and our water as they are, but that's a hard, yeah, that's sometimes a hard sell if you've got people who are too entrenched in where they sit and what they think they see.

01-01:48:34

Meeker:

Do the Vintners then try to play a role in facilitating these conversations, or finding common ground?

01-01:48:41

Dyer:

Yeah, I think absolutely, yeah.

Interview 2: April 26, 2019

02-00:00:00

Meeker:

Today is April 26, 2019. This is Martin Meeker, interviewing Dawnine Dyer for the Napa Valley Vintners Oral History Project. This is our second session together, and we're here back the world headquarters of Dyer Wine. [laughter] We covered a lot of ground last time, but there's still a number of topics that I think that we both want to talk about. Why don't we jump in, and you had mentioned something I think that's quite intriguing that I haven't heard anyone mention before, and that is Napa Valley Vintners rebranding themselves. What does that mean, exactly, when a nonprofit rebrands itself? What's at stake?

02-00:00:46

Dyer:

Well, I think that in this particular case the Vintners Association, which had been a very rural-looking logo with kind of a folksy approach to how it was organized and what its tasks were, really started to look at kind of the mission and what it could do, what was at stake, what services its members really wanted, and, in conjunction with that, the kind of evolving relationship between the Auction and the vintners. The Vintners Association, from my observation, was kind of a luncheon group who took on, at some point, throwing an Auction to raise money for two hospitals that both served their community, and it was kind of a folksy event that managed to strike a chord, and you had all kinds of people, like the wives of vintners who turned out to be people like Molly Chappellet and Margaret Mondavi, who certainly knew how to throw a party, [laughter] doing the organization, and it started to make some serious money, and also to garner some attention from the press, and to become something that was known outside of just the wine community. Initially, wineries were encouraged to invite their good customers, and at that point most of the sales of wine was actually done through distributors, so the three-tier system was the way wine was sold, and really predates the idea of a wine club and the email lists and the notices of offerings. So the customers were frequently the trade, and as it got more notoriety you started to have people coming in as attendees of the Auction who were wealthy individuals as opposed to wine lovers, certainly, but not just the trade group. And there were other wine auctions that we began to be compared with, and along with that, about that same time, there was this shift in the Vintners, just the size of the members and the issues, the number of issues that were being dealt with, a more professional staff, bringing on Linda Reiff, expanding the staff, kind of starting to understand what the real power of the organization could be.

02-00:03:55

Meeker:

So you would date this period to the mid-nineties?

02-00:03:57

Dyer:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And there was a need to link all these elements together in a different way, because the idea that the Vintners were synonymous with the Auction. We wanted to be associated with it, most certainly, but it didn't want

it to be the only thing. And I think that it was confusing which was the lead organization, and so some formal structure was important. Auction Napa Valley has its own board that includes some community members, in addition to the Vintner Board. That NVV board meeting is closed and ANV board meeting is opened, and you'd bring in the other members. And a little more conscious decision making about what kind of things the Auction was going to fund, because it started to be pretty hefty to be giving to two hospitals when there were other issues. I don't remember what year, but Clinic Ole was added to the recipients of the Auction proceeds. The creation of the Vintners Health Center. Those things became of equal weight. So we had a branding guy come in, famous branding guy. [laughs] But he was someone from San Francisco who had some interest in the wine industry.

02-00:05:43
Meeker:

Oh, is this Landor?

02-00:05:44
Dyer:

It was Landor, yeah. Okay, yes. Mr. Landor, what's his name?

02-00:05:51
Meeker:

Mister Landor. [laughter] [Walter Landor]

02-00:05:52
Dyer:

Mr. Landor had a place in Napa, so he was amenable to talking to us about that. And the logo changed pretty dramatically from being the swoopy N over a cluster of grapes to being what it is now, where it's a little bit more—I think there are four portions of it, and everything ties together. And then the Auction Napa Valley, so it was Napa Valley Vintners and then Auction Napa Valley, and somewhere along there, in the same time—someone else is going to have to fill in the dates—Premiere Napa Valley became the logical spinoff as the Auction became more geared towards consumers. The relationship with the trade, and how they fit into that, how they interacted with the vintner community, which was a pretty powerful part of the auction for many years, but how they fit into that relationship—the Auction started to be not the place. And so Premiere Napa Valley, which is a true wine auction, it's tasting wines available from barrel that are unique, either because they're something that people would blend normally into something else, or a separate blend that someone has made for Premiere.

02-00:07:34
Meeker:

It's closer to what that was based upon, yes?

02-00:07:36
Dyer:

It is very much based on those serious wine auctions, and the idea is that it is a trade auction, and it is a premiere. It's something that happens before the wines are bottled. And it can go to trade in a couple of ways, but essentially it's creating a brand, right? So you've got Auction Napa Valley, Premiere Napa Valley. You set up a structure for the activities that fall under Napa Valley Vintners.

- 02-00:08:12
Meeker: So the charge that Landor got was, hey, we've got this problem whereby the child is starting to overshadow the parent, meaning Auction Napa Valley is being confused with Napa Valley Vintners and which begat which.
- 02-00:08:32
Dyer: Yeah.
- 02-00:08:32
Meeker: And then you also have Premiere Napa Valley at some point in time, but the charge is to help identify and create an identity for these different entities, show how they're related, but also how they're distinct, I would guess.
- 02-00:08:47
Dyer: Right, in a readable system for what the hierarchy is.
- 02-00:08:53
Meeker: Were you involved in some of these conversations?
- 02-00:08:55
Dyer: Yeah, yeah.
- 02-00:08:55
Meeker: How were you involved? What role did you play?
- 02-00:08:57
Dyer: Well, I think I was on the board at the time that we did that, or maybe it was shortly after I'd gone off the board, but yeah, there was a committee. We met and saw various views, and talked about what—it's a little bit an offshoot of strategic planning, because you have to know what it is you are before you can ask someone to deliver a brand strategy that works, and can grow, and will serve an organization over a longer period of time, and be recognizable, and—
- 02-00:09:38
Meeker: Do you recall what some of the main conversations or points of debate were amongst the board members and the committee members who were working with the company?
- 02-00:09:51
Dyer: You know, I don't believe there was anything that was contentious. There was nothing that was disputed. There may have been people who liked one thing more than another, but I think the conversation was pretty—it was a process, but there was no real controversy in that.
- 02-00:10:16
Meeker: Did this process help you develop a better understanding of what the Vintners was and could be?
- 02-00:10:23
Dyer: Could be, I think, really more than was.

02-00:10:29

Meeker: How so?

