

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

The Wine Spectator California Winemen Oral History Series

Joseph E. Heitz

CREATING A WINERY IN THE NAPA VALLEY

With an Introduction by
Maynard A. Amerine

An Interview Conducted by
Ruth Teiser
in 1985

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PREFACE

The California wine industry oral history series, a project of the Regional Oral History Office, was initiated in 1969 through the action and with the financing of the Wine Advisory Board, a state marketing order organization which ceased operation in 1975. In 1983 it was reinstituted as The Wine Spectator California Winemen Oral History Series with donations from The Wine Spectator Scholarship Foundation. The selection of those to be interviewed is made by a committee consisting of James D. Hart, director of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; John A. De Luca, president of the Wine Institute, the statewide winery organization; Maynard A. Amerine, Emeritus Professor of Viticulture and Enology, University of California, Davis; Jack L. Davies, the 1985 chairman of the board of directors of the Wine Institute; Ruth Teiser, series project director; and Marvin R. Shanken, trustee of The Wine Spectator Scholarship Foundation.

The purpose of the series is to record and preserve information on California grape growing and wine making that has existed only in the memories of wine men. In some cases their recollections go back to the early years of this century, before Prohibition. These recollections are of particular value because the Prohibition period saw the disruption of not only the industry itself but also the orderly recording and preservation of records of its activities. Little has been written about the industry from late in the last century until Repeal. There is a real paucity of information on the Prohibition years (1920-1933), although some commercial wine making did continue under supervision of the Prohibition Department. The material in this series on that period, as well as the discussion of the remarkable development of the wine industry in subsequent years (as yet treated analytically in few writings) will be of aid to historians. Of particular value is the fact that frequently several individuals have discussed the same subjects and events or expressed opinions on the same ideas, each from his own point of view.

Research underlying the interviews has been conducted principally in the University libraries at Berkeley and Davis, the California State Library, and in the library of the Wine Institute, which has made its collection of in many cases unique materials readily available for the purpose.

Three master indices for the entire series are being prepared, one of general subjects, one of wines, one of grapes by variety. These will be available to researchers at the conclusion of the series in the Regional Oral History Office and at the library of the Wine Institute.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons who have contributed significantly to recent California history. The office is headed by Willa K. Baum and is under the administrative supervision of James D. Hart, the director of The Bancroft Library.

Ruth Teiser
Project Director
The Wine Spectator California
Winemen Oral History Series

10 September 1984
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University of California, Berkeley

CALIFORNIA WINE INDUSTRY INTERVIEWS

Interviews Completed by 1986

- Leon D. Adams, REVITALIZING THE CALIFORNIA WINE INDUSTRY 1974
- Maynard A. Amerine, THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AND THE STATE'S WINE
INDUSTRY 1971
- Philo Biane, WINE MAKING IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA AND RECOLLECTIONS OF FRUIT
INDUSTRIES, INC. 1972
- John B. Cella, THE CELLA FAMILY IN THE CALIFORNIA WINE INDUSTRY 1986
- Burke H. Critchfield, Carl F. Wente, and Andrew G. Frericks, THE
CALIFORNIA WINE INDUSTRY DURING THE DEPRESSION 1972
- William V. Cruess, A HALF CENTURY OF FOOD AND WINE TECHNOLOGY 1967
- William A. Dieppe, ALMADÉN IS MY LIFE 1985
- Alfred Fromm, MARKETING CALIFORNIA WINE AND BRANDY 1984
- Joseph E. Heitz, CREATING A WINERY IN THE NAPA VALLEY 1986
- Maynard A. Joslyn, A TECHNOLOGIST VIEWS THE CALIFORNIA WINE INDUSTRY 1974
- Horace O. Lanza and Harry Baccigaluppi, CALIFORNIA GRAPE PRODUCTS AND OTHER
WINE ENTERPRISES 1971
- Louis M. Martini and Louis P. Martini, WINEMAKERS OF THE NAPA VALLEY 1973
- Louis P. Martini, A FAMILY WINERY AND THE CALIFORNIA WINE INDUSTRY 1984
- Otto E. Meyer, CALIFORNIA PREMIUM WINES AND BRANDY 1973
- Norbert C. and Edmund A. Mirassou, THE EVOLUTION OF A SANTA CLARA VALLEY
WINERY 1986
- Robert Mondavi, CREATIVITY IN THE WINE INDUSTRY 1985
- Harold P. Olmo, PLANT GENETICS AND NEW GRAPE VARIETIES 1976
- Antonio Perelli-Minetti, A LIFE IN WINE MAKING 1975
- Louis A. Petri, THE PETRI FAMILY IN THE WINE INDUSTRY 1971
- Jefferson E. Peyser, THE LAW AND THE CALIFORNIA WINE INDUSTRY 1974
- Lucius Powers, THE FRESNO AREA AND THE CALIFORNIA WINE INDUSTRY 1974
- Victor Repetto and Sydney J. Block, PERSPECTIVES ON CALIFORNIA WINES 1976
- Edmund A. Rossi, ITALIAN SWISS COLONY AND THE WINE INDUSTRY 1971

- A. Setrakian, A LEADER OF THE SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY GRAPE INDUSTRY 1977
André Tchelistcheff, GRAPES, WINE, AND ECOLOGY 1983
Brother Timothy, THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS AS WINEMAKERS 1974
Ernest A. Wente, WINE MAKING IN THE LIVERMORE VALLEY 1971
Albert J. Winkler, VITICULTURAL RESEARCH AT UC DAVIS (1921-1971) 1973

INTRODUCTION

These interviews with Joe Heitz and, in some, his wife Alice, cover his career as a student, as a serviceman in and out of the armed forces, as a young man in the wine industry, as a winery owner (with his family), as a traveller, and as a participant in various wine-related and community affairs. They reveal a fine memory, particularly on his career in winemaking. Of interest also are details of farm life in Illinois, cadet training, and his work as an employee in various wineries.

One is struck by Heitz's keen sense of duty and values: duty to his family, to the community, to the wine industry and its organizations, and to success, monetary included, as a reward for hard work. To each of his employers as well as to his own business he has obviously given a great deal of himself. The path to being a successful winery owner with a reputation for producing fine wines may not be straight or fast, but he makes it abundantly clear that he had no rich uncle and that the achievement is due primarily to hard work on the part of Alice and himself.

There are also expressed here strong feelings on various subjects: wine auctions and judgments (he doesn't like them or has strong reservations about them), democracy in the wine industry, public members of semi-government agencies, the strong mutual-assistance history of the Napa Valley winemakers, low penalties for drunk driving, the value of a dollar, pricing wines according to their perceived sensory value, his Cabernet wines being Napa Cabernets and thus incomparable to Cabernet wines of other regions, and a number of other subjects. Joe doesn't like high-alcohol Zinfandels, some wine writers, wineries that over-price the first wines they produce, or over-sized bottles for aging wines. Also he doesn't like Sauvignon blanc wines!

Present here too is Joseph Heitz the philosopher: you can only scalp a person (the wine consumer) once; let a wine judging do as it wants as long as he doesn't have to participate; know that popular demand for a wine type or style can change overnight; stay away from things that are going to be fights.

Although he claims that nothing big has ever happened to him, Joe Heitz and his family have contributed their share and more to the making of fine wine in the Napa Valley which is a major "happening."

Maynard A. Amerine

September 1, 1986
St. Helena, California

INTERVIEW HISTORY - Joseph E. Heitz

The interview with Joseph E. Heitz was conducted at his home and winery on Taplin Road near St. Helena in three sessions, on July 8, August 15, and August 20, 1985. The first was in the quiet antique-filled sitting room of his home, to escape the noise of the air conditioner in his winery office, where the other two were held. In the second, Mrs. Heitz, Alice, was a participant.

Characteristically independent and outspoken, Joe Heitz has a reputation for crustiness and occasional irritability, which have the value of bringing direct and candid responses to an interviewer's questions. Less easily perceived in the transcript but present is the characteristic humor which tempers his outspokenness. A very serious and analytical man, he nevertheless has a flexibility of mind that does not allow the ridiculous or ironical to pass unnoticed.

Mr. Heitz read the transcript of the interview carefully and made a few changes, none major. He very kindly supplied a number of photographs.

Ruth Teiser
Interviewer

2 September 1986

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please print or write clearly)

Your full name J. Joseph Edwin Heitz
Date of birth December 10, 1919 Place of birth Princeton, Illinois
Father's full name Jacob Deobold Heitz
Birthplace Princeton, Illinois
Occupation Farmer
Mother's full name Elizabeth ? Dietrich Heitz
Birthplace Pera, Illinois
Occupation Housewife
Where did you grow up? Illinois
Present community St Helena, Calif
Education B.S. & M.S. University of California
Davis, Calif
Occupation(s) Writer

Special interests or activities

RESUME OF

JOSEPH EDWIN HEITZ
HEITZ WINE CELLARS
500 TAPLIN ROAD
ST. HELENA, CA 94574
(707/963-3542)

1980

PERSONAL

Born Dec. 10, 1919, Princeton, Illinois. First 21 years were spent on family farm. During school years was active in, and a leader in, state farmer and 4-H groups. Married. Three children.

EDUCATION

High School: Princeton, Illinois. Graduated 1938.
Prior to World War II, attended University of Illinois majoring in agriculture.
1948: B.S., Enology, University of California, Davis.
1959: M.S., Food Science, University of California, Davis.

CAREER

1948-1950: Chemist for several wineries in San Joaquin Valley of California.
1950-Jan. 1958: Plant Manager, Beaulieu Vineyards, Rutherford.
Jan. 1958-June 1961: Enology Instructor, Fresno State College.
1961: Started own winery in St. Helena.

MILITARY

1942-1946: Crew Chief, P-61 Night Fighter, U.S. Air Force

ORGANIZATIONS

American Society of Enologists (Past President)
Napa Valley Vintners (Past President)
St. Helena School District School Board (Chairman for one year)
Institute of Food Technologists
Wine and Food Society
Wine Institute: Member since 1961. Currently Chairman of the Board of Directors and Executive Committee.

MISCELLANEOUS

Extensive travels abroad.
In the summer of 1979, was a member of the California agricultural mission to China headed by Richard Rominger, Director, California Dept. of Food and Agriculture.
April, 1980, participated in March Fong Eu's Wine Trade Mission to the Orient.

Dec 24, 2000

Joseph Heitz

ST. HELENA, Napa County — Joseph Heitz, who made one of the United States' most famous wines and helped put the Napa Valley of California on the map as a source of fine wines made from Bordeaux grapes, died there Dec. 16 at a hospital in St. Helena. He was 81.

The cause of death was not disclosed, but he had had several debilitating strokes in recent years.

Joe Heitz — no one ever called him anything but Joe — was the founder and president of Heitz Cellars, at St. Helena. Over the years he produced a variety of wines, but his reputation was based almost entirely on just one of them: his Martha's Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, named not for the island off Massachusetts but for the vineyard that supplied him with the grapes. That vineyard, in nearby Oakville, is owned by Tom and Martha May and is named for Martha May.

For over two decades, Heitz Martha's Vineyard was the benchmark by which California Cabernets were judged. A wine of astonishing depth and staying power, some of its earliest vintages, including 1966, the first, are still delicious.

In his 1989 book "California's Great Cabernets," James Laube rated Martha's Vineyard the best of all of them from 1966 through 1970 and in 1974, and among the top three in 1973, 1975, 1979 and 1985.

Some connoisseurs call the 1974 Martha's Vineyard one of the finest Cabernets ever made in California.

Mr. Heitz was born on a farm in Princeton, Ill., some 100 miles west of Chicago, and joined the Army Air Corps after two years at a junior college. For most of World War II, he served as a mechanic at an Air Corps base near Fresno. On his days off, he later recalled, he knocked on doors looking for part-time work "to pick up beer money."

One of those doors was at the Italian Swiss Colony winery, which hired him and set him on his career path.

After the war, he enrolled at the University of California at Davis and earned bachelor's and master's degrees in winemaking. He worked for E. & J. Gallo in Modesto for a time, and in 1951 went to Beaulieu Vineyards in the Napa Valley as an assistant winemaker for \$325 a month. He stayed at Beaulieu almost 10 years, working for the legendary Andre Tchelistcheff.

In 1961, after four years teaching enology at Fresno State University, he decided to go into business for himself. He found a small vineyard just south of St. Helena planted entirely with gignolino, an obscure Italian grape. Scraping up about \$5,000, he bought the eight-acre tract and set out to support his family on the \$4,500 a year he was told the place would earn.

His first break came in 1963, when he bought several barrels of wine from Hanzell Vineyards in Sonoma, which was shutting down

temporarily. Blending the wines in his own cellar, he produced some exceptional Chardonnay and some respectable Cabernet Sauvignon. His reputation began to grow.

In 1965, he bought his first Cabernet grapes from the Mays. He blended them into his regular Cabernet that year, but the result was so good that in 1966 he vinified the Mays' grapes separately. That was the beginning of a California legend.

The Mays' vineyard, like almost all vineyards in the Napa Valley, was devastated in the early 1990s by phylloxera — small insects that attack plant roots — and subsequently replanted. No Martha's Vineyard Cabernet has been released since 1992.

In the mid-1960s, Mr. Heitz moved his home and winery across the Napa Valley to an almost hidden spot off the Silverado Trail known as Spring Valley. He expanded over the years, eventually owning 350 acres of grapes. But he never owned any of Martha's Vineyard or of Bella Oaks Vineyard, the source of his second Cabernet, a wine that some connoisseurs have preferred to the Martha's Vineyard.