02-00:10:30

Dyer: [pause] Good question. When you start to look at an organization as not existing to be the umbrella, or to stand on legs, but to be the organization and to understand what the organization wants to do, or wants to achieve, and you create a way to express the things that will help you get to that point, you're, I think, in a much better shape to drive an organization forward. There's still people who you could talk to who would talk about what a shame it was that the Auction isn't as folksy as it used to be, and can still remember that so-and-so from Southern never liked it after they changed it. But if you really look at it structurally as to what it's achieving, and then you say, okay, there's this other vehicle, what is it achieving, it does help you understand that the goals don't even need to overlap.

02-00:12:10

Meeker: So you're talking about Auction and Premiere, and how there was an evolution, and the trade is now more engaged in what Premiere is doing.

02-00:12:21

Dyer: Right, right.

02-00:12:22

Meeker: But you're also talking about something different, and broader, which is: just what is this organization, and what do we want it to accomplish?

02-00:12:34

Dyer: Yeah, for instance, the membership had to approve the idea that we would take a role in anything political, and that is part of that whole Napa name, the Two Buck Chuck and the infamous lawsuit [*Bronco Wine Company v. Napa Valley Vintners Association*]. But the Association had to wrap its head, or the membership had to wrap its head around the fact that that was an activity that made sense under the Vintners structure. And international marketing programs, there has to be a way in which that's funded that's fair and equitable for people who participate in it, or don't, but there has to be a way in which the board can say we're not just doing this to help one member sell wine; we're doing this because the Napa name is an international brand on its own, and we're promoting the Napa name, and allowing our members to promote their own brands within the context of representing the Napa Valley.

02-00:14:01

Meeker: Was it a bit like the organization kind of woke up one day and realized that it was much more expansive and influential than it thought it was?

02-00:14:11

Dyer: Oh, I think absolutely. Yeah, yeah.

02-00:14:14

Meeker: Was there anything that inspired that awakening or epiphany?

02-00:14:19

Dyer:

[pause] I'm not sure I know. I'm not sure I would be the one to ask about that. [pause] I can't think of one particular incident. You can start to add them up. They would be things like the Two Buck Chuck lawsuit, and the concern about that, and the trying to figure out what we could do better, exploring the idea of trademarks and registration marks and things like that, and kind of understanding the difference between trademarks, which you have to defend yourself, [laughs] and the GI, the geographic indications, or— [pause] I guess that's it, the GI recognition, that leads to someone else helping you to defend it, or understanding that it's an outrage [laughs] to mislead the consumer. So you'd have that. You'd have the change in the auction would be one of those things. You'd probably have some of the things like the first Napa book that was written, documenting things that we thought were just kind of the way things were in Napa, and suddenly seeing things in print that we didn't like, and not so much wanting to suppress the press but trying to figure out what it was about those things that we didn't like, and what our ethics were relative to our neighbors and each other, and—

02-00:16:45

Meeker:

Are you talking about the James Conaway book?

02-00:16:46

Dyer:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So I'm trying to remember when the first one came out.

02-00:16:52

Meeker:

It was the early nineties [it was published in 1990], I think, but there have been a succession now of three, and I think one came out—it was one every ten years, I think.

02-00:17:01

Dyer:

Yeah. I think it was maybe a little later. But at any rate, that sudden awareness that you're more visible than you thought you were, and not necessarily that you didn't want that visibility, [laughs] but that you just didn't think you had it, and that it was important to try to build consensus in the community. And the speed at which Napa Valley has been planted—planted out, some would say, but expanded—and the number of new wineries that have come on the scene in that period of time, the consolidation of larger players, and the chomping up of some of the midsized successful ones from those golden days of the late seventies and early eighties, is something that's a little disquieting, I think, for many people. And there have been more thorny community issues.

The Ag Preserve was established by the time we had arrived here, so didn't see the negative of that. It was obviously a positive by that time. But you start to see things strain a little bit when you have downturns in the economy, and people are saying, "What, I can't do this on my property? I need to keep my business going. I want to have a wedding." [laughter] And you've got the ongoing need to continually redefine and kind of rein people in a little bit about what is activities that are appropriate to support an agricultural product,

which is essentially what that winery definition ordinance—which has been redone three times, I think, in the period of time that it’s been in existence—is to really look at what we mean by “agriculture.” How do you define it? Wine is an agricultural product, all the things that you need to make it and sell it, but what are all of the tools that—? Do you really need that to sell it? It’s ongoing. And it’s kind of a slippery slope, I suppose, but I think it’s also impossible that you’ll ever fix that in time. It probably should be looked at more often rather than less. Every time it gets rehashed people say, “Oh, God, I’m glad that’s done; let’s not bring that up for a while.” [laughter] And I’m not sure but what it wouldn’t be better to keep it a little bit more elastic than to fix it, like the Second Amendment, fix it in stone and not take care of it in a timely way. And then you’ve got all of the environmental regs, and some of those became really obvious when the California Water Board started looking around at the health of rivers, and it certainly wasn’t unique to Napa County. A lot of California has abused its rivers in a lot of ways, and most are working to clean those up. But Napa River, the fish populations were not what they used to be, the flows were not what they used to be, and it opened up a whole other opportunity to rehash who gets what.

02-00:21:15

Meeker:

Well, I appreciate that. It’s a long but interesting answer with a lot of nuance, so thank you. Coming back around—

02-00:21:24

Dyer:

I wonder if I’ve remembered the question. [laughs]

02-00:21:27

Meeker:

I could reconstruct it for you—

02-00:21:28

Dyer:

No, no, don’t, don’t, don’t, don’t, don’t.

02-00:21:29

Meeker:

—but let’s move on. It was an outgrowth, really, of this—

02-00:21:36

Dyer:

Oh, the moment that we realized that we had a bigger job than having a Christmas party and throwing an auction, yeah.

02-00:21:44

Meeker:

Right, right. And then bringing it back around again, when you’re presented with this new identity, brand of Napa Valley Vintners, did you feel that it adequately represented this new vision of what the organization was really supposed to be doing?

02-00:22:09

Dyer:

I thought it was good. I thought it was important to go through the exercise, and important to think about the association. And there are obviously people who really value the visual of a brand. I’m not sure; I think the decision to do the process was probably more earthshaking than the outcome, although, in

fact, it's an easily recognized logo, and it does work with all the programs that have been spun off by the Association, so it certainly did its job, I think, yeah.

02-00:22:52

Meeker:

Does Dyer Wine participate in the Auction or Premiere?

02-00:22:56

Dyer:

Absolutely. All members participate in some way or another. And we've done a variety of different things over the years. This year, it's the seventy-fifth anniversary of NVV. At Dyer we're donating wine to as many of the NVV joint lots as possible, so we're participating as a member of the Vintners. In the past we've done e-auction lots, joint AVA lots, and we've done barrels. We've done Premiere barrels. We've done barrel auction at the Auction. There's a barrel auction at the Auction, too. Yeah, we always participate. We usually go to the Friday event—

02-00:23:41

Meeker:

Which is, typically?

02-00:23:43

Dyer:

It's a little bit more community oriented. It's lots of local vendors, restaurants preparing things outside. The barrel tasting is going on inside somewhere and some people are obsessed with that. It's a lawn party, and there is a contingent of the local residents who continue to come on Friday. You can do that and it really, truly does feel like you've been to the auction. The big items, the live lots, which are in the tent on Saturday night, that part of the event tends to be supported a little bit more by people who have the wherewithal to put those lots in the Auction. There certainly are a handful of members who are carrying the flag for that one.

02-00:24:53

Meeker:

How do you decide what to contribute, in terms of what kind of lots, and how do you want to represent Dyer in that situation?

02-00:25:04

Dyer:

Well, we have done Diamond Mountain District lots, where we work together with our neighbors to come up with something.

02-00:25:14

Meeker:

Like a shared barrel.

02-00:25:15

Dyer:

Like a collection. Yeah, or a collection of wines. I think one year we were working on an idea that we weren't a monoculture, [laughter] right, so we had local honeys and olive oils and things, as well as the wines from Diamond Mountain. And so you probably put more thought into putting them together than anyone does when they're buying them, but we've done that a couple of times. And we've done verticals a few times, verticals of magnums. The barrels are always good, but they're a little—to put five cases into something

for a winery our size is not the easiest, economically. It's not as easy as a 20,000-case winery doing that.

02-00:26:10

Meeker: No kidding. Right.

02-00:26:12

Dyer: But it's worth doing occasionally, mix it up a little bit.

02-00:26:19

Meeker: Well, one thing that we did want to talk about was land use, and you did talk about that a bit. And following on the Ag Preserve of 1968, a lot of people say the next—that also grew, in terms of changing the approvable lot size, and everything.

02-00:26:48

Dyer: Yeah, yeah, and the definition of the ag watershed, and considering more of Napa County.

02-00:26:58

Meeker: And then 1990, the Winery Definition Ordinance passed, and that was passed by the Board of Supervisors, so it wasn't a vote. It wasn't a Measure C kind of proposition.

02-00:27:10

Dyer: Right.

02-00:27:11

Meeker: And now I think at this point in time you weren't yet involved in the Board of Napa Vintners.

02-00:27:18

Dyer: No. Prior to that, though, I think that there was a committee called 2020 that did take the form of an initiative to Measure J, that put on the ballot that the Ag Preserve couldn't be changed by a vote of the Board of Supervisors. And I did get involved in that.

02-00:28:03

Meeker: How so?

02-00:28:05

Dyer: Just organizing, calling, writing pamphlets. So the people that I remember who were very involved in that were: Warren Winiarski; Diane Dillon before she was Supervisor was very active in the land use area; Lester Hardy, who's a local attorney; Volker Eisele, who always had a lot to say about anything political. [laughter]

02-00:28:34

Meeker: And you were supportive of J.

02-00:28:37

Dyer: Oh, yes.

02-00:28:37

Meeker: Did that pass?

02-00:28:38

Dyer: Yes, it did.

02-00:28:39

Meeker: Okay. So one of the things I was getting at was when you're setting up your operation here, how did your vision for Dyer Winery interact with the Winery Definition Ordinance, and how the changing regulatory environment—

02-00:28:57

Dyer: Well, the regulatory situation that changed for us was the creation of these type 02 licenses, where you could actually hold a winery bond without owning a wine production facility. The bond allows you to participate in wine events, to sell directly, more easily—being a bonded winery is an advantage, from a commercial perspective.

02-00:29:30

Meeker: So prior to the type 02 licenses, wineries such as this couldn't be a bonded winery.

02-00:29:36

Dyer: Pretty much.

02-00:29:36

Meeker: You actually had to have a physical winery. I didn't know that. Huh.

02-00:29:40

Dyer: And that was huge.

02-00:29:45

Meeker: Do you know when that happened?

02-00:29:45

Dyer: I should have done my homework on all of this, shouldn't I? I don't remember when that was exactly, but when it came up there's a lot of discussion. When I went on the Board in '98 there was still discussion on the Board level as to whether members needed to be bricks and mortar wineries. That was the term, "bricks and mortar," vs. "custom crush." And the conclusion that the organization reached was that the type 02 license, as long as you held the bond and were commercially viable, that you were a winery, and therefore eligible for membership, which is a critical moment for the organization. If they had decided at that point that it had to be bricks and mortar, you wouldn't have the membership that you have now. Your Napa Valley Vintners Association would be a small group of people who owned the facilities, and there'd be a lot of people who would either have formed another association or would be on the outside of that completely. So it was a smart move, but that

decision did have some members who thought that was really letting in people who weren't serious about the business.

02-00:31:24

Meeker: How do you think that it impacted the organization?

02-00:31:28

Dyer: Well, simply by being inclusive it allows it to be the voice of Napa Valley. I think without that kind of inclusion it would have been pretty hard to do the kind of things both in marketing and in name protection that it has done. First of all, you'd have a higher percentage of members who had commercial interests in a lot of different wine producing parts of the state, who certainly value the value of their Napa Valley properties but might be less inclined to defend the name quite so energetically as the Association does. But the fact that you have a lot of smaller property owners, vineyard owners, winemakers, who do have skin in the game, maybe isn't quite as much as if you have spent five million dollars on a facility, but it still is having skin in the game. And—

02-00:32:50

Meeker: You may not have bricks and mortar, but you have soil and leaf.

02-00:32:54

Dyer: Well, yeah. Yeah, that's right, and you've got inventory, and you buy barrels, and you are participating. So I think that decision was very important to the Vintners being able to become the voice of Napa Valley.

02-00:33:19

Meeker: Do you know who in the organization were the big advocates for expanding membership to that contingent?

02-00:33:28

Dyer: [pause] Well, I think you would have people—first of all, until the change in eligibility, the Board would have only had people who owned facilities on it, or who worked for people who owned facilities—at that point I would have been at Chandon. I think the people who saw more value in that would have been like Tom Shelton from Phelps—he was a good and able leader, good thinker. I don't recall NVV staff taking a strong position on that. [pause] But I think you would find Hugh Davies sympathetic, Beth Milliken sympathetic.

02-00:34:36

Meeker: All very respected people with a long history in the Valley, too.

02-00:34:38

Dyer: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

02-00:34:43

Meeker: So when you become this type 02, how do you go through that process, and what was it like for Dyer to become a bonded winery? How was that transformative for your experience here in the Valley?