Heitz was not given to the laid-back California style or the heavy social schedule of many of his neighbors. Tall, intense and sometimes irascible, he detested the small talk of wine dilettantes and would often subject guests, particularly journalists, to an informal fasting before submitting to questions. But while he was a private person in a gregarious world, he helped more than a few wine newcomers get started in the Napa Valley.

Mr. Heitz's son, David, began to take on winemaking responsibilities in the late 1970s and is currently the Heitz Cellars winemaker. A daughter, Kathleen Heitz Myers, is now president. Also surviving are Mr. Heitz's wife, Alice, and another son, Rollie.

Joe transcended the narrow view of winemaking that prevailed in the '60s, said his friend Warren Winiarski, founder of another Napa Valley winery, Stags Leap Wine Cellars. "Joe looked at wine as an outsider. When he pushed his price to \$9 a bottle, people said, 'This is madness.' But he persisted. He asked, 'Would an artist base his price on the cost of the paint and brushes?' In the Napa Valley, he was the first artisan."

NEW YORK TIMES

I EARLY YEARS

[Interview 1: July 8, 1985]##

Education and Wartime Service, 1919-1944

Teiser: This is the first interview with Mr. Joseph E. Heitz. We're in the sitting room of his home.

Let us start then with the beginning, with your birth date and place, if we may.

Heitz: You want to go way back! I was born December 10, 1919, on a farm outside of Princeton, Illinois.

Teiser: What kind of farm was it?

Heitz: Just a diversified farm. We had corn, oats, alfalfa, cattle, pigs, chickens.

Teiser: No wine?

Heitz: No. Well, my grandfather grew grapes. This is in Illinois, remember. He had some Concord-type grapes. Later on, when I was a young boy, I would have to help go out on the creek banks and fence rows and pick wild grapes and chokecherries and elderberries, and we would make wine out of those. But I always considered it just a chore.

##This symbol indicates that a tape or a segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes see page 86.

Teiser: So you had a little reference; you probably didn't think of it later, did you?

Heitz: No, that was just work. Of course I didn't like the wines that were made from that kind of fruit. They were basically just used for flavor. You added sugar, you know. Most civilized people like to drink some form of alcohol, and you use these other things a lot of times just for flavor.

Teiser: Did your family drink them, these wines, with pleasure?

Heitz: Well, they didn't really drink them with the meals. My grandfather particularly, and grandmother, would have a glass of wine before lunch and before dinner. But then with the meal they would drink milk or water or something. As I say, these were not Vitis viniferas. A little different type of beverages, but they were wine. But that had nothing to do with my interest in wine later.

Teiser: Did they make that through Prohibition, then?

Heitz: Oh, sure.

Teiser: So it was just a family custom, I suppose.

Heitz: Right.

Teiser: They say there's not much farm tradition of wine-drinking.

Heitz: No, the Midwest is not a wine-drinking region. Mostly beer, a little whiskey.

Teiser: What was your early education?

Heitz: First eight years in a one-room school, one teacher. Then I went through high school, of course, and graduated in 1938. Then I went directly to the University of Illinois for two years.

Teiser: What did you study there?

Heitz: General agriculture, with emphasis on animal science, because my dream was to be a veterinarian. But Illinois did not have a veterinarian school at that time. It was during the Depression, and I had a scholarship to go to the University of Illinois, and I didn't have money to go out of state. Indeed I had to drop out of college at the end of two years for financial reasons primarily. But anybody with any brains could see the war was coming anyway.

Heitz: So I dropped out and enlisted in what was then called the Flying Cadets, and was sent to Muskogee, Oklahoma. It didn't take long-- I did not have flying ability, and I was washed out. Then I didn't want to go home in embarrassment, so I hitchhiked to California and got a job in aircraft, in Southern California.

Teiser: Where?

Heitz: Northrop Aircraft, in the then little town of Hawthorne.

Teiser: Then what?

Heitz: Well, time moved on, the war did start, and eventually I was drafted and went through a series of this, that, and the other things. Never did get overseas. But in my civilian life I had been an experimental inspector on the P-61, the Northrop Nightfighter. It was stationed in Fresno, so I went there as a crew chief on the P-61 Nightfighter. I was a ground crew chief, because it was only a two-man crew, a pilot and a gunner.

Teiser: Did your early experience teach you enough to help you in that job?

Heitz: Oh, sure. Yes, I had been inspector with Northrop for, oh, three years or more.

Teiser: I mean your earlier service experience.

Heitz: Well, my service experience was all mangled up. I had gone through school to be the flying mechanic crew chief and gunner on the B-24. But then, just as our whole unit was ready to go out to the staging area and get ready to go overseas, I got a telegram from Uncle Sam saying, "You're going to be discharged and go back to work, because aircraft production is down, and we need you to help bolster aircraft production." I said, "Well, that's silly. I'm single, I want to go overseas." I was foolish then. Today I wouldn't do that, but--"There are married men and so forth, and I think I should stay." And they said, "Well, you dummy, you didn't argue when you were drafted, you're not going to argue now. Go up to Salt Lake City and get your discharge papers."

So I went back to Northrop and worked as inspector on the assembly line. It was just a matter of a few weeks. (I'm sure you've had dealings with the government in the past.) Then a new order came out from the government: "Nobody, but nobody, shall be deferred because of their job alone." And that's when I was put back into the service.

Learning about Wine

Heitz: Of course all my crew friends and planes were overseas by then, and frankly as a lone individual, the army Air Corps didn't know what to do with me. So I started writing letters, and ended up in Fresno. Which probably, as chance goes, was all right, because being a PFC I didn't have much beer money, date money. So I went up and down the street knocking on doors, looking for work in the evening, and I got a job working for Dale Mills at Italian Swiss Colony winery, their La Paloma plant, just out of Clovis. It was primarily just running the evaporating pan, making concentrate out of grape juice. As I was all alone in the winery, and Dale Mills, the manager, lived on the property, he would come out and see me once in a while. And gradually he built up confidence in me, and they would add other little duties for me to do. Simple things. They would leave machinery running. They would leave a refrigeration unit, or a filter or something running, and when I got tired and ready to go home, there were very simple instructions to follow: pull switch B, open valve A, that sort of thing. But--because labor was very scarce at that time--at least they could stretch their day a little bit by having me finish off the job. Dale would also take me into the laboratory and show me the simple tests. He's the one who got me interested in winemaking.

Teiser: What sort of a person was he?

Heitz: Well, I thought he was a very fine person. He had a nice family. The wine business was tough in those years.

Teiser: This was 19--

Heitz: '44-ish. 1944. Later on, when I was in Davis going to school, he had moved up north and was working for the Gibson Wine Company in Elk Grove. And we had kept in contact, of course.

As a matter of fact, I probably should back up a little bit. Before I was discharged from the service, I had met and married Alice in Fresno on October 16, 1945. So I went back to Fresno. I talked to Mr. Mills about my future. He said, "Well, Joe, I can give you a job, but it would be just a job. You've got two years of college, with good grades. Why don't you go to the University of California and get a degree in enology, and then you can get a good job." Well, that made sense, and so that's what I did. But in the meantime I worked for him nights and Saturdays to

Heitz: help pay my way through school when I was at Davis and he was winemaker at Gibson Wine Company. Then finally I graduated in 1948, and you know enough about wine history to know that somebody pulled the rug out from under the wine industry then, and there were not only no good jobs available, there were no jobs available.

Teiser: Let's go back a minute. Your first winery experience was at Italian Swiss Colony in La Paloma. What were they making there then?

Heitz: Mostly, or maybe I should even say exclusively, although I'm not positive, dessert wines. Port, sherry, muscatel. And making concentrate, which was my job.

Teiser: Did you get some feeling for how wine was made, what the procedures were?

Heitz: Oh, a little bit, yes.

Teiser: Did it interest you?

Heitz: Yes, that's why I went back when I was discharged, to talk to Mr. Mills. And why eventually, then, I went back to school to finish my degree.

Teiser: Why did it interest you more than animal husbandry?

Heitz: Well, I've always thought that I was just a little dumb. Because that has always been my dream, and here in the meantime I'd become a California resident, and I could have gotten into the vet school at Davis immediately. There was a great demand for vets. I could have gotten out of school and made a lot of money. But, I repeat, in the meantime I had been off the farm, working in aircraft, being in the service and met and married a California girl. I just really didn't think about it. I just was thinking about wine, and I guess it worked out all right.

Teiser: Was your wife interested in wine?

Heitz: We were all kids then (21 to 25). I hope she was interested in me!

Teiser: Did she have any part in your decision to go to Davis?

Heitz: Well, I don't know if she had any part in that--she must have, but not a major influence.

Teiser: So you worked also at Elk Grove for Dale Mills?

Heitz: Yes. When I was a student at Davis, during the harvest season, I would go down there and work in the laboratory two or three nights a week and all day Saturday.

Teiser: Mainly on sweet wines?

Heitz: Oh yes, sweet wines, berry wines. That was the wine business in those days.

Teiser: So when you went to Davis in '46 you had two years of undergraduate work and you had to go two more, didn't you?

Heitz: I tell people I'm a slow learner. I graduated from high school in 1938, got my bachelor's degree in 1948 and my master's degree in-- I like to say 1958, but I think it was actually 1959. I wanted to make a ten-year gap, but it took eleven years to get my master's. There were other things, such as family and wars, and things like that that intervened.

Teiser: You got your bachelor's in two years of study, though, at Davis?

Heitz: Yes.

Teiser: Whom did you study with?

Heitz: Well, the whole gang there: [Dr. Albert J.] Winkler, [Dr. Maynard A.] Amerine, Dr. [James] Guymon, Dr. [John G.B.] Castor, and obviously other professors in horticulture, chemistry, math, et cetera. While I was there I also worked part-time as a student assistant for Dr. Guymon, doing both winery work and distillation work and laboratory work. So I really feel that, when you're going to college, if at all possible, if you can work in the department in which you're studying, it's a great advantage, because you're putting your hands to work along with your head. If you just go four years to school, and simply study out of books, and then at the end of four years you want to put that knowledge into the end of your fingertips, it's tough to do.

Teiser: Were there any of these people that you've mentioned who had more influence upon you than others?

Heitz: Oh, they all influenced me in different ways, I'm sure. I didn't have any idealized heroes, no.

Teiser: Did you find there a direction in winemaking that you were going to take, or were you just interested in the whole field?

Heitz: Again, I was quite young. I was looking for a job, a source of income, to buy groceries and pay rent. It happened to be wine. So I just wanted a job in a winery.

Teiser: You didn't care if it was sweet or dry, or a distillery? You did pick up some distilling experience.

Heitz: Oh, yes. My master's degree is in distillation.

Teiser: Oh it is?

Heitz: Yes, much of my early work, with the Wine Growers Guild* certainly, was on improving the quality of sweet wines primarily through the improvement of the quality of the fortifying brandy.

Teiser: Oh, I see.

Heitz: I've trotted up one road and down another.

Teiser: So with your brand-new degree in '48, then what did you do?

Heitz: Well, of course, being at Davis, I was acquainted with Napa valley. And everybody in the wine business wants to be in the Napa valley, even back then. So I was looking all over for a job, and there wasn't much doing. I had had a conference with the people at Gallo, and I was also talking to the Ahern family that at that time owned Freemark Abbey. Anyway, I had those two prospects and over the weekend I talked to Mike Ahern. He needed assistance, and Alice and I were delighted. We made an agreement. We shook hands. Went up to his house, had a drink, and the next morning, Monday morning, I went in to call Gallo and tell them that I wasn't interested, I had another job. Fortunately the line was busy. About ten minutes later I got a call from Ahern, who said, "Joe, I talked to my mother and father. We can't hire you." Well, you know what I thought of him ever since. I just don't know why people make commitments if they don't have the authority to make commitments.

Starting a Career, 1949

Heitz: So anyway, I did call Gallo that same Monday morning and accepted their offer. So I went to work for Gallo in their quality control lab.

*The name was later changed to Guild Wineries and Distilleries.

Teiser: Whom did you work with there?

Heitz: Primarily Charles Crawford. But I would be making trial blends and trial treatments and everything, striving for uniformity or improvement. But even improvements had to be gradual, because quality and consistency is very important in a winery, or with any product of that volume. Now in the fine wine business, your vintages can vary considerably and you can get away with it. But again, we were talking, basically port, sherry, muscatel, although they had table wines also.

So every night, or almost every night--certainly Saturday morning--Ernest and Julio [Gallo] both would come up, with Charles Crawford, and taste what samples I had prepared and argue about them and eventually decide which one to follow in the winery.

Teiser: It was a small outfit, wasn't it?

Heitz: Well, it was growing. But we thought it was huge at that time, but looking back today, it was pretty small.

Teiser: They had a newly-graduated lab man making the blends under the direction of the seasoned man, but even still--

Heitz: Well, there was more than just me in the lab. There were probably four or five people. Some were doing analyses; myself, I was doing trial blends, finishing treatments, et cetera. Others were very busy on the bottling line, seeing that each bottle, as it came from the glass factory, had the proper fill and that the machinery was filling it properly and that the alcohol and the color and everything was proper. The Gallos have always been extremely conscious of quality control.

Teiser: I guess for a young man to begin a professional career, that was a good send-off, wasn't it?

Heitz: Yes, I always thought it was great. They didn't have much money then, and they worked the tails off of their employees, but they worked their own tails off. As I say, it was every Saturday until noon, and they had the habit of coming up to do tastings. I had to be there when they were tasting to say what was going on, what was in the blends, and so forth. And they would usually come up about five minutes to five. More frequently you would wait and it would be five or ten minutes after five before they started. So we got a great long day and a goodly week. Now that they are more

Heitz: prosperous, people still work hard, but they are much more gentle on their help, because they can afford to be. They were struggling, and I can understand, looking back. At the time it didn't make me too happy, but I can certainly understand now.

Teiser: Was it something of a contrast to Italian Swiss Colony?

Heitz: Oh, my part, sure. I was a laborer at Italian Swiss Colony.

Teiser: Yes, but was the whole tone of the place different?

Heitz: Well, you've heard of the six or seven blind men and the elephant. I was seeing different parts of the elephant.

Teiser: Had Charles Crawford hired you?

Heitz: Yes.

Teiser: A remarkable man.

Heitz: Yes, and he's holding up tremendously well, too. He's still going strong.

Teiser: I should say he is!

Why did you leave Gallo, then?

Heitz: Oh, I was young and impetuous. Looking back, I don't know why. Supposedly had a better offer, I guess. I went from there to Wine Growers Guild.

Teiser: How long were you at Gallo?

Heitz: I don't know. Something like nine months. But I think it was mostly inexperience on my part--not being able to foresee the future. Most of us don't foresee the future. This job at the Wine Growers Guild promised more. I think they had four or five branch wineries. And I would be working on quality control, helping each of them improve their wine before it came in to the main plant for final blending and bottling. You know, it gave me a chance to get out on the road, and to see more than one winery, more than one operation. I guess that's why I changed.

Teiser: Wasn't that a lot of responsibility for a young man?

Heitz: Well, I wasn't too much of a kid. You know, I was born in 1919, remember.

Teiser: But still--you hadn't been in the wine business too long.

Heitz: Well, I repeat, all the time I was at the university I worked as a student helper, and I worked nights. I didn't just work only at Italian Swiss Colony when I was a GI. I worked as a laborer in other wineries, more or less throwing cases and loading boxcars and this and that. But if you are awake, you absorb a little bit of what goes on around you. Who else was available? The wine industry was dead.

Teiser: You were one of a small group at that time.

Heitz: The class I graduated with had only four or five enology graduates. Ed Rossi* was one; he went back to his own family winery. Ken [Kenneth W.] Kew went into the distribution business with, Esquin.** First he went with Martin Ray. He went to work there as a partner, and that didn't work out, and then he went to Esquin.

One of the other fellows in my class, a Frenchman, had some misfortune, his girlfriend got pregnant and he had to get a job quick, so he went to work for Campbell Soup Company. And oh, there was another one--his family had a winery, Delicato's. So, you know, these people who hired me didn't have a whole lot to choose from if they wanted a man with a degree.

So at Wine Growers Guild I did more or less the same thing, but working with five wineries, trying to help all of them improving distilling, blending, general winemaking technology so that it was all a better product in the end.

Teiser: Where were those wineries?

Heitz: Well, you know the main blending plant is just east of Lodi. And there was Bear Creek Winery, just south of Lodi. The Del Rio Winery in Woodbridge. Lockford Winery in Lockford. All quite close. And then there was a winery down in Cucamonga--I can't even remember the name of that--Cucamonga Pioneer Vineyard Association.

Ronnie Roberds was the manager, I remember that. I guess that was probably all. So I got to move around and work with them and learn the equipment. At this point in time, remember, I had worked for Dr. Guymon as an undergraduate student, in distilling and brandy. So I think I was useful in improving their fortifying brandy quite a bit, and bringing up the quality of their wines. L.K. Marshall was, I think, chairman of the board of the Wine Growers Guild at that time. According to their original contract,

*Edmund A. Rossi, Jr. of Italian Swiss Colony.

**John Esquin.

Heitz: the various wineries would get paid according to the amount of alcohol, the amount of sugar, and the quality. Well, alcohol and sugar is easy to measure. So that had been enforced. They had never enforced quality. Some wineries thought they were getting cheated, because "My quality is better than your quality." So that was my job, to decide it. To do that I would do the rough tasting. I think I divided it into three categories: A, B, and C. Then there was a committee that would come in and judge finally. They would move an A sample down to B or a B up to A. That committee was André Tchelistcheff of Beaulieu Vineyard, Herman Wente of Wente Bros., and good old Jim Howe--remember Jim Howe?

Teiser: No.

Heitz: He was an ex-newspaperman and an avid wine consumer, so they brought him in as the consumer expert. Jim also was a home winemaker. He would acquire grapes from different localities and make experimental batches of wine from them at his "Gopher Gulch Ranch and Wine Cellar." They were three great men to work with. Tchelistcheff and Herman Wente were in their prime. So it was a great learning experience for me, too.

Teiser: Guild hired this group of people?

Heitz: Yes. Outside, independent experts. If it were just me as an employee making the final decisions, they could gripe and say, "Well, he's too young to know anything. Throw him out." But my preparing things and pre-grading, and then the three outside, neutral experts--they couldn't complain. Well, they could complain, but it wouldn't do them any good. They knew it wouldn't do them any good, so they did not.

Teiser: I didn't realize that Herman Wente was a particularly good taster.*

Heitz: I always thought so.

Teiser: I believe I read that in the beginning of your career with the wine business, your acuity of perception was noted. Is that right?

Heitz: It was better than it is now. My taste sensitivity was better than it is now.

Teiser: I think I read that Dale Mills found that ability in you. Is that right?

*Herman Wente was one of the best post-Repeal California wine judges. His ability with Livermore wines was fantastic. [Maynard A. Amerine]

Heitz: Well, yes--this is why I was put into the jobs I was put into at Gallo and at the Wine Growers Guild. Later on, when I was working with Beaulieu, the State Fair, in an effort to improve their wine program, had a series of tastings where they would judge the judges. I think there were two of us that got the best score. I think it was Lou Stern, winemaker I believe at Charles Krug, and myself that came out significantly ahead of the other tasters at that time.

Teiser: I think that Davis had set up some tests, hadn't it?

Heitz: Yes, the university was setting up these tests for the State Fair. They were conducted by the State Fair, but the university had done the background work.

Teiser: Had you taken similar tests when you were at Davis?

Heitz: No.

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Teiser: We were discussing your ability to taste. This is just something God-given, isn't it?

Heitz: Well, yes. Some people are color-blind. Some people are taste-blind. But most people have normal eyesight and most people have normal palates. It's just a matter of working on it, practice, practice.

Teiser: Practice?

Heitz: Wine is the best thing in the world to practice on. We would do a lot of tasting in the lab at Gallo, and then save the samples for observation, for stability and this and that. They were tenths, little tiny bottles. And I would ask Mr. Crawford if I could take them home and drink them, not because I wanted free wine so much, but I'd like to see how this goes with spaghetti, or this or that. And he said, "Oh, sure, sure." So after we would get through with the samples I would take them home and drink them at home and taste them. For enjoyment and for learning experience.

Teiser: I have been told that memory is a part of tasting ability.

Heitz: And that's what is going now: As one gets older, of course, taste acuity and specific memory fades. This is partially compensated by a large backlog of experience.

Teiser: Do you have an organized storage system in your mind? Do you have prototypes; do you think, "Well, I remember a Zinfandel that was wonderful and every Zinfandel should taste like this?" Or how does it work?

Heitz: Oh, no. Don't get in the trap of trying to do like so many wine writers do. They try to bring everything down to a mathematical formula. And it can't be done. At least, historically, it's never been done. And I would hate to see it accomplished. No, it's just like experience in anything else. You store a lot of miscellaneous facts, and on the right occasion the brain seems to pop them out in order. But I don't have a column in my head for Zinfandel and another column for sugar and another column for this and a bottle line down here, no.

Teiser: Well, I just wondered if you had a list of recollections of ideal wines.

Heitz: No.

Teiser: I once tasted a Burgundy that I think all Burgundies should taste like.

Heitz: Oh, a few stand out, of course. But, no, I don't think that's what "taste memory" means.

Teiser: Your criteria for the wines that you want to make, that taste the way you want to make them taste, is a separate--?

Heitz: Well, certainly separate, because--well, again, I'm rather amused at some things I read that the wine writers write that they quote winemakers as having said. That they are going to sort of be architects for a wine, and they're going to have, you know, a big tower over here and a small arch over there and a steely backbone and a soft subtle voluptuous front. And then they're going to take grapes and they're going to force it into that preconceived mold. Well, they're either liars or damn fools. It doesn't work that way! You take the grapes that you have available and you do the best you can with them. If you like the grapes from a particular grower and it makes wine that not only you like but your customers like, you keep buying from that grower. If you get grapes from a grower that makes a different type of wine than you like, you don't get out a big whip and hustle it in and train it like a horse or something, and make it do what you want to do. You just change growers. And different people have different ideas. A grower whose grapes may not suit me may suit somebody else ideally, and vice versa.

Teiser: I suppose at that early time, when you were working for Gallo and then Guild, that you had no idea that you would be able to choose among things.

Heitz: I had no concept of owning a winery. It never entered my head. I had just always been a poor kid, and I was happy to have a steady income.

Teiser: You then went from Guild to another winery?

Heitz: Yes. I told you that one of the people I worked with was André Tchelistcheff. And he had an assistant, or relief man, and his name was Bard Suverkrop.

Teiser: Before we get to this, let me ask you about Mission Bell.

Heitz: Well, I'm trying to answer that.

Teiser: Sorry. I thought you were going on to Beaulieu.

Heitz: I will back up a little bit. One of the men I worked with at the Guild was André Tchelistcheff, of Beaulieu. His assistant was leaving, and I knew that, and I knew he would be looking for somebody else. Well, there is a certain amount of honor in the wine business. I may have done a dishonorable thing. I knew Tchelistcheff couldn't, in all honor, hire me away from the Guild, where he was working as a consultant. So I took a calculated risk and took another job at Mission Bell. As I say, this was a little sneaky, I hate to admit it, but you do what you can in life. We never fully unpacked at Mission Bell, and sure enough, the phone call did come through, and then it was just a matter of time till I went to work for Beaulieu.

Teiser: I see. What did you do in that brief period at Mission Bell?

Heitz: Well, sort of the same thing: quality control, making trial blends, trial treatments. Expanded a little bit, then I was also responsible for seeing that the right wine got to the bottle with the right label and that sort of thing. Laboratory work and tasting.

Teiser: They had a huge distillery, didn't they?

Heitz: Yes, they had quite a distillery there.

Teiser: Was that built by Arakelian?

Heitz: K. Arakelian, yes. But just before I went there they had sold to [Louis] Petri.

Teiser: Maybe you can clear a point. I remember Louis Petri, when I interviewed him, said that they had done several things because they were anxious to get Thompson Seedless in early and distill it in time for the year's vintage. Couldn't they make the high-proof and hold it over instead of doing it that way?

Heitz: Those people in that Central Valley then, and I think now, work on just pennies. A penny per gallon mark-up, or a half a cent in the market to sell a shipload of wine or a tanker full of wine--a half a penny a gallon difference will mean whether you get the sale or don't get the sale. And holding it over, you have to buy tanks; in those days you had to buy a building to put the tanks in. Now we have outside tanks--that wasn't thought of in those days. But you had to buy tanks and then of course you always pay interest on money, and you had to buy insurance for it. So the cost of holding it over would be indeed significant.

Teiser: Thank you. I always wondered about that.

Heitz: Yes. When you're holding something, aging it, it costs money.

Teiser: Does it help high-proof to hold it?

Heitz: No.

Teiser: You were not involved in the distilling then, at Mission Bell?

Heitz: Not directly, I don't believe. I'm sure I must have dabbled in it, but that was not my primary job.

At Beaulieu Vineyard, 1951-1958

Teiser: So then on to Beaulieu.

Heitz: Yes. So then we moved to Beaulieu and the Napa valley! And I think by that time, I forget the exact dollars, but I think I had probably moved up to maybe \$325 a month.

Teiser: [chuckles] My word!

- Heitz: Yes. Winemakers were not very highly thought of. We were not considered bad, but nobody paid any attention to us. I remember distinctly one time when I was with Beaulieu we had a visiting winemaker from Canada, and we were discussing salaries. He was just shocked at what Tchelistcheff and I were making, and the standing in the community and everything. In Canada winemakers were much more highly thought of, and paid accordingly, too.
- Teiser: I remember in that period the younger members of wine families didn't want to come in to the business; there was nothing in it for them, they thought.
- Heitz: Yes, yes. No money. You could do better at Campbell Soup or at airplane factories, or anything.
- Teiser: But Beaulieu must have been a very glamorous place to be.
- Heitz: Oh, we were so thrilled. Quote, "We had arrived," unquote.
- Teiser: That was in 195--?
- Heitz: 1951, I believe.
- Teiser: Was Mr. Georges DeLatour alive?
- Heitz: Mr. DeLatour was dead. Mrs. DeLatour gave me the final interview in San Francisco, and that was the one and only time I met her. Then she went to France and became ill and died before I ever saw her again. But Hélène de Pins, then, was the major-domo.
- Teiser: You were working directly under André Tchelistcheff, then?
- Heitz: Yes.
- Teiser: What were your duties there?
- Heitz: Well, a little more diversified. Certainly also quality control. But more or less actually overseeing the winery operations, too. And getting out in the plant more. Because in the larger wineries, you're more specialized, but there I was out in the winery more. I would even visit the vineyards with André somewhat. But primarily doing the lab work, the analyses, doing the trial treatments and so forth, and tasting. And then following it through in the cellar. I would be out watching the people, see that they washed the barrels clean and see that the pumping was done right and the wine was really cool or whatever. During the fermenting season I would come in

Heitz: early in the morning before everybody else and myself, personally check each tank for temperature and sugar to see how it was going so that when the crew arrived, "Hook up this pump there and that pump over there." So it was more a plant operation, as well as laboratory work.