02-00:35:01

Dyer:

Well, it's a lot of paperwork is mostly what it is. [laughter] Yeah, what you're doing is you're establishing that your participation in the process is real, that there is an area and a facility, whatever facility you use, that is yours and controlled by you. And in the first years of these Alternating Premises your area had to be physically fenced off. Your barrels had to be in something where you were the person who had the primary access. You can now do it with just kind of filing a map, having a plan of what that is. Our first experience with that was working with our neighbor in the Von Strasser Winery, which is right next door here on Diamond Mountain. Our original agreement with them predated a lot of wineries doing custom crush. He had just leased a piece of property adjacent to us on the other side of us and it had been planted, but the owners of the property were nervous about water, and we had a very good well. So Rudy Von Strasser was leasing that vineyard, and harvesting the fruit from it to make wine. And we traded watering his vineyard from our well for rights to make wine in his winery, literally turned water into wine. [laughter] Their facility was very close—literally a five-minute walk from the vineyard. The fruit went to the winery without ever getting on a truck. It would just go on a tractor across the road. And the process really was more paperwork than anything else, yeah.

02-00:37:15

Meeker:

One thing that I'm hearing from a number of people I've been speaking with is the impact of 2008 and 2009 on the wine industry, and that, according to what I've heard, results in a real consolidation of the distribution networks and wholesaling, which means that—and then also there's some beginning of loosening of direct-to-consumer marketing across the United States, and more states become open to that practice, which means that the sales and marketing of wine moves away from the three-tier system and kind of becomes a two-tier system: the winemakers and the consumers. Is that an accurate description of what's happened over the last ten years, first of all, based on your experience?

02-00:38:17

Dyer:

Yeah, that certainly is what's happened, and I'm guessing it would have happened even without 2008, 2009. I think that just to be seen as a downturn in the economy, when wine sales were not as robust as they had been, made people question the prices, and who got what from the money that came in from wine sales. I think the three-tier system is quite broken, but I think it was broken before 2008, and I think that the idea of wine clubs predates 2008, too, maybe perfected under some of the pressures [laughter] of that. But it's a good time in the wine business right now, and the wine market is pretty strong, but I think you would find a lot of people who are saying that it's not as easy now as it was five years ago, and there's some saturation in the market. There's a lot of things filling up our email systems. That makes the blast email a less valuable way of communicating with people about things you would like them to buy. In addition to that, we are in that luxury world where having that sense of place and authenticity really is important to our consumers, and I think that

wine consumers are probably more likely to open those emails than anybody. But even so—I'm sure you're the same—

02-00:40:14

Meeker:

No, I get those emails and I actually read them. [laughter]

02-00:40:17

Dyer:

Oh, yeah?

02-00:40:17

Meeker:

There are a lot that I delete right away, but I'll open my wine emails. I'll even go to the "buy," but I won't always buy, because I'm like, I can't, I just can't. I'll get in trouble.

02-00:40:30

Dyer:

Exactly!

02-00:40:31

Meeker:

Well, so this transformation that's happened, has this brought forth issues that the Napa Valley Vintners have been compelled to contend with or address in some way?

02-00:40:44

Dyer:

Yes, and I think it's probably a work in progress, but the biggest one, really, is that everyone finds it easier to sell wine if they can actually touch the consumer. And the Vintners do a great job of the road show, trying to recreate that situation, but I think, without doing a scientific study, I can almost guarantee you that someone who tastes through a hundred wines is probably not going to find your website, call you up, and place an order. I won't say that never happens, but if someone comes to visit you then you've made contact in a way that's different, and the story isn't, oh, I went to a tasting the other day and met Dawnine Dyer. It's, I sat down and tasted wine, or walked through the vineyard with Bill Dyer, or something like that. Those experiences tend to stick. And I think that really is what much of the current focus on wine sales and wine experiences and wine visits is about. It's that people are looking for an experience – authenticity. We do very well in that world of: "know where your food comes from" – know where your wine comes from is an extension of that. People get it. It's not a hard story or connection to make. But there are a lot of us (wine brands) right now, and it's gotten kind of crowded at that end, and it's not clear as the market segments how many of those can be supported. And that's without even touching the three-tier system. That's direct-to-consumer, obviously. That's a better place to sell. You get more of the profit. If you have a winery with a tasting room, though, you've got to staff the tasting room, and you've got to create the experiences, and it's maybe food and some things that come in, and maybe you can figure out a way to get all of that back into your sales, but as we all know also from the weeks and months after the 2017 fires it didn't come back right away. There were an awful lot of people who just thought Napa Valley

and Sonoma had burned to the ground. And that was hard on wineries, because you pay your staff while there's nobody come in.

02-00:44:00

Meeker:

Does the Napa Valley Vintners see itself in having a role in helping wineries adjust to this new world?

02-00:44:13

Dyer:

Yes, it does, but it's not omnipotent. So it's essentially the Napa Valley Vintners Board of Directors, with capable staff, sees its role as holding the conversation, or engaging people in what their issues are, and what they're feeling, what they think need to be improved, and then trying to offer some of those solutions. But I don't think the association is a problem solver. It's not quite that paternal. It is a board made up of members, an association made up of committees, and some of those committees are pretty opinionated. [laughter] So I think that you'd find that at the board level there's always going to be a lot of discussion about—I haven't been very active in the marketing committees, but there are people, like Paula Kornell, she knows a lot about marketing wine, and her presence on some of those committees, her ability to understand from her clients' perspective, or wineries that she's worked for, what's going on in the market and what will help wineries more is—yeah, so I think the association and the committees and the board are taking that seriously. What's the next thing that will help our members be successful?

02-00:46:02

Meeker:

Well, that's a good segue to talk about marketing Napa, and there's a whole constellation of issues that maybe fits within that, some that you've identified that I know you'd like to talk about. There's the early work on the geographic indicators. There's the hundred-percent certification mark, the conjunctive labeling law. All of these things have to do with protecting the name, which is closely related, I think, to marketing the name.

02-00:46:35

Dyer:

Yeah. Oh, absolutely.

02-00:46:36

Meeker:

It's sort of truth in advertising, I guess, and the understanding about how that has evolved over time. So I don't know that I have a question here, but maybe you can start by telling me when did it first become apparent that there were these outliers that were maybe abusing the Napa name, and therefore potentially diluting its significance for the consumer?

02-00:47:07

Dyer:

Yeah. Well, I think the big one would be the Two Buck Chuck label.