Teiser: How many people worked then in the lab?

Heitz: Well, at least Tchelistcheff and myself. And then before I left, they were growing too. My duties in the cellar expanded, which we'll come to in a few minutes, I think. So we hired a young lady, Paula Rosenbrand, in the lab to do the simple analyses, run the alcohols and acids and that sort of thing.

Teiser: André Tchelistcheff gave us a very interesting interview, and he discussed how he found Beaulieu when he came in the thirties and what was done to bring it up to a higher standard technologically. By the time you came, then, I suppose it was quite a well-equipped winery?

Heitz: Well-regarded winery, yes. The quality was good.

Teiser: The equipment was fairly up-to-date by then?

Heitz: Quite up-to-date, yes.

Teiser: Were they using techniques that you hadn't encountered before?

Heitz: Well, of course; it was a different business. Making Beaulieu wine is a lot different than making Mission Bell. We would purchase the sweet wines from the Central Valley and bring them up and bottle them.

Teiser: You had had some experience, I suppose, at Davis with table wines, had you not?

Heitz: A small amount.

Teiser: Was it quite different then when you came to Beaulieu, to encounter them and to deal with them?

Heitz: Any industry is different than any comparable schooling.

Teiser: You were not about to be shocked by the difference between sweet wines and table wines. [chuckles]

Heitz: Oh, no, no. I wasn't an ostrich all this time.

Teiser: How did your career, then, go at Beaulieu?

Heitz: Well, it went quite well. As I said, we liked it. But then the wine business was beginning to perk up. And at one point I was offered a job at Cresta Blanca in Livermore, to come down there and take over as plant manager. This is what I said I'd get back to. I don't remember what year that was. '54, maybe, in there--I'm not sure.

Teiser: '64?

Heitz: '54. Don't forget, you're only taping old folks, you're not taping kids. So, anyway, I had probably gone up to \$350 or \$375 at Beaulieu and that was fine; I was happy. But there I had the opportunity to be totally in charge of running that Cresta Blanca winery. And that's in a beautiful location, too. \$650 a month! Almost double salary. So that was kind of startling. So I went and asked for a meeting with the people at Beaulieu, and I told the people at Cresta Blanca, "Boy, I'd sure love to come, but I'm working for Beaulieu and that's my first obligation. So I must talk to them first." And they said they understood.

Teiser: A national company owned it then.

Heitz: Schenley, I think. So I talked to the people at Beaulieu and then they realized that the world was entering a different era, and they equalled the salary and made me plant manager at Beaulieu. And that means everybody in the whole damn plant had to get a raise. Tchelistcheff got a nice raise, Mr. [Joseph J.] Ponti got a raise, [Harry] Conrey, who was in charge of the bottling and shipping, got a nice raise. And so that was delightful. Then things held on for several more years. Everything was going well; I was happy with them, they were happy with me. But the wine business was really a dead business then. I was really an insurance policy for Tchelistcheff. And I was working maybe half, sixty percent of my capacity and just simply getting bored.

Teiser: Were their sales actually dropping?

Heitz: No, just steady.

Teiser: Before you get away from Beaulieu I want to ask you about Mr. Ponti. What was he like?

Heitz: Oh, he was a very gentle old man by the time I arrived on the scene. He had been winemaker during Prohibition, but then when Tchelistcheff came, Ponti was soon relegated to the vineyards and taking care of the property. You know, there's maintenance and upkeep on houses and gardens and everything. But I understand when he was younger he was a real workhorse. He is the one that made the money for Beaulieu by selling it out the back door and making good wine and this and that. But when I came, why he was already sort of a figurehead. Important in the vineyards, but not too important in the winery, except to find lost pipes and hidden valves, and you know how that goes. Somebody asked me today, this morning, where the septic tank is down in my sales room. I don't know where it is. I hope my son can find it. You know, those things happen. And they're important to know. But I had a good relationship with Ponti. I think I had a good relationship with everybody at Beaulieu.

Teiser: You mentioned Harry Conrey. Had he been with them for a long time?

Heitz: Oh, a long time, yes. So he got a nice raise, too!

Teiser: Wonderful--you picked up the whole enterprise!

Heitz: Stirred things up. But then, as I said, it was challenging for a while, but then when there's no challenge, and I was still fairly young at that time--let's see, 1920 to 1958, I was 38 years old. So I had the opportunity to go to Fresno State College.

Teiser: Coming back, before you get to Fresno--

Heitz: Oh, I could tell forty or fifty stories about my days in Beaulieu. They may come out later.*

Teiser: Was this your first close association with vineyards, at Beaulieu?

Heitz: Yes.

Teiser: Had you studied much with Winkler?

Heitz: I took the courses there, yes.

*See page 26.

Teiser: Did this carry over, do you recall?

Heitz: Yes, sure, but the university still works with growers and with wineries. They have a good relationship, I guess is a good word, with the industry of whatever field they're in.

Teiser: Do you feel that it was something of value to be learning at Beaulieu?

Heitz: Oh yes, sure. It's helping me now.

Teiser: André Tchelistcheff is, I guess, a very good teacher, of viticulture, also, is he not?

Heitz: Yes.

Teiser: I should think for the first time coming into contact with the whole span, from the vineyard to the bottle, so to speak, must have been instructive to you.

Heitz: Oh, yes. It was a great privilege.

Teiser: So by then, you had got well educated to educate.

Heitz: Well, I had always liked school. Always got good grades, which indicates that I liked school. A lot of people who don't get good grades, they simply don't apply themselves. So I had the opportunity to go there and set up the enology department, help set it up, that is.

Teiser: Opportunities don't just drift in. How did it start?

Heitz: Well, when I was at Davis, one of my friends and fellow students was Vince Petrucci* We had gone to his wedding and all that sort of thing, and to the christening of his first babies and what have you. Then he had gone directly from school, from Davis, to set up the viticulture program at Fresno State. So when they got ready for enology, he thought of me and talked to me. Well, my basic reasoning at the time was--remember, I was still young and vigorous, relatively speaking--and I was just in a relative stalemate at Beaulieu. Nothing was happening. But I thought, if I can raise the quality of all wines in the Central Valley by one percent, I would have accomplished more in my lifetime than if I stay at Beaulieu and improve their quality by fifty percent, which was impossible. So being young and noble, I thought I should do that. I think this was in June.

*Vincent Petrucci, who became first Professor of Viticulture at Fresno State College.

Heitz: So again, I talked to the principals at Beaulieu. In the meantime I had gotten some raises and I was well set at the time. But I was wanting to go some place. I wanted to go to work the first of September. They said, "Well, you can't leave that soon. The harvest is only sixty days away," or something. They said, well, they understood; they weren't too happy, but they understood. So I stayed through the harvest, from the first of June through the end of December, knowing that I was going to leave. I gave them plenty of time to hire somebody else and to make the adjustments and so on and so forth. But we weren't in Fresno very long until we knew we had made a mistake. After you have lived in the Napa valley for over seven years, going back to Fresno--that doesn't work, at least not for our family.

Teiser: Even if your wife had grown up there?

Heitz: Oh, she didn't grow up there. She was working there during the war effort. No, she's from South Dakota. But she had a sister living there.

Establishing the Fresno State Enology Curriculum, 1958-1961

Heitz: Anyway, working for the state is a lot different than working for industry. You know, if you needed a beaker for the laboratory, you had to wait till July to put in your request and by September you would know whether or not it was granted. Then by next July, you would get the money to buy it. Well, you wouldn't need the damn beaker by then. So that was one thing. But working for a state system or any governmental system didn't suit my personality. Plus the climate there is not as good as Napa valley. So we almost immediately just started looking for a job.

Teiser: Well you were there for--

Heitz: --three and a half years.

Teiser: What did you do there? How did you set up the curriculum?

Heitz: Well, there was some background before that. They had been working on it. But they still hadn't gotten it through Sacramento, because there was great opposition. The Fresno Bee, every week, would have letters and letters from individual citizens, criticizing the university or the state college for teaching these young people how to drink alcohol. That sort of thing. There was a lot of opposition.

Heitz: So we had to fight the battle in Sacramento first of all to get the funds to do it. In the meantime, I taught some simple viticulture courses and simple introductory chemistry course, the lab part, just to keep going. Then, of course, designing the building and selecting the equipment, and then in the meantime to put a program together and start teaching winemaking.

Teiser: How did you design the building? Where did you start?

Heitz: Well, I had been working in quite a few wineries and I had graduated from Davis.

Teiser: Did you design a winery based more on Davis or industry?

Heitz: No, based more on what Fresno State's needs would be. Davis is more highly scientific. Fresno State is more practical, hands-on approach. You have to be making the wine and running it through filters and so on and so forth.

Teiser: I remember at Davis, when they set that plant up, there was controversy over how big batches should be. Did you stick with the small-batch concept?

Heitz: Oh, certainly. You can't make huge quantities, no.

Teiser: So did you then build the building that is still there?

Heitz: Oh, yes. Sure. I'm sure it has been modified since, because it's been a long time ago, 25 years ago.

Teiser: Did you set up the curriculum based pretty much upon Davis, or modified?

Heitz: Modified Davis. Davis had been in existence a long time, but I repeat: their approach is different. Their approach at that time was certainly different. As far as the student was concerned, you would get a bottle of wine and you would analyze it down to every last iota of what was in there. At Fresno State, you started with the grapes and you made the wine. Now, they did that at Davis, too, but the emphasis was on the research and on the analyses, whereas at Fresno State, the emphasis is on doing it. So, sure, I started with the core of Davis, and then modified, eliminated and added and worked it into what we thought was appropriate for the Fresno State-type student.

Teiser: Did you attract good students?

Heitz: Well, they were good people. You are certainly familiar with the state school system. We have the community colleges, the state colleges, and the university. And each one takes a higher level of intelligence to get in and higher grade point average, higher SAT scores, blah, blah, blah.

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Teiser: --so the university got the best, you said.

Heitz: Well, the university likes to think that they get the better brains. Generally that's true, but it's not always true, because a lot of people can't afford to go to the university, and they can afford to go to a state college. Maybe it's a matter of living at home, where they're actually working, helping their parents on the farm. So there were some bright students. But on the average they were not red-hot. But that's all right; they've grown and matured and several of them are working in industry and doing very well indeed.

Teiser: You gave the lectures and the labs and everything else there?

Heitz: Oh, yes. With only a handful of students you can do it.

Teiser: And you worked closely with Petrucci, I suppose?

Heitz: Yes, we shared the office. And also I would have to help him somewhat with his viticulture laboratories, because the enology program was just starting and we didn't have a mass of students. And then also, the part that I enjoyed most--I would do night school for people in the industry. To elevate their skills. The cellar workers would come in and maybe, theoretically, with my help, they could eventually be a cellar foreman. Even many of the winery owners and winery managers would attend, because a lot of them were in it without any technical background at all. Just to show them why you do this or that in a still, and why the fusel oil collects one place and the aldehyde some place else, and how to drain them out. I showed them some microscope slides of how a filter works. If you know how it works, then you know how to operate it better and why you do this or that. So that was, to me, the most rewarding part, because I was working with my peers; I think indeed helping them. The classes were very well attended.

These were not held at Fresno State, by the way. But it was the industry people who were requesting and pushing for the enology program at Fresno State, and then putting on political pressure in

Heitz: Sacramento to get the money passed. So as soon as they got an instructor there, then they asked can we do something at night. It was actually held at Fresno City College. They weren't Fresno State classes per se, they were, I don't know what you call them, extension classes I guess. Words are not too important.

Teiser: It was a challenge, wasn't it?

Heitz: Yes. It kept me on my toes.

Teiser: So you started looking for a job.

Heitz: Yes, the climate--we just loved Napa valley and Northern California, so we just looked for jobs anywhere--Sonoma or Napa. But the industry--this was '59, '60--the industry was still asleep. There were no jobs.

I finally had a good opportunity to go to work for Christian Brothers in their beautiful Greystone plant. Oh, that made me feel good, because they had a three-headed giant there. They had one man running champagne, another man running the sales room, another man running the still wine cellar. And they had no head. I had the opportunity to be the manager there. And that was a thrilling prospect. We were just about ready to sign the final papers and Brother John said, "You realize, in a big company like ours, to get promotions you may have to move to other plants." Well that meant--they had a winery in Reedley and they had a winery in Fresno. And I said, "No thanks. I don't want that."

II THE HEITZ CELLAR

Return to the Napa Valley

Heitz: Finally one day I was talking to Hanns Kornell, and he said, "There is a little winery south of St. Helena that Mr. Brendel just has as a retirement hobby, and he is getting pretty old. Why don't you go talk to him?"

Teiser: Tell about Leon Brendel, would you?

Heitz: Well, he was, to use the term, a kind of goofy old character. He was, in his mind, the great scientist and a great inventor. He would invent, oh, all sorts of hose-cleaning equipment for example, and he was also a great perfumist. The ladies would come in to buy wine and he would dab perfume on them that he had made. He was just an odd little fellow. And he had this as a retirement hobby, and he had only Grignolino.

Teiser: What had he been before he retired?

Heitz: Oh, he had been a chemist for larger wineries, and had been consulting.

Teiser: Within the wine business?

Heitz: Yes.

Teiser: I see.

Heitz: I think in Italy; but he always emphasized he was Swiss, he wasn't Italian.* It seems to me like he worked somewhere in South America also. I don't know the details of his background.

*An article about Mrs. Brendel at the time of her death in 1961 stated that Leon Brendel had been born in France. He died in 1963, aged 79.

Teiser: How in the world did he happen to concentrate on Grignolino?

Heitz: He just thought it was the greatest grape in the world. That was his brand name: "Only One," Grignolino.

Teiser: I suppose it had the advantage of being unique, or almost unique. There wasn't much of it in California, was there?

Heitz: There was some grown in earlier years down around the Cucamonga area. That was mostly before Prohibition.

Teiser: Had you encountered it ever?

Heitz: No. We sure didn't buy the place because of the Grignolino, no. We bought it because of the location, and a toe in the door. Because it was small, and we thought because of the location, we could get roadside traffic.

You mentioned the stories at Beaulieu--we're backtracking now to when I was with Beaulieu--one thing I did was talk them into opening their winery for tourists, for customers. Before that they had a little tiny door saying, "Visitors, Thursdays, 1-3 p.m., by appointment only," something like that. So they said, "Okay, you want to do it; you do it." I said, "Okay, I'll do it." So the first day we put a sign up, you know, one of these sandwich board signs out at front. "Open to Visitors." And I remember very well--nobody came. It was the day of the Memorial Day automobile races. I was listening on the car radio, and that was the day Billy Vukovich (I think) was killed. He was a Fresno lad and was killed in the 500-mile race.

I don't know whether I got one or two visitors that day or not, but there weren't many. But, you know, they opened up, and you see what Beaulieu is like now. I mean their visitors' center. While I was still there we took the visitors in the little room up front. But after I left, the crowds grew and they built one separate building in the back, and it wasn't any time at all they outgrew that. And they now use that for offices, and they built a huge, big building for visitors with multi-screen movies and everything. I think I'm partially responsible for these horrible crowds in the valley. But the valley is prospering. If there are no customers, there is no need for wineries. No need to hire anybody. In any business, if you don't have any customers, if you don't have wine drinkers, you don't need wineries, you don't need vineyards. You don't need to employ people. You don't need to be prosperous. You can sit and be in the doldrums, forever, raising prunes.

Teiser: Did the visitors' facility that you opened then help Beaulieu sales?

Heitz: Certainly. It also helped the sales throughout the valley.

Teiser: Did you give tastings?

Heitz: Oh yes.

Teiser: I suppose at that point people who went in bought seriously though. Not just a bottle.

Heitz: What do you mean, "at that point"? You think they don't today?

Teiser: Oh, do they go off with cases? Don't they taste and like it and go off to Liquor Barn and buy a case?

Heitz: Well, some buy at the Liquor Barn, but the Liquor Barn is quite a new phenomenon. No, if tasting rooms weren't profitable, we'd close them up.

Teiser: Yes. I just wondered if winery sales now are by the case very much.

Heitz: Cases, bottles. And also the spin-off effect; if they like your wine and they're up here on a hot day and they don't want to take a case in a hot steamy car, they'll tend to buy it at home. They do that also. It's good public relations as well as immediate sales.

Teiser: I remember coming through this valley when there were only three or four places you could stop.

Heitz: Beringer--Fred Abruzzini--he wasn't so much for roadside people as famous Hollywood stars. Every week in the St. Helena Star he would have his picture in with Carole Lombard or some great star. Well, that helped Beringer, I'm sure. He catered to the fancy folks, not just the man in the street. But he was the first real promoter of Napa valley wines in that manner.

Teiser: So when you bought the Brendel winery, I suppose your eye was on the roadside business, too?

Heitz: Yes. East side of the road, cars would be going up valley with their trunks empty and their pocketbooks full, hopefully. If you're on the other side, you're going south, your pocketbook is empty and your car is full.

Teiser: Is it a good vineyard there?

Heitz: Oh, yes, it's good land, but the whole thing is only eight acres, so we weren't going to make our fortune on grapes.

Teiser: Maybe we should stop now and start next time with the beginning then of your own enterprise.

Heitz: Okay. Then Alice can be here and talk too.

Teiser: I gather she was much in on it.

Heitz: Oh, yes; certainly.

[Interview 2: August 15, 1985]##

Teiser: This is Alice Heitz, Mrs. Joseph Heitz. I asked if there was anything winey in your background.

A. Heitz: I think we more or less learned together.

Teiser: When you married Joe, you had no experience in the wine business?

A. Heitz: No, I did not.

Teiser: You also came from the midwest?

A. Heitz: Yes, South Dakota.

Teiser: And how long have you been in California?

A. Heitz: Since '43.

Teiser: And you married in what year?

A. Heitz: '45.

Teiser: Did you know what you were getting into? [chuckles]

A. Heitz: No. [chuckles] I didn't know there would be so much work! But it has been enjoyable.

Teiser: It's a great accomplishment.

I think we got to the purchase of the Brendel property last time.

J. Heitz: We had covered that, hadn't we?

Teiser: Well, I think just the decision to buy it. How did you decide to venture into this?

J. Heitz: Well, I was just looking for a job. The industry was so sluggish in those days, there were no jobs available. And we were eager to leave Fresno and come back to the Napa valley. This was a tiny place and the only place we could get our toe in the door, so to speak. Mr. Brendel wanted \$5,000 down, and we didn't have any money and the banks thought we were crazy, trying to go into the wine business. They wouldn't think of loaning us \$5,000. So we had to borrow \$5,000 from a personal friend, Mr. Al Furman, on the east coast. We are going further in debt every year, but we have a lot more to show for our debts now. At one time in my life, it was my dream to die debt-free. My accountant tells me I'm crazy as a loon. Every progressive, prosperous business has a good debt limit. The greater the debt ceiling that you have from your creditors, the better off you are.

Teiser: Well, I suppose that it's the normal way of doing business.

J. Heitz: You use other folks' money and pay for that use, of course.

Teiser: But you were able to raise it on your own initially. That's a help, isn't it?

J. Heitz: Well, just from a personal friend, yes.

Teiser: You had to keep making payments, did you?

J. Heitz: Oh, yes, we had to keep making payments, of course. \$5,000 was the down payment. The whole thing cost us \$45,000.

Teiser: How big a property was it?

J. Heitz: Exactly 8.32 acres. And it had two little houses, a small winery, four or five thousand gallons of inventory.

Teiser: Goodness! What could you get for \$45,000 today?

J. Heitz: But today, salaries--everything has gone up accordingly. Not only land.

Teiser: What time of year did you take it on, physically, to begin with?

J. Heitz: We made the deal I think in April. Finalized it in April, and actually took possession the first of June, when the school year was out. That's 1961.

Teiser: I see. What did you do first?

J. Heitz: Came down with hepatitis. For this so-called one-man operation, we had to take out a special life insurance policy. And I think that policy was only \$50,000, but the insurance company sent me to a pretty dingy doctor's office, and while I have no proof, I've always suspected that's where I got hepatitis, from the needle where he took the blood sample. Because I came down a couple of weeks after I had the exam.

Then also that first year was really hell, because he had never had frost there before. And that year, after we had made the agreement, before we moved in, they had a pretty serious frost that really zapped the vines. And if you know anything about grape vines, they have an eye that has three buds in it. The first is the strongest and the most productive. Well, if that fails, then the second bud comes out of the same eye. And that's weaker, and of course, a few weeks later, because it's wasted the time. So this second bud came out, and Alice and I went to San Francisco in early June, and we had one of the hottest days on record in Napa valley, and this second shoot, which was not hardened in yet as the first one would have been, was severely burnt by the sun. So off of that eight acres--well, it wasn't eight acres of vineyard, it was probably six and a half, seven acres--we made a total of 312 gallons of wine that first year.

Teiser: All Grignolino?

J. Heitz: Grignolino, yes. Then what else happened? When was the automobile accident?

A. Heitz: That fall.

J. Heitz: That fall or summer, I think. No, it was the following winter, because I had picked the grapes, those 312 gallons worth, before I got hurt. It was still within our first year or ownership, I had a station wagon and I was hauling 30 cases of wine in the back, and our little four-year-old son Rollie was riding with me. Some lady came across the highway and hit us head on. That 30 cases of wine just crushed us up against the dash and the windshield. So I was in the hospital and Rollie was in the hospital, more banged-up than I, and I thought, "Well, I've had it. I gave it my best shot; I'll give up." But fortunately we had a lot of good friends and they said, "Shut up; don't talk like that."

J. Heitz: They came in and pruned the vineyards for me and helped Alice. As a matter of fact, even the government inspector came in and actually did our government forms for us, which is absolutely against regulations. But he was a man I had known when I was a student at Davis. He actually did the forms for us for a couple of months while I was in the hospital.

I think that's about all the bad things that happened, but they all happened in the first year. And it really looked bleak, bleak, bleak. But then things started getting better. And as I say we had so many people who helped us.

Teiser: What were those first cases of wine that you smashed up with? Were they labelled with your own labels then?

J. Heitz: Well, we were buying wines. Obviously on 312 gallons you're not going to make a living. Remember, I had been in the industry for quite a while. I had worked for various wineries, including eight years at Beaulieu. So we were buying wine at other wineries and having them bottled for us. Then as we grew, we would buy wines in bulk and bottle them ourselves.

Teiser: Did you have a label right from the beginning?

J. Heitz: Oh, certainly.

Teiser: Same as the one you have now?

J. Heitz: Certainly.

Teiser: It's a nice label. Who designed it?

J. Heitz: Well, after we bought the property and before we moved, we had some discussions in our own family: what do we call the winery? Is it going to be Joe Heitz Winery? Joe and Alice? Heitz and Sons? What do we call it? We finally thought, well, Heitz Cellars. And that includes any of the family that wants to stay. If one leaves, two leave, or whatever, the name can go on without pinning anybody down. Then, along after that, what should the label be? So within our family we had a little contest, and our oldest son, David, who was then ten years old, came up with a ten-year-old type drawing of a man in the cellar, with barrels behind him, testing the wine for quality. Then we gave his rough drawing to Mallette Dean, if you remember him.

Teiser: It looks like Mallette Dean, yes.*

J. Heitz: And he came up with three or four ideas. Then we chose one and polished that up. And then Jim Beard did our first printing of it. And we're still with the same printer. Of course, Jim went into partnership with Herdel--Herdel and Beard. And then Herdel bought Jim out, and we're still with Herdel.

Teiser: Still basically the same label?

J. Heitz: Yes.

Teiser: No changes?

J. Heitz: Well, originally we could only afford one color. Everything was red. But then, after four or five years, for white wines we had the green label and for red wines we stayed with the red label.

Making Wine in the Brendel Winery

Teiser: What were your facilities initially? What kind of a winery did you have?

J. Heitz: Well, we would take the head out of a storage barrel, actually nine of them, and stand them on end. We had a little portable crusher that would straddle the barrel, and we would dump the grapes into that crusher and crush.

As I say, we had nine barrels and they went on a three-day cycle. After we were rolling, we would go out in the vineyard and pick grapes in the morning when it was cool and then bring them inside the winery, and then we would press three barrels. So we would have three empty barrels. And after we pressed three, then we would crush the grapes that we had picked in the morning, that afternoon. Of course we were working in a winery where it is relatively cool.

For our bottling we would sit on a case on the floor and have empty bottles in front of us and a single siphon hose, filling one bottle at a time, pinching it with our fingers. And of course, a

*See also--interview with Mallette Dean, Artist and Printer, an oral history interview conducted in 1969, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley, 1970.

J. Heitz: hand corker and a hand labeller. Very, very primitive. We were probably stupid as all hell to do it that way, but what the hell else can you do if you don't have any money? If you don't have equipment you make it up in labor. We still do that somewhat, because you have to have a certain volume to justify fancy equipment.

Teiser: Did all of you work there? Did you work with him, Alice?

A. Heitz: Yes, I did.

Teiser: In the vineyard and the winery?

A. Heitz: Mostly in the winery, with the book work.

Teiser: Did you have to hire some vineyard help?

J. Heitz: Oh, yes, we had to hire somebody to cultivate it. You can't afford equipment to cultivate eight acres.

Teiser: How about harvesting?

J. Heitz: Well, in the early days, with our kids and the neighbor lady, we would pick the grapes, for the first two or three years.

Teiser: You were real pioneers! You could have been out making wine a hundred years ago.

J. Heitz: Just about.

Teiser: So then did you gradually buy equipment?

J. Heitz: Well, we started there in 1961. Then in 1964 we bought the Taplin Road property. At that time we had to get some outside funding. Then we gradually equipped the old building here. Instead of this old crusher that just straddled a barrel, we bought a mechanical electric crusher, I think very much used. We bought it from Tripoli, Mr. Banista Tripoli here in town. I think we paid \$250 for it. We used that for several years--1965 was actually the first year we used it; through 1971. By 1972 we were able to build our new addition. At that time we bought a used crusher that Valley Foundry had--the Welch grape juice people in New York had bought it as an experimental crusher, and it was about the right size, five tons an hour. So we used that for a few years until about three or four years ago we bought a new crusher that was properly sized for our operations, ten tons an hour.