02-00:47:14

Meeker:

So what was that? Can you, for the viewers at home—? [laughter]

02-00:47:19

Dyer:

Let's see if I can do this story justice. You probably have a lot of people you've asked this of; somebody will hit it right. Essentially, there was a brand, Charles Shaw, a man who had started a winery in the Valley, made Gamay Beaujolais exclusively back in the seventies, and he at some point got a divorce, had this winery, sold the vineyard, and sold the brand. So he sold a brand that had an association with the Napa Valley. Where did it say Napa Valley on it? Charles Shaw, Napa Valley. That brand was purchased by a winery that was not making Napa Valley wine. Now, the association monitors labels when they come out. At that time, that wasn't the case, and it was kind of like, well, that's weird, that's not very good, but it was kind of as that brand grew and became two-dollar Napa Valley cabernet - that it began to be a problem. And Trader Joe's was, I think, the first exclusive account for that wine, and had pretty broad distribution. And there was no real obvious way to confront that. There was no way to say, "Hey, you guys, don't you think that's a little misleading?"

So it became clear as that went along that there needed to be a better regulatory structure around labeling, and that while taking on a legal challenge was really expensive, and that while the membership was mostly supportive—quite honestly, they were a lot more supportive after it was won than they were about all the big dollars that were spent on lawyers during that time—it had to be done. I do hope you get a chance to talk to Richard Mendelson at some point. But that lawsuit was probably a turning point in NVV work to protect the value and authenticity of the name Napa and all it implies on a wine label.

The expansion of new AVAs within Napa Valley started to happen quite a bit before that. Their growing influence was a good lead-in to that, because you did then find questions arising like: "If you're in Rutherford, do you need Napa Valley, or does Rutherford trump Napa?" I was never active in this one, but I remember there being a committee. I think Tim Mondavi might have been the guy who headed it, and the idea was let's not let this happen higgledy-piggledy. The idea was to go in and say, "You've got the Napa Valley; let's find a way that makes sense to everybody to divide it up so that you don't have—which we do have now—places that are nothing." There are parts of Napa that aren't in a sub-AVA; they're *just* Napa Valley, poor guys. But the process doesn't really work that way, and it turned out not to be possible for the Vintners to agree on that as a let's do one big application and divide it all up amongst ourselves.

02-00:51:32

Meeker:

Yeah, sort of the grand compromise or something.

02-00:51:33

Dyer:

Yeah. So people started to apply for what they thought were the specifics of their watershed, their soils, their history of winemaking, all of those things that go into the AVAs. And as that happened, you find AVAs that benefited

by becoming an AVA because their names maybe weren't very well-known, but you also then had the better-known AVAs, the Ruthersfords, the Stags' Leap, who came first in all of that, who said, "We're pretty happy. Maybe Rutherford's all we need." And so the conversation about how do you express both—and I think that the argument is very good that we all benefit by being in the Napa Valley, and some of our customers, sure, they know Diamond Mountain and they'll dig into Diamond Mountain and get it, but there are customers that we maybe don't have who may like the brand or the story who, quite frankly, what they're looking for is Napa Valley cabernet. They're not looking for Diamond Mountain, and they don't know what that means. And there may even be times where, if you're not careful, you can get them confused about whether you're in the Napa Valley, if you're in Diamond Mountain. So that led to some considered thinking about how you might put that together on a label, how you might turn that into a regulation, which ultimately became a state law.

02-00:53:21

Meeker:

So Dyer Wines says Diamond Mountain, Napa Valley.

02-00:53:24

Dyer:

Absolutely.

02-00:53:24

Meeker:

Okay. So this is interesting: you talk about, I guess, Freddie Franzia, right, who bought the Chuck Shaw label, and the lawsuit followed which was won. Who was the—?

02-00:53:41

Dyer:

Richard Mendelson argued that at the Supreme Court.

[side conversation deleted]

02-00:54:19

Meeker:

I'd like to interview him anyway. It might not happen with this project, but I'm trying to find a way. But then after that, all these other things start to happen, as you'd mentioned. So can you talk about some of those other things?

02-00:54:42

Dyer:

The Napa name? So, yes.

02-00:54:43

Meeker:

Yeah, there's a state law, right?

02-00:54:45

Dyer:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And just so you know, we at NVV have always kept our focus on similar things, so our concern is using Napa Valley on labels for things that are alcoholic beverages, but there's a mineral water *right now* [laughs] that's Napa Hills Mineral Water, that talks about having the antioxidant benefits of red wine, and has a lot of names that are like "lemon

chardonnay,” with the Napa Hills label, and you just kind of look at it and you go, “this can’t be good”.

02-00:55:31

Meeker: Well, and right around the corner, no doubt, there’s going to be cannabis AVAs.

02-00:55:37

Dyer: Did you hear *Forum* this morning?

02-00:55:39

Meeker: I didn’t, no. Is that what they were talking about?

02-00:55:40

Dyer: Go back and listen to it. Yeah.

02-00:55:43

Meeker: Have you and your fellow vintners been discussing that, and ideas for how to approach it?

02-00:55:50

Dyer: Watchfully. I know that there is an association that’s a Napa County cannabis association and that would like to start to work with AVA-specific, at least Napa Valley-specific, outdoor grow da-da-da, talking about terroir in much the same way that we do for wine. The Vintners have not taken a position on that. I think that we’re concerned, and I think rightly so, that it doesn’t make sense for the AVAs that we’ve demonstrated to have an impact on grape characteristics should be used. We’re happy and respectful of the political boundaries like Napa County, Sonoma County. Wine is a controlled substance, too, so to some extent it would be a little disingenuous to say “go away,” but I think that whatever the characteristics—and I’m thinking from what I hear, that they’re a little far away from this—whatever the characteristics that are imparted to a particular clone or strain of cannabis by the soil that it’s grown in has yet to be demonstrated. And one of the things that is correct about the AVA systems is you do have to demonstrate that that is directly affecting the characteristics of the wine that’s produced. And I think there’s still a long way to go with cannabis, and even understanding what those characteristics are, and is there something in the growing that changes the THC. All those things are, I think, a little bit understudied right now. It’s kind of like it had to be legal to study it, and now the horse is out of the barn, and it would be nice to know some of these things.

02-00:57:58

Meeker: The science isn’t just there quite yet.

02-00:58:00

Dyer: It doesn’t seem like it is. So it doesn’t seem to me that the NVV is anything more than just watching right now. There are some serious concerns about proximity to vineyards and anything that might be drift from Cannabis—I think there would be fair argument with that. I think that the State has been

pretty clear about not having cannabis-infused wines, which I'm very grateful for. Until the science is in on some of the active ingredients, I think that's a foolhardy road to go down. But as of now, just a concern, again, that if you're not talking about just what county are you in, if you're talking about smaller AVAs and specific characteristics, they need to demonstrate that that's the case.

02-00:59:18

Meeker:

So your board tenure coincided with a lot of these geographic indication issues coming up. I think 2000 was the year that the California State Legislature had the geographic indication law, and then 2005 was, I think, when the Wine Origins Alliance was established.

02-00:59:36

Dyer:

Right, right.