- J. Heitz: But we've obviously had to borrow from Peter to pay Paul, and buy used equipment and make it do until we could afford something better. And we're still in business. Had we gone crazy and bought all fancy new equipment, somebody else would own us now. There is more to running a winery than being a winemaker.
- Teiser: One thing that must be important is to be a mechanic. How do you keep the used equipment going?
- J. Heitz: Well, I don't claim to be a mechanic, but I was raised on a farm. I know what a pliers and baling wire are. And I was an airplane mechanic during the war. So you learn--you do what you have to do.
- Teiser: A lot of people, I imagine, wouldn't be able to deal with old equipment.
- J. Heitz: It needs more care and attention than new equipment.
- Teiser: Before you added this to the Brendel property, had you improved that? Had you put in some new equipment there?
- J. Heitz: No, there was really no space to do it.
- Teiser: So you just kept on your primitive way there?
- J. Heitz: Yes.
- Teiser: Will you tell about the decision to buy this property?
- J. Heitz: Well, here again, we were not looking to buy. But we were growing. Obviously that little tiny place down there couldn't support a family. And we were just looking for another winery to rent. We were looking here and there and the other place.

Expanding, 1965

- J. Heitz: I'll back up a little bit now. When we worked for Beaulieu, we would ride around in the evening. Just go for a little ride to cool off and see the country. One evening we rode to Taplin Road and we saw this beautiful stone winery. But we saw we were in somebody's yard, so we turned around and left. Well, some years later--it had to be seven, eight years later at least--when we

J. Heitz: were looking for any place to rent for storage, we remembered this spot. So we took the kids to school one Monday morning about 8:30 and drove up here between 8:30 and 9:00. And it was a nice looking place. The man came out to see us and we introduced ourselves. And he said, "Oh, yes, I know you. I've been watching you grow down on the highway." He took us all around. We told him we were looking for a place to rent, that we needed storage space. There were no vines here. So he took us all around the property, showing us all the pastures and the hillsides, and into what he called the "stone barn"--he just had it as a storage barn for the tractor and disc and a little workshop. And I said, "You obviously love the place." You could just feel it oozing out of him all over. "But you're not really utilizing this old stone winery. Could we rent it or lease it or something?" And he put his hands on my shoulder and said, "Joe, you may not believe this, but something happened in our family over the weekend that need not concern you. But yesterday, Sunday, we decided to sell the place, and if you had come a half hour later, we would have been in town talking to a realtor. We want \$150,000; we want \$45,000 down. And we'll carry the balance at 5% interest." Well, I said, "Fred, you can get 5% interest at the bank." He said, "I know. A lot of people helped me when I was young. We don't have any children. I'd like to help somebody else." We didn't have \$45,000 down any more than we had had the \$5,000. This is why I said we had to get outside financing. I said, "Can we give you something down, \$5,000 down or something, until we come up with the money?" "No, no," he said. "You don't need to do that. I won't sell it to anybody else. If you tell me you can't hack it then I'll look for somebody else. We're in no rush to sell."

Well, thirty, forty-five days went by and their attitude kind of changed. Mrs. Holt particularly. "When are you going to get the money in?" So I said, "Well, I'll have it, absolutely, by,"--what was it, April 1 or May 1 or some such date--"or else I'll give up." Well, about two days or twenty-four hours before that we got a package together and came and made the down payment and signed the papers. After the papers were signed, they said, "Well now we can tell you the joke. We did not go looking for anybody else, but while we were waiting for you to raise the money, somebody else drove in the yard. They wanted to turn this into a horse farm, and they offered us more money, more total money, a bigger down payment, and a higher rate of interest." But they stuck to their word with us; they weren't going to sell unless--. So it was just a miracle, just a miracle.

Teiser: What was his name?

J. Heitz: Fred Holt. And his wife's name was Alice. Of course, we became friends with them, and then when they moved out, why, we would visit them. We knew them up until they both passed away. They were really honorable people.

Teiser: Alice, do you have any recollections that Joe hasn't mentioned?

A. Heitz: I don't believe so. I think he's covered it pretty well.

J. Heitz: Well, a couple of other personal things, along that same line. After we had bought the ranch, he said, "Well, you know, that didn't include the equipment." They had a tractor and a disc and an electric fence and all the tools you'd need, and nuts and bolts and this and that. And he said, "Do you think \$1,000 will be too much?" Well, even used, it was worth at least \$3,000. So then in the household things, he said, "We don't want to take all this with us." We got a deep freeze and a stove and a refrigerator and the rugs on the floor. Were the beds included?

A. Heitz: Yes. Which we didn't need.

J. Heitz: Some of the beds and the dining room set. Again, "Do you think \$1,000 would be too much?" That sort of thing. They had all the money they could spend in the rest of their lifetime, and they were just willing to help us out.

Teiser: Well it's just the way people should behave in this life.

J. Heitz: Yes. You don't find them too often.

Teiser: Did your kids agree that this was a good place to come?

J. Heitz: Oh, yes. Yes. Of course, we were living down there, and with three children in basically a two-bedroom house, although we kind of made it with a third bedroom, it was getting--as they were getting older it was getting a little crowded, you know, and grumpy. Up here they all had their own individual bedrooms, and they just blossomed. You've seen the property--it's a great place to raise a family.

Teiser: No, I haven't.

J. Heitz: Well look out the window! [chuckles] You've been here a couple of times.

Teiser: Describe it. How many acres is it?

J. Heitz: Well, there are 160 acres. It's mostly rocks and trees with this little valley that you see out the window. Out of 160 acres, oh, if you really pushed it, there might be 55 or 60 that are tillable. But it has the nice old country house and then the guest house, and the beautiful stone winery building, built in 1898. We describe it as just a little pocket-sized world of our own. It's at the end of the highway and it's just your own little tiny piece of the world.

Teiser: It certainly is. Then you planted grapes?

J. Heitz: Yes. We started planting grapes right away and planted a few each year. We couldn't afford to plant the whole thing.

Teiser: How did that work out? What did you plant first?

J. Heitz: Well, the Grignolino vineyard that we had purchased was pretty old. Frankly, it had mixed clones and different things. We had just a slight reputation for that. We could buy other grapes from growers; nobody else grew Grignolino. So the first thing we did was to go through that old vineyard and pick out the best vines, mark them, and get proper bud wood from the best vines. Then we planted Grignolino here. Then right away started buying grapes, Cabernet [Sauvignon] and Chardonnay, from other folks.

I should go back to fill in the growth history. In 1962, or perhaps it was early 1963, poor Mr. [Harold] Zellerbach who started Hanzell Winery, passed away. Well, the poor man wasn't cold in his grave yet and the family decided to close the winery. So they put the wines up for bid. Not an open auction, but anybody could bid on them. So we with a few friends with money--that was when we were still at the little place--we bought all of his remaining wine in bulk: the Chardonnay, Pinot Noir. And we made a deal with the people who came up with the money--and we bought the barrels, too--we would finish the wine, bottle it, and sell it under our label and then go 50/50. We would keep half the money and they would get half the money. Well, as it turned out, it was an excellent investment and an excellent opportunity for us to get established in the quality wine market.

Teiser: What kind of barrels?

J. Heitz: It was the French Limousin oak.

Teiser: Had you had French oak before?

J. Heitz: No. And I repeat, it was before we bought this place, so we didn't have any space. Fred McCrea up at Stony Hill was good enough to rent us a little space so we could put the barrels there, finish aging it and bottle it in his cellar. I say Fred McCrea; I guess I should say Fred and Eleanor. They were another important step in our growth.

Teiser: All the rivalry there is in the wine business is in the stores! It's not among the winemakers.

J. Heitz: Oh, no, not among the winemakers. Gee whiz--Fred McCrea was a great advertising man, as you know. So he would help us write our sales letters. But he was not a winemaker, so I would help him with his technical problems. Sutter Home, across the street, they were into vinegar at that time. Again, they were not chemists. So I would help them with their vinegar analyses and stuff. And if we ran out of glue we would run over and borrow some glue from them. Or maybe the foil capsules or something. In those days, very few people, except the big wineries, had their names on the capsules. We couldn't afford it. We just had red capsules and green capsules and white capsules. So we could borrow and trade back and forth.

Even with yeast--about the smallest container of yeast you could buy is twenty-five pounds. Well, we didn't need that much, and Stony Hill, the McCreas, didn't need that much, so we would buy one twenty-five pound minimum order and share it. No, the whole valley is excellent in cooperation. I love to quote Robert Mondavi. He says, "We are in competition with each other. We are not in competition against each other." I quote him every chance I get on that. I think it's a great idea.

He acts that way, too. One time, one specific I remember--several years ago there was an insidious little bacteria that hit the valley. Actually it was sort of a yeast that caused spoilage in the bottle. So he had meetings at his winery and invited everybody from the valley and university people and everything to talk about and help solve this problem that he had and some of the rest of us did. He not only wanted to solve his problem, he wanted to stop the other wineries from getting involved. So that's the way the valley works. Obviously we're all people, and you don't like, you don't love everybody quite to the same extent.

Teiser: When you came up here to this winery did you have to get all new equipment, or did you transfer some of your equipment?

J. Heitz: No, we had no equipment worth transferring.

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Teiser: So then when you moved up here, you had not only the expense of the property, but the expenses of equipment, too.

J. Heitz: Yes, and here again, we had to scrounge around. I wanted used cooperage. You can buy new cooperage if you've got money. But you don't want all new cooperage because your new wood is harsh. I like my barrels seasoned a little bit. And that was hard to find, because people who had cooperage were using it by and large. But anyway, we found used cooperage and hauled it in and put it up, and then gradually we would buy a few new tanks every year. Well, of course, after you've used those tanks for a while, then they are seasoned. So that's how we did that.

Prices and Standards

Teiser: By the time you came here, then, had the wine business in general improved?

J. Heitz: Somewhat. But we came here in 1965, and it wasn't red hot then. We had attracted some attention. Some of those wines we bought from Hanzell--we sold Chardonnay at \$6 a bottle, and some at an unheard-of price of \$9 a bottle! Well, the neighbors all thought we were going to end up in Napa State Hospital. As a matter of fact, Alice had a friend, an Irish friend, who was vice-president of the Italian club in St. Helena. So he would go to meetings, and on the way back he would stop and have a glass of wine with us and tell us what went on. And everybody thought, they're really nuts trying to sell wine at that price, because wine was two or three dollars a bottle then. Well, people would buy one bottle of that \$9 wine--remember, European wines were selling at that price--so they would buy one bottle, take it home and taste it, and they would come back next week and buy a case.

Teiser: Where were these people from? Were they from the city?

J. Heitz: Yes, the city, San Francisco, Berkeley, around. Real wine people who knew wine and knew values. And it was every damn bit as good as European wines. My opinion is, if a product is identical, I would pay more for an American product than a European product. But most of the world thinks, anything that's imported, they're willing to pay more for. Well, I helped change that around. California wines are great and they should demand the price they deserve.

HEITZ WINE CELLARS

July, 1985

CABERNET SAUVIGNON	PER FIFTH	PER CASE*
1973 Martha's Vineyard	60.00	648.00
1976 Martha's Vineyard	50.00	540.00
1977 Martha's Vineyard	37.50	405.00
1978 Martha's Vineyard	35.00	378.00
1978 Martha's Vineyard Magnums	72.00	388.80
1979 Martha's Vineyard	35.00	378.00
1979 Martha's Vineyard Magnums	72.00	388.80
1980 Martha's Vineyard	35.00	378.00
1980 Martha's Vineyard Magnums	72.00	388.80
1976 Bella Oaks	50.00	540.00
1977 Bella Oaks	40.00	432.00
1977 Bella Oaks Magnums	82.00	442.80
1978 Bella Oaks	20.00	216.00
1978 Bella Oaks Magnums	42.00	226.80
1980 Bella Oaks	25.00	270.00
1980 Bella Oaks Magnums	52.00	280.80
1980 Napa Valley	11.75	126.90
1981 Zinfandel	6.25	67.50
1982 Pinot Noir	7.50	81.00
Pinot Noir July only	6.25	67.50
After August 1st	6.75	72.90
1981 Grignolino	4.50	48.60
Burgundy	3.95	42.66
1984 Grignolino Rose June only	3.75	40.50
After August 1st	4.25	45.90
1982 Chardonnay "Heitz Vineyards"	12.50	135.00
1981 Chardonnay "Heitz Vineyards" Magnums	30.00	162.00
Chablis	3.95	42.66
"Cellar Treasure" Port	4.50	48.60
Brut Champagne	10.75	116.10
Extra Dry Champagne	10.75	116.10

*Case Price after 10% Discount — Add 6% Sales Tax

FREIGHT CHARGES	TO ONE ADDRESS IN CALIFORNIA ONLY	
	Fresno & North	South of Fresno
Amount of Order		
1 Case	\$11.00 Total	\$15.00
2 Cases	9.00 Total	10.00 Total
3 Cases	7.00 Total	8.00 Total
4 Cases or more	2.00 Per Case	3.00 Per Case
Minimum order for shipping — \$85.00		

NOTE: There will be a charge of \$1.50 for packing ANY CASE with less than 12 bottles.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

Phone (to facilitate delivery) _____

Signature _____

(over 21 years of age)

(WINE CANNOT BE SHIPPED TO INDIVIDUALS OUTSIDE OF CALIFORNIA)

- Teiser: With those wines, was that the beginning of your daring price raising?
- J. Heitz: I don't think it was daring at all. I think it was very practical.
- Teiser: But I mean, that was the first time you had raised prices above market levels, say?
- J. Heitz: Yes.
- Teiser: I see. And that was the Hanzell wine?
- J. Heitz: Because the wines were worth it. Some of the other wines that were selling weren't worth it. And you don't just raise prices and snap your fingers and say, just because it's expensive it's a fine wine. You make fine wines first and then you raise the prices.
- Teiser: I see in your price list, that you--
- J. Heitz: We have some very modestly-priced wines.
- Teiser: Yes, that you have varying prices now. Did you do anything to the Hanzell wines?
- J. Heitz: Well, not so much. We did the final treatments, and the filterings, the bottling, of course.
- Teiser: But they were essentially the wines Zellerbach had made.
- J. Heitz: Yes.
- Teiser: And I assume they fitted in with your philosophy of what wine should be?
- J. Heitz: Yes, certainly.
- Teiser: Did they influence you in your winemaking?
- J. Heitz: Well, the barrels, certainly. They were the Limousin oak barrels. We liked the wine and our customers seemed to like it. And I'm a believer in if something ain't broke, don't fix it. So we stuck with Limousin oak ever since, while other people have experimented. They have used Yugoslav and, oh, you know, the various other oaks.