02-00:59:38

Meeker:

And just from my understanding of the way that Napa Vintners works, I would guess that there was a lot of consensus on this issue, on the board. Were there any people who were questioning it or worried about it going too far in direction of protection?

02-01:00:00

Dyer:

Well, the sticky one is always people who do want to use [laughs] somebody else's name. And we have been very effective as an organization, as a group of producers, at ridding our own neighborhood, Napa Valley of the designated champagnes, and the ports, and the Chablis, and burgundies that used to be all over labels in Napa. And that (removing those terms from use in Napa) was an important first step, and I think there were definitely people who were not as enthusiastic about being confrontational with, for instance, the Wine Institute and their position on the use of semi-generic terms, knowing what their members from outside Napa might be saying to them. And so it wasn't wholeheartedly embraced. I'm guessing that there's even a fair percentage of the membership now that doesn't really know about that.

02-01:01:20

Meeker:

Know about—?

02-01:01:22

Dyer:

The Wine Origins Alliance and its predecessor for NVV, Origins, and the extent of that, and the respect that we get from our world winemaking peers, from not only participating in that but really pretty much having started it. We had done a lot of work, after we got the GI recognition in the EU, a fair bit of work with a group out of—I think it was funded through the EC, actually, that was doing outreach in potential member countries, or new member countries, to get them to understand the value of a Geographic Indication status, and to *voluntarily* recognize the importance of the GIs that were coming out of the more longstanding European countries. And after we got the GI status, we had

been invited to participate, not in their meetings, but on their panels when they presented in other countries, and that led to some nice trips. [laughter]

02-01:02:59

Meeker: Did you go on some of these?

02-01:03:01

Dyer: I actually spoke in Geneva. Yeah. (This was a WTO Public Symposium prior to the general session in May 2004. I was part of the Doha Round of trade negotiations for the WTO. The panel was from organized by Origin, the first group to champion GI internationally.)

02-01:03:06

Meeker: What was that experience like?

02-01:03:08

Dyer: It was pretty amazing, actually. That one was pretty amazing. I've also been to Beijing—not so amazing—where the EU is trying to kind of convince China that respecting Geographic Indications made sense, and everything is simultaneously translated, and everybody's looking for a joint venture, and it's just—I don't think that one was very effective, but it was an interesting trip.

02-01:03:31

Meeker: I've heard people recount a story about Linda Reiff needing to confront one of the emissaries from the Chinese government.

02-01:03:42

Dyer: Ooh, I don't know that one.

02-01:03:44

Meeker: Okay, I'll need to research that one a little bit more, it might have been a different trip there.

02-01:03:51

Dyer: Oh, absolutely. I'm sure.

02-01:03:52

Meeker: Yeah. Well, so I would love to hear a little bit more about this trip to Geneva, and what was it like representing Napa Valley, and what did people want to know? What were people asking? How were they interested in this issue, vis-à-vis Napa Valley?

02-01:04:14

Dyer: Well, I think the reason why we were of interest to them was that GIs have not played, historically, a big role in the United States. So Georgia peaches, that's a trademark. Idaho potatoes, that's a trademark. And those guys all do their own legal defense of that. So I think from their perspective, the Napa Valley was the only place that they could go where they could look to a large trading partner that wasn't about trademark protection, so that's—

02-01:05:01

Meeker:

Huh. So those are different options, I guess.

02-01:05:04

Dyer:

They're very different options, but I'm not even sure they are options, because I think it depends—you have to have someone's cooperation to recognize that, right? And that is, then, where some of the work that we had done previously with our friends in the EU, with the champagne producers and the Porto producers, had been important to our gaining that kind of a status, and—yeah.

02-01:05:38

Meeker:

They wanted to see that Napa was playing by the same rules that they were. Was there ever discussion about instead moving in the same direction that Georgia peaches and Idaho potatoes have, and—?

02-01:05:50

Dyer:

Yeah. There was definitely some conversation about that. But I think the feeling had always been, well, let's try for the other first, because if you have to defend a trademark your legal budget is going to be a lot higher than if you have governmental recognition, and if you have governmental recognition then essentially all you have to do is report it. You report abuses, and then the government steps in and takes care of it, whereas if it's trademark infringement every time something like that comes up it's kind of whack-a-mole. You just are always in court with someone.

02-01:06:32

Meeker:

So why did you say that the trip to Beijing was difficult?

02-01:06:35

Dyer:

[pause] Well, I don't think there was any receptiveness on the part of the audience, or even, maybe, any real comprehension of what the issues were. I think it was just quite a foreign concept to them. It didn't seem like it was preaching to a terribly receptive group, who I believe valued the interaction, but not for the reasons that the organizers might have wanted. There's something about simultaneous translation in a language that you're not even close to understanding that gets difficult.

02-01:07:36

Meeker:

They valued the interaction just because maybe they were interested in California wine?

02-01:07:41

Dyer:

No, I think it's just trade in general. (Joint EU-China Conference on Geographical Indications. I was invited by the EU delegation to present a successful use of GI status in the US). This was not a wine program. We were just part of a program, and we were from the United States (the only example of a region specific product relying on GI protection in the states).

02-01:07:56

Meeker:

A long way to go?

02-01:07:57

Dyer: A long way to go.

02-01:07:58

Meeker: I know that we are probably getting close to running out of time here, but I did want to touch on a few additional topics, and—

02-01:08:07

Dyer: I'll try to be more succinct.

02-01:08:09

Meeker: Well, it's mostly because I'm asking all these follow-up questions, so I'll try to resist. But let's talk a little bit about the Green Task Force. I think that was established in 2000, so that was also on your first term of the Board. Can you tell me about the conversations that led to the establishment of this, and what the Board hoped it was going to accomplish?

02-01:08:36

Dyer: Yeah. Again, going back to issues around the health of the Napa River, and concerns about returning it to a better condition. We were looking, at the time, at a group over in Sonoma called Fish Friendly Farming, which is not specifically a grape-growing organization, but was really looking at establishing farm plans and evaluating farms on what are the sources of runoff, looking and making sure that pesticides are used, stored appropriately, looking at erosion control, roadways. And we had the notion that it would benefit the Napa River greatly, and literally this was tackling—the Napa River has a bad report card. Are we grapegrowers the only reason? Probably not, but we're out there, and can we make it better? And so we initially talked to the Fish Friendly Farming people about just going in with their program, and ultimately decided—and there were lots of meetings about what percentage of fine sedimentation comes from dirt roads, as opposed to vineyards; what can cover crop give you in terms of keeping the soil on the land; what are the benefits of cultivation versus no-till; what do you do about erosive areas, if you've got a spot where you've got drainage in a vineyard, or seasonal creeks that are right on the edge of it, how do you treat your roads and access areas appropriately—and decided that we wanted to customize it specifically for grapegrowing in the Napa River watershed, I guess you'd say. I'm not sure that it's a lot more stringent, but it's a little bit more focused on vineyards particularly. And so we developed the green certification. We've got a sign indicating that we are certified on the gate. I don't know if you saw it.