J. Heitz: Nevers and this and that. We've just stuck with Limousin because we like it. Historically it was used for the Burgundian wines, but we use it for Cabernet and everything. So to that extent we were influenced. But I think as far as winemaking techniques, they were mostly what I had learned in school and working at other wineries, specifically Beaulieu.

Teiser: Can you name it, the tradition that you make wine in, that Beaulieu did?

J. Heitz: No--just old standard winemaking. I once made a statement that winemakers should be born with fingers on one hand and a scrub brush on the end of the other arm. Somebody printed that, so I have been careful not to say it any more. But sanitation, sanitation, sanitation. And common sense.

Teiser: Also, however, some idea of what you're shooting at.

J. Heitz: Well, remember, I think you should prepare yourself for anything. If you're going to be a nurse or a carpenter or a hairdresser, you should prepare yourself. And both of my degrees, both my B.S. and M.S., are in wine and viticulture and distillation. They're in enological pursuits. And then I've worked for many wineries. When I was a GI I worked for wineries, when I was a student at Davis I worked in the department. I also was working in Elk Grove to help put me through school. So I have worked part-time. And after I was out of school, I worked in several wineries, which I'm sure we covered last time you were here. And then I've taught winemaking. So sure, I've got a background.

Teiser: Not everybody--let me put it this way--not everybody who has that much experience in the wine industry developed the standards that you have developed.

J. Heitz: Well you have to like the product. In the early days I worked for wineries where the winemaker was really an engineer or a bacteriologist or a chemist, something like that. All of which are necessary to be a winemaker. But they were really not interested in wine. They would have been just as happy working in the soup factory. They were working for their salary. Alice and I happen to like wine. We're going to have to drink it ourselves, we want it to be good.

Teiser: Is Alice a good taster?

J. Heitz: She's got a couple of tales she likes to tell.

Teiser: What about--?

A. Heitz: Well, I enjoy tasting. Guymon used to think I was one of the better ones, which I was real pleased with. I think that's about it.

Teiser: Do you ever say, "I don't like this wine as well as--"?

A. Heitz: Oh, sure. It was an experience to taste so many new wines when I first started. I guess I had never had that experience.

Teiser: Well, you were tasting with experienced people.

A. Heitz: Dr. Guymon had an excellent palate.

Teiser: So that must have given you an education of a kind that proved useful.

A. Heitz: Oh, sure.

Teiser: As you've moved along, who has tasted? You have, but who else?

J. Heitz: Oh, family, the whole cellar crew. We just--you saw the table set up. It's set up for lunch today. But the tables are there because we had a tasting yesterday of nine of our own Chardonnays, three of which I think are bottled and six are different lots in different barrels of different manufacturers. The whole cellar crew tastes. Now tomorrow we're going to have a tasting again, because we're getting ready to release our 1983 vintage Chardonnay. So we'll buy other folks' Chardonnay and again have a blind tasting of everybody's.

No one person makes wine. You read these damn wine journals. The winemaker, the winemaker--that's a lot of hogwash. He may be the leader, but you've got to have a crew. And it takes time to build up a good crew that know what they're doing and like what they're doing and stick with you. So we involve them as much in all aspects as we can.

We're having one man leaving today, so we're going to have a little luncheon together, so he'll leave in peace. But it's a total crew, and in our case a total family. There are five of us that are family. In a tasting, we don't all say, this is the best and this is the worst. No, there are ups and downs. I say I run a very democratic organization. I listen to everybody and then I decide what to do. But I do listen; that's the point.

Teiser: Suppose--this is a hypothetical question--suppose in your Chardonnays in your blind tasting that's coming up, your Chardonnays don't stand up well against some of the others. What are you going to do?

J. Heitz: Well, I can give you a factual answer, not a hypothetical answer. The reason we have these tastings is to establish a price. We price it accordingly. If it's great, we put a great price on it. We know before we bottle it, it's not a dog. But if it's not as good as the competition, we sell it for less money than the competition. I'm a great believer, you can cut a man's hair many times, but you only scalp him once. We try to price our wines honestly.

Teiser: I'm told that your wines are consistent.

J. Heitz: Per dollar; per dollar they're consistent.

Teiser: The people who work for you and have worked for you--have you had trainees? Have you had people pass through your employ who have gone on to--?

J. Heitz: Oh, yes, quite a few. I emphasized a moment ago, we have a stable crew. In the early days, money was scarce. So there would be young folks just out of Davis or Fresno State who couldn't get a job anywhere else, because they didn't have any experience. They would work at what we considered a low salary, but then they would gain experience. Then they could go out and get a better job in a couple of years. That worked very well indeed for several years. We've had a lot of people come. For example, Bob [Robert] Travers, who now owns Mayacamas Vineyards. Oh, a lot of them. A lot of people work summertimes here, too. Davis students work here during the summer. So they would get training and I would get reasonable help. And we both knew what we were doing. We weren't ying-yanging each other.

Teiser: You were using your time, more time I'm sure than you would have had to use with experienced people.

J. Heitz: Oh, certainly.

Teiser: Again substituting your labor for capital.

J. Heitz: That was mostly before our own children became adults, too.

Teiser: Did they always know they were going to be involved in the family business?

J. Heitz: Oh, no. We never tried to push it, but they knew it was here if they wanted it. David, from the time he was ten years old-- I think even younger. When I worked for Beaulieu one of the first sentences he learned to speak was "Beaulieu wine is fine." We lived close to the Beaulieu winery, and when he was just five or six years old I would take him over at night; when I was going over to check the crew during fermenting, he would go over at night. He was always very, very much interested. He is the one who has the degree in enology, so I don't think there was ever any question about him. Kathleen majored in biology and taught high school biology for a year. But then she decided to throw in with us. Rollie majored in business and finance, and he kind of piddled around for a year or two after school. He wanted to start his own business, a spice business. But you have to have a lot of individual initiative to start a business, and it didn't pan out. During that period of time we let him work part-time, just on an hourly basis like any other casual employee. Then he decided to go in with us and of course we put him on a legitimate salary. So they're all three with us now, but they didn't have that plan when they were in school.

Teiser: What are their birth dates? Let me just get those on the record.

J. Heitz: [to Alice] Boy, that's your department.

A. Heitz: David is 5/3/50; Kathleen is 2/9/54; and Rollie is 3/28/58. Four years apart. They are all through with college.

Teiser: You didn't have them in school all at once.

J. Heitz: Spaced out a little bit.

Teiser: David went to Davis, did he?

J. Heitz: He's really a home boy, so he went to junior college for two years, then he went to Davis for two quarters, and he got C's and B's, but he was just working his tail off to do that. So he took the third quarter off to help us when we were building the new winery. And then for his last year, year and a half, he went to Fresno State where the academic standards are a little lower. As far as the enology program, it's more practical and less scientific. There instead of C's and B's he got A's and B's, but developed a social life too and made friends, which he just did not have time to do at Davis,

A. Heitz: He got out of the dormitory, too. At Davis he couldn't study in the dormitory.

- J. Heitz: Yes, he got out of the dormitory--
- A. Heitz: --which he should have done at Davis.
- J. Heitz: --and he and Pat Heck had a little apartment together. Pat Heck was of the Korbell champagne family.
- Teiser: That's interesting. Even though he had a brother and sister, he wasn't used to community living I would gather.
- J. Heitz: Well, not that noisy and raucous. And dirty. He was there during the early seventies. That is when the kids thought they should run the campuses and have mixed bedrooms and all of this and that.
- Teiser: I guess it's in a swing-back now.
- J. Heitz: Yes, now the students are wanting separate dorms again.
- Teiser: Describe, then, the progress of this property, how you developed it. You mentioned that you built another winery and so forth.
- J. Heitz: Well, that we can do pretty quickly. From the vineyard we now have about eighteen acres of Grignolino and approximately fifteen acres of Zinfandel, the Zinfandel just coming into bearing this year, the Grignolino in full production.
- Teiser: I hope you're going to make real Zinfandel, not White Zinfandel.
- J. Heitz: Yes. And not high-alcohol Zinfandel, either.

The Taplin Road Property

- J. Heitz: As far as the winery, we bought it in 1964 and poured cement floors and replumbed and rewired and had our first small crush here in 1965. We just filled the winery slowly. By 1971 we had outgrown it. In 1972 we built this building. You can't build a building ten percent a year, as you need it, so we had to build the whole thing.
- Teiser: It's a stone building, is it not?

J. Heitz: Well, it's basalite.

Teiser: And this is the office and lab building?

J. Heitz: No, the lab is over in the old winery.

Teiser: So it's just the office building?

J. Heitz: Just the part you're in. Haven't you seen outside? Get up and open the door quickly. That's the winery.

Teiser: Is this the aging cellar?

J. Heitz: Yes. Aging cellar,* processing, everything.

Teiser: Oh, I see. I had no idea what was in the back of this building.

J. Heitz: So we built this in 1972, but obviously we couldn't fill it with tanks and barrels as we have now. So we used part of it as a bottling line and warehouse for case goods. Then in 1979, out behind, we built a small warehouse, bottling room and warehouse to store empty glass and a certain amount of case goods. So that's the progress here.

Teiser: What's being built out there now?

J. Heitz: Oh, that's just a room onto our house, a little solarium.

Teiser: You mentioned Zinfandel. I see that you began making Zinfandel in 1980 or 1981.

J. Heitz: '81 is the first vintage.

Teiser: And how did you happen to decide to? This was a period when Zinfandel was not rising in popularity.

J. Heitz: Well, I've never followed the leader in other things too much, so why do it in Zinfandel? I've always liked Zinfandel, so we decided to plant some. In the meantime--what's the famous movie director?--[Francis F.] Coppola bought the old Niebaum estate.

*Some wine is aged in the original stone cellar on the property as well.

J. Heitz: He bought that vineyard and had Zinfandel on it, and he was going to build a winery in a couple of years. My own Zinfandel was going to come into bearing in a couple of years, so we bought Zinfandel grapes from him for three years, and now, last year we knocked that off because we don't need them anymore, because our vineyard came into production. But he had a little financial problem, which you may have read about, in his movie career, so he hasn't built his winery yet.

Teiser: But he released some wine, didn't he?

J. Heitz: Yes, well he has had a little tiny winery. But he was going to build a bigger winery and really get into the business, release some wines. Well, this is just another example of cooperation in the valley. I was helping him by buying grapes and he was helping me by supplying grapes until mine came into production. You know, it's a valley where you work together.

Teiser: So here you now have only the Zinfandel and Grignolino of your own?

J. Heitz: Here on this place, yes. But the old place on the highway that we started with Grignolino--we pulled that after we got this vineyard in production and we planted Chardonnay there. We are real accumulators. We bought the original 8.32 acres and then other adjoining property came for sale. We bought a one-acre place that had been the Standard Oil distribution center. We now rent that to John Montelli, who has it for his corporate yard. He does all sorts of road work and building and stuff. Then we bought another 3 1/2 acre piece of a vineyard from a neighbor, and then later, another 4 1/2 acre piece. So we have four pieces of property there, and the whole thing only totals 16 acres.

Teiser: Are they contiguous?

J. Heitz: Oh, yes; a nice little sixteen-acre block.

Teiser: What's on that?

J. Heitz: That's the Chardonnay.

Teiser: All Chardonnay?

J. Heitz: All Chardonnay. And the whole thing--I say the whole thing is sixteen acres. There are about twelve acres of vineyards. Twelve acres of Chardonnay. Then about four or five years ago

J. Heitz: we bought seventeen acres on Zinfandel Lane, and that's all Chardonnay. Then last year, 1984, we bought 77 acres on Silverado Trail. There are a couple of houses and a winery building and the avenues and so forth, but by vine count there are about 65 acres there. And that's Cabernet and Zinfandel and a little bit of Chenin blanc.

Teiser: Previously planted, all?

J. Heitz: Yes.

Teiser: Who had planted it?

J. Heitz: Dick [Richard] Shown.

Teiser: So now you have moved on--

J. Heitz: So now we're selling grapes. When we first started out, we were lucky to start a winery, because it takes time to age wine. Now we've grown, so we have some vineyard of our own. But we're still buying grapes from a couple of fine vineyardists. The Martha's Vineyard, which I'm sure you've heard of, and the Bella Oaks vineyard.

Teiser: Yes. I rather thought you had a commitment to select vineyards that weren't necessarily your own. And I thought you rather preferred buying grapes to growing them. I see that's not the case.

J. Heitz: Well, I do, very much. All my knowledge, if I have any, is in winemaking. I know a little bit about vineyards. But it takes a lot of specialized equipment and specialized knowledge to operate a vineyard. I grew up on a farm in Illinois, and I just don't like the feel of that sweat running down your back on a hot July afternoon. As we build up more business and as the children become more involved, they have to have something to get their claws into. But, at this point in time, we just hire a vineyard manager and we talk to him about, obviously, when to harvest and what to plant. But the daily work and owning all the equipment-- he does all of that.

Teiser: I see. Have any of your children shown an interest in--

J. Heitz: Oh, yes, they're in the discussion on it, but they're not out there doing the work.

Teiser: No one of them has decided they want to handle the vineyards?

J. Heitz: No.

Cabernet Sauvignon

Teiser: Let's go to your Cabernet Sauvignon, which we haven't really discussed. This is your biggest commitment, is it not?

J. Heitz: Oh, probably.

Teiser: When did you start making Cabernet on your own?

J. Heitz: When did we start selling it? There's a good lesson there. In the very early sixties, the wine wasn't moving. Other wineries had surplus Cabernet. We just had a little yellow truck I could get three barrels in, three fifty-gallon barrels. I would buy some Cabernet from--well, I could get some from Inglenook and some from Louis Martini, but this particular story concerns Christian Brothers. They were really doing me a favor to sell three lousy barrels at a time, but that's all I could afford. We would never buy anything we couldn't pay for. But I first started selling it, and it was four or five years old. I don't know exactly. We first put it on the market at \$1.63, I think, and it sold all right. I got three more barrels, the same wine, and I raised it to \$1.79, and it sold quite a bit faster. I got three more barrels, and I don't know what I did--\$2.25 or \$2.20, something like that. It went out the door like that! So you learn as you go along--if you've got a good product, people want to pay for it. Then gradually the wine business picked up, and people were able to sell more and more of their own wine and those good deals were not available to me so much.

[to Alice] Are you going to do something?

A. Heitz: Yes, I think you're through with me.

Teiser: No, not necessarily. I would like you to add anything that you would.

J. Heitz: Why don't you get her to do it now, because we're having a luncheon for that fellow who is leaving.

Teiser: Well, is there anything that you--I know that you have been active--that you have both handled your own public relations, have you not?

J. Heitz: Oh, yes.

A. Heitz: That's right.

J. Heitz: With the help of Fred McCrea, as I mentioned early. He had helped us write our first sales letters, and we would help him with winemaking. So we picked up a few little tricks from him.

Teiser: Have you, Alice, had a particular part in that, in the public relations?

A. Heitz: Yes, I do a lot of the entertaining.

J. Heitz: That much more so than writing letters or brochures.

A. Heitz: Last week we had 29 people for lunch.

J. Heitz: And dinners. Let me interrupt, then she can elaborate. When we have the distributors come, or wine writers or whoever come, we'll have them for lunch or dinner instead of going out to a restaurant or somewhere. Well, New York has a lot better restaurants than St. Helena. It certainly did a few years ago. So we had the idea of sharing our home with them, which gave us then an excellent showcase in which to present our wines with her cookery. And her ability and willingness to do it at the last minute, when somebody drops in--

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Teiser: Willingness to change your plans at the last moment I think implies a good disposition.

A. Heitz: You have to have a good disposition in this business, I think.

Teiser: Have you developed special menus, paid a lot of attention to the kinds of food that complement your wines?

A. Heitz: Yes, especially for the Cabernets, because we do serve a lot of Cabernets.

Teiser: In general, what kind of foods do you serve with Cabernets?

A. Heitz: I do a little French-type cooking. Light sauces now, because you can't have heavy sauces.

Teiser: What sort of thing do you show your Chardonnays with?

A. Heitz: Oh, salmon; or I do a dish with sole that I like, with mushrooms. That turns out very well.

Teiser: I realized the other night how important it is--somebody served a very good Sauvignon Blanc with a very highly seasoned chicken dish.

A. Heitz: Did it work?

Teiser: No, it killed the Sauvignon Blanc.

J. Heitz: Sauvignon Blanc is one wine that we don't make and don't plan to make. We don't care for it very much. There are a million wines; you can't make them all.

Teiser: Your public relations--do you do that yourselves, or do you hire somebody to help you?

A. Heitz: Oh, we do it ourselves, and Kathleen, our daughter, does a lot now.

Teiser: I see. That's her function, is it?

A. Heitz: Yes.

Teiser: And what about advertising?

J. Heitz: Very little.

Teiser: Who designs your brochures? You have nice printed matter.

J. Heitz: We do that ourselves at the local printer.

Teiser: So you don't go through agencies?

A. Heitz: No.

J. Heitz: We're not that big.

Teiser: Again, being independent.

J. Heitz: We're not trying to sell all the wine in the world. We want to make a good living, don't misunderstand. But we're not trying to drive anybody else out of business or steal their shelf space or anything like that. We think we can remain small enough and make a good living and just sell wine in addition to what other people do without hurting them at all.

Teiser: There are not many wineries in your price class really, are there?

J. Heitz: Oh, you go down the shelf and look at dollars. Everybody wants to sell for the top dollar.

Teiser: Yes, more and more now. But I think, as I understand it, you kind of led the way.

J. Heitz: Well, we made our reputation first, and then sold at a high price.

What is happening now--practically all the new wineries, when they come out with their first release (whether the wine be good, bad, or indifferent, I'm not saying)--but their very first release they want the same price that I've been getting, that I've worked up to over 24 years. And if they can do it, good for them. I don't object to people making a living.

Teiser: [to Alice] Is there anything else that you think of? I'll let you go.

A. Heitz: No, I don't think so. [to Joe] Do you?

Teiser: [to Joe] Anything you think Alice should discuss before she goes off to her duties?

J. Heitz: We'd better not get her talking too much; she might say some things I don't want to hear! [laughter] No, I don't know. It's just been team work, a family. I told you at the very beginning, we said, "Heitz Cellars" rather than "Joe Heitz Winery." And Heitz Cellars involves all of us.

[Alice Heitz leaves]

Teiser: Back to your Cabernet. You started then by finishing other people's Cabernet?

J. Heitz: Yes, we would buy Cabernet and finish it and bottle it.

Then the first year that we were here on Taplin Road, 1965, Tom and Martha May had just bought their land and their vineyard. They had bought it from Belle and Barney Rhodes, who are friends of ours. They had left a couple of bottles of Heitz champagne in the fridge for Tom and Martha, and they liked it. So they came and bought some more and talked to us. They said, "We've got some grapes for sale this year. It's the first crop; we don't know what to do with them." Tom had been a schoolteacher down at Ojai. I said, "We'll crush them," and we did. So then we found that they made pretty good wine. They blended in with our other Cabernet that first year. The second harvest from them, 1966, we kept separate. By a stroke of what turned out to be genius, but pure luck, we put the vineyard name, "Martha's Vineyard" on the label. I think you're aware of the story of Martha's Vineyard since then.

Teiser: Tell it.

J. Heitz: Well--it turned out to be a very good wine, with the little distinction there of Martha's Vineyard, which absolutely has nothing to do with the east coast. It's just that Tom named it for his bride at the time, Martha. The wine writers liked it, the connoisseurs liked it, the restaurants liked it. Some of the older ones are going for pretty excellent prices now. Just recently Joey Delisio, who is the cellar master at the River Café in Brooklyn, put together a wine list of several of the great Cabernets of California. Just listen to some of these prices. This is restaurant prices, of course, but they're all available today. The 1966--and these are all Martha's Vineyard--\$410 a bottle. 1968, \$465 a bottle. 1969, \$395 a bottle. 1970, \$310 a bottle. And so on. 1974, only \$225 a bottle. So that's the story of Martha's Vineyard in a nutshell. I wish I could get that kind of money for it.

Teiser: Well, that's about two and a half times what you can get for it, isn't it?

J. Heitz: Ten times.

J. Heitz: When they get old and scarce, then they can charge--And there are people in this world who have a lot of money and they like to show off to their friends.

Teiser: That particular restaurant--has it bought and cellared those?

J. Heitz: Very few of them. I helped supply them with some of the older ones, because it's really a showcase thing.

Teiser: How big is Martha's Vineyard?

J. Heitz: It's a small vineyard, and this, of course, is one of the reasons why the price is up. It's a world of supply and demand. If I had a million cases of Martha's Vineyard, why, the price would drop dramatically. But it produces around 35,000 to 50,000 bottles per year. It varies from year to year. I happen to have a '78 here in my hand. In 1978 we produced 55,200 bottles and 2,400 magnums. So that's about the production of it. But it's an agricultural product. The 1980 vintage was way down, like, you know, maybe sixty percent of that. When you're working with farm crops, you go up and down.

Teiser: Does the quality differ from year to year, too?

J. Heitz: Somewhat, yes. In Napa Valley our vintages are never, oh, wildly variable as they are in France, for example. The peaks and deep valleys of Bordeaux are much more moderated here in California. They become gentle slopes up and down.

Teiser: Can you characterize your Cabernet Sauvignons?

J. Heitz: Sure. They taste like Cabernet should.

Teiser: Do they taste like anything else in the world? Do they have a European counterpart?

J. Heitz: No; they're Napa Valley wines.

Teiser: In what part of the Valley is Martha's Vineyard?

J. Heitz: It's just south of Oakville, at the base of the western hills.

Teiser: And Bella Oaks? Where is that?

J. Heitz: That's just south of Rutherford. Again up against the base of the western hills.

Teiser: What's the story of that? How big is it and so forth?

J. Heitz: We get about 65 tons a year off of it. I don't know the acreage. But it's roughly about the same size as Martha's Vineyard. The first Martha's Vineyard kept separate was 1966. The first vintage that we got off of Bella Oaks was '76. It's a younger vineyard and has ten years less reputation, so basically it sells at a more modest price. Except (you're looking at the price list*) you'll notice 1977--we felt the wines, while they were not the same from each vineyard, certainly the quality was equal. So we charged the same amount for them.

Teiser: A little more for Bella Oaks.

J. Heitz: Well, at this point, yes. Initially the same. But Bella Oaks from '77 has developed into a wonderful wine. Basically though, year after year, Bella Oaks is a little lighter, a little more elegant style, while the Martha's is more pronounced. I don't know; I use the term, it has a little more "punch," a little more power.

I just got a phone call this morning, by the way, from some Swiss people who are doing a great wine promotion in some fancy restaurant over there. They have a weekly dinner from November through Easter, with about a hundred people each time. And they have selected our '78 Bella Oaks. They've tasted ten or twelve Cabernets from Napa valley, and they selected that one as the one that they feel is best and the one they want to serve. So the Bella Oaks is gaining in reputation, too. But I repeat, Martha's has a ten-year head start.

Teiser: Do you have a hand in the cultivation practices and so forth?

J. Heitz: No.

Teiser: You tell them when to harvest?

J. Heitz: Sure. We work with them, but we certainly don't want to get involved in telling them how to prune or how to do this or that. If you look at the reputation of the grapes and the wine we make from there, they seem to be doing all right without my sticking my nose in it.

*Of July 1985.

Teiser: I see there's a "Napa valley" Cabernet on this list.

J. Heitz: That's a hundred percent Cabernet, a hundred percent Napa valley, and it gets basically the same treatment in the winery. We don't neglect any of our wines. It's just a blend of different vineyards, none of which is distinctive enough to carry the vineyard designation.

Teiser: You have some Cabernets of your own?

J. Heitz: Yes, we do now. But none on the market. We just bought that vineyard last year. We will be making some from our own vineyard.

Other Heitz Wines

Teiser: I'm still looking at this July 1985 price list. You have two Pinot Noirs.

J. Heitz: Two. One is a vintage and one is a non-vintage, which simply means it's a blend of different years.

Teiser: Do you like Pinot Noir particularly?

J. Heitz: I personally don't care as much for it as I do Cabernet, but if you look on the price list there, you see it sells for a lot less money. I think Pinot Noir has taken a bum rap from wine writers the last few years. They expect it to taste like a \$40 wine when it's selling for \$8 or \$9. It has a distinct place. But gradually, as Heitz is growing, I think we'll probably drop the Pinot Noir. We've not had a Zinfandel before. We'll probably replace it with Zinfandel and maybe a little more Cabernet.

Teiser: Pinot Noir, of course, is caught in this cross-current of styles.

J. Heitz: Yes. They even make a white Pinot Noir to help get rid of some of the grapes. And a lot of champagne makers use Pinot Noir. They pick it before it gets much color. It kind of jollies up their champagne cuvée.

Teiser: You made a sparkling wine. Have you made a champagne?

J. Heitz: Well, we don't make it. We have it made for us and we market it. You might call it a sideline with us, to stir up a few dollars. But we're not going to retire on our champagne income.

Teiser: I think Leon Adams in one edition or another of his Wines of America mentioned a sparkling wine that you made by the "Miller Way" process.

J. Heitz: Oh, yes, that was a carbonated wine. That was kind of fun, but too labor intensive. Had we stayed with it I'm sure all the children would have left home at a very early age! It's very labor-intensive.

We play around, we try different things. We try not to get carried away with experimentation. I think if I haven't learned how to make wine now, it's too late.

Teiser: Are your kids interested in experimenting?

J. Heitz: Oh, yes, somewhat.

Teiser: I should have asked you in connection with your Cabernet Sauvignons, are they one hundred percent?

J. Heitz: Yes. Definitely. Again, a lot of the newcomers are taken by the great Bordeaux and so they try to imitate Bordeaux methods here in California. Well, my theory is, if you imitate somebody, by definition you're in second place. I don't like to be in second place. I'm going to try to make the best damn California or Napa valley Cabernet possible