02-01:11:29

Meeker: Well, I did notice that, and I also noticed it appears that you don't use Roundup out there.

02-01:11:34

Dyer: Oh, no. No, we don't.

02-01:11:38

Meeker:

There are two certifications now: there's the Green Vineyard and the Green Winery.

02-01:11:44

Dyer:

Right, and the Green Vineyard was first, and that was successfully spun off, and I guess that's probably another important thing about how the Vintners Association has worked. That's now a freestanding group; it's not certified by the Association. Since, and I think accurately so, it could be perceived as being a little too close to the henhouse. You want a third-party acknowledgement of your farm plan, and periodic inspections to see how you're following your plan. And that has gone on to be very responsive to regulations that are coming down the road. So if there's new requirements that the Regional Water Quality Control wants to put on vineyards for reporting, a lot of times that can be built into your certification so that you have a plan, and I know because recently there have been some changes in reporting, and it's been recommended by the Fish Friendly Farming people that you want to document some of the flows on your property during the rainy season so that you can actually explain, you can see the effect of what you might have done as a splash basin or to spread things out, so that you're not carrying fine sediments to the river as you otherwise might. And so there's an effort to try to deflect some of the hostility between regulatory agencies and the farmers by providing the tools to make that straightforward.

I've worked on a couple of those plans, and when you first look at them it's a little overwhelming, but with some handholding—and I've seen vineyard managers go from, "I'm not going to do that, I can't possibly," to, "Okay, now we've documented it; we've laid it all out; we see where the slopes are; we've got our plan for where the straw's going to go; we know what areas we need to clean out before the rainy season; we've got our checklists," and it just routinizes it. But by having it be a third party that can come in and be not the regulator but able to give you advice that will help you meet the regulations, and able to certify you in that direction, it's, I think, turned out to be a very good thing. To be honest, I haven't stayed as close to the Napa Green Winery, and I don't know who oversees that. I don't know if the regulatory group is the same, but it's similar, and relates more to environmental protection in general—recycling, waste disposal, minimizing water use, electrical use—all of those things that can make a big difference in, say, how much water goes down the drain at a winery, or what goes down with it.

02-01:15:33

Meeker:

Did the guidelines, for instance, associated with the Green Vineyard certification, did they impact the way in which you farmed this land? Were there direct linkages between those guidelines and—

02-01:15:50

Dyer:

Well, I think you just learn a lot about what the sources of erosion are, what the sources of windborne soil and—yeah, sure it does influence the way you

think. Does it change how we farm? I don't know. It's hard to find a direct link, but probably for both of us being involved in farming, and discussions around the environment, it makes sense that you would have a repository of that kind of information. And farm plans are kind of cool things, when you get down to it. I think you've got your land, right, and you map it out, and you say, oh, look at this feature, and you document all of that, and what you're going to do to mitigate things that you're doing that might have a negative impact, or minimize their impact—and you've got a plan.

02-01:17:09

Meeker:

Are there areas that you'd like to see the Green Vineyard certification go in, in terms of things that it's maybe not covering now that you'd like to see?

02-01:17:21

Dyer:

You know what I think it would be really handy if it did? I think that it would be really nice if they met their goals in terms of acres certified in the Napa Valley and then started to be more educational, because I think that that would be very helpful, and you could work it through a number of different vehicles to make sure that those things were being discussed in a direct, noninflammatory kind of a way, just studying what are best practices. Because I think that's really what you're talking about is best practices. You're not talking about trying to stop somebody from planting, or encourage somebody to plant. You're just talking about, now that you've come to this fork in the road, what are the best practices, the best way to do it? And I think those things are always changing a little bit.

02-01:18:26

Meeker:

When these initiatives were launched in 2000, what was the debate like about whether to move in this direction for the Vintners?

02-01:18:35

Dyer:

[pause] Well, I think that there were people who thought it was a really good idea, and people who didn't care much. I don't think it was that there were people who didn't think it was a good thing to do, but there were people who would have shrugged and said, oh, go ahead and do that hippie thing.

02-01:18:57

Meeker:

Was this something you were committed to from early on?

02-01:18:59

Dyer:

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

02-01:19:01

Meeker:

Let's see here. Well, I think we're actually toward wrapping up, unless there are some things you'd like to talk about that I haven't asked about. One thing I do want to ask you about is some of the other volunteer board service activity that you've done in Napa Valley, and one of those organizations I think is called UpValley Resource Center.

02-01:19:25

Dyer: Family Center, yeah. It is a family resource center.

02-01:19:30

Meeker: But it's the UpValley Family Center.

02-01:19:32

Dyer: Yeah.

02-01:19:32

Meeker: And I believe they're a recipient of auction money—

02-01:19:36

Dyer: Auction money, absolutely.

02-01:19:37

Meeker: Well, tell me who they are and what they do, and how it is that they play into, or—how should I say this—how they work within the rubric of what the Auction funds?

02-01:19:51

Dyer: Okay. So the UpValley Family Center is a family resource center, which is kind of a model of—well, you can have them in all kinds of areas. In this particular case, it's a rural model. I started with the Calistoga Family Center. All of the County services are in the city of Napa, and clearly that's not where most of our rural ag workers are. And so the Family Center was established to help identify the need for services in Calistoga—help sign up kids for the healthcare that they were eligible for, to schedule the County, to make appointments for the County—so that when they did send somebody up from Napa it was worth doing. We try not to build programs or invent programs if resources are available somewhere else, so essentially to make it our job to have as much information about what's available where, and what people's rights are to access programs. We co-located initially on the campus of the elementary school in Calistoga, which gave us a focus towards family resources. We did do everything including running tax clinics for people to file their income tax, using volunteers, so people who aren't documented can file income tax and get refunds. When you get people in, you can start to look at helping them develop financial security, financial planning, saving for college, saving for whatever it is you need to be saving for, advocating for people in healthcare situations or with specific needs. Much of it, but not all, is oriented towards the immigrant population, documented and nondocumented, but not exclusively.

And what other kinds of services? So in the schools we have gotten to the point where there's—oh, English as a Second Language. And we have a program that I think it's running right now—that actually is funded by the Mexican Consulate, which is kind of cool, to help people who don't have a formal education get their baccalaureates. And it's kind of an interesting deal, if you know anything about literacy. And if you're not fully literate in your

own language, it's very, very hard to learn a second language, so literacy, reading, math skills are something that we find that there are the people in our community whose backgrounds are such that they can be wonderful people, hardworking people, not have any problem with a job, but they are having difficulties with their English skills, and it's largely because they can't read in Spanish, either. So that program has been very good, and it has become a docented online program, so there's a serious amount of time at the library that's open, with a docent to help people go through that. Clearly that's one that I like.

02-01:24:10

Meeker: Do you speak Spanish?

02-01:24:12

Dyer: Not very much, no. No. Unfortunately, I speak French. [laughter] Not helping me much these days.

02-01:24:20

Meeker: Well, it's not bad for wine. [laughter]

02-01:24:27

Dyer: Yeah, I should, but I don't.

02-01:24:31

Meeker: These activities are also supported, in part, by the Vintners Auction fund.

02-01:24:36

Dyer: Yes, yeah.

02-01:24:38

Meeker: And that plays into the goal of the Auction Fund, in terms of community health and those—

02-01:24:45

Dyer: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. And there have been changes made to the auction giving over the years. I'm sure there are people who can tell you this better, more detail than I can, that took it from an emphasis on health care-funding for two hospitals, and then two hospitals and a health center, to what they do now, which reaches quite far into the community in terms of social services.

02-01:25:13

Meeker: And this Family Center is one of those examples.

02-01:25:15

Dyer: Yeah, yeah, yeah, and is very grateful for that support.

02-01:25:26

Meeker: So just in January, a couple months ago—it's actually been almost three months ago, or over three months ago at this point—Napa Valley Vintners had their annual membership meeting at the Lincoln Theater in Yountville,

and it was a special occasion: it was the seventy-fifth anniversary of the organization, founded in 1944 by a very small group of men. And I believe you were at that event?

02-01:25:56

Dyer: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

02-01:25:56

Meeker: Yeah, we ran into each other. I'm curious: when you were at that event did you have any thoughts about where the organization has been, and where it is today?

02-01:26:11

Dyer: Yeah. I mean, not terribly deep thoughts about it at the time—this may sound sort of silly, but I was kind of proud of the group, sort of a sense of, wow, look, there are some people who had an idea, drove it forward, people picked it up, moved it along, and yeah, it was—yeah.

02-01:26:42

Meeker: Why would you say that's silly?

02-01:26:44

Dyer: [laughs] I don't know. I don't know.

02-01:26:51

Meeker: There were many members, and then also a number of former board chairs, and I guess you would have been up on the stage with them. How did that feel for you to be up there on the stage with so many legends of Napa Valley?

02-01:27:12

Dyer: Yeah. Dan Duckhorn, and—. Well, how did it feel? It didn't feel strange, if that's what you mean. I mean, it wasn't a pinch me moment. It was more, yeah, look, we've really done something.

02-01:27:33

Meeker: Well, on reflection, what has the Vintners done? What are the big accomplishments of the organization in its seventy-fifth year?

02-01:27:47

Dyer: Well, I think the overriding one is the ongoing and consistent interest in preserving and promoting the quality of the wines from Napa. And I think that while there are lots of wildly diverse kinds of activities that fall under that rather big umbrella, that focus has been pretty consistent. I think that goes back—I didn't know those guys that founded the organization, but I think that it seems to have really originated with them. And I think there are some big steps that happened. I think that Prohibition, obviously, was a hard one to come back from, but I think—I probably have already said this, but—if you look at the time when Bill and I moved here, in the mid-seventies, there was a great sense of sharing, and I think a lot of that generated from Bob Mondavi. He was a guy who had some recognition in the community, and he was kind

of pushing the envelope in what he was trying to do with the winemaking, and he was thinking about his wines in a way that was a little bit more elevated, I think, than a lot of people were who were just getting by a little bit. But there was definitely that sense that a high tide floats all boats, and that we're all in it together, and the support for your neighbors' successes I think definitely grew the Napa Valley. Did that grow the Vintners? The Vintners were part of that growth, I think, and certainly picked it up and ran with it. I think something else that is probably good, and I hadn't really thought about this, but we talked just very, very briefly about the breaking down of the State rules that prohibited shipping wine direct to consumers, and there's an organization called Free The Grape that is a freestanding organization (working on legislation to make shipping wine direct to consumers possible). That was actually started by the Vintners, and spun off. And Napa Green, I think, is pretty much the same kind of thing: got a good idea, start a good program, but don't try to own everything all the time. So I think it does a pretty good job of focusing on it's mission.

02-01:30:55

Meeker:

In the coming years and decades, even, what do you think the biggest challenges are that will be faced by the members of the Vintners?

02-01:31:07

Dyer:

Well, it's no longer a small, everybody-knows-everybody valley. There are certainly large groups of people that we know, and large groups of people that others know. I think figuring out the way that keeps the unity is probably the biggest one. I think this Measure C environmental stuff was more divisive than we've seen in the recent past, and I think in large part that's indicative of herding five hundred cats as opposed to a hundred and fifty or two hundred. And I think that's likely to be a challenge. Likely to be a challenge is understanding how smaller wineries work with larger wineries as the larger wineries get larger and the smaller wineries, because of the way the regulations work, stay pretty small. I think climate change is probably something, and I think there's nothing that we can look to right now, other than understanding what it is and what impact it's going to have. And we, as farmers, still deal with weather. We don't really deal with climate, but climate makes weather, and that's going to be an important one to watch. It's going to be an important one to watch from both a real standpoint and a promotional standpoint.

02-01:33:00

Meeker:

How do you think the Vintners can begin to address these challenges that you've just discussed?

02-01:33:09

Dyer:

[pause] Well, the climate one is studying it and knowing it, and I think that's underway. Addressing it is probably best done by just understanding what we can do environmentally to make our footprint a little less. The others I'm not

sure I have clear solutions to, but identifying a problem is probably the first step.

02-01:33:44

Meeker: What about opportunities? What are some of the biggest opportunities ahead? Where's the optimism?

02-01:33:54

Dyer: That it's a pretty wonderful place to grow grapes and make wine. I mean, there just is no question. This is one of the places, one of the handful of places, where you can consistently make really excellent wine, and where you can, given enough time, establish styles and characteristics that are known around the world as Napa. And that's why people keep coming.

02-01:34:35

Meeker: Do you have any final thoughts, anything I didn't ask that you want to talk about, or any final thoughts you'd like to add?

02-01:34:40

Dyer: I think you've been pretty exhaustive. [laughter]

02-01:34:44

Meeker: Hopefully not too exhausting, but—

02-01:34:45

Dyer: No. No, not at all.

02-01:34:48

Meeker: Well, thank you very much. This has been really insightful and informative, and I'm happy that I got to spend some time with you doing a good interview.

02-01:34:58

Dyer: Yeah. Well, thank you, and thank you for taking the time and allowing the little sidebars. [laughs]

02-01:35:07

Meeker: Yeah, I'm happy to. Thank you so much, Dawnine.

[End of Interview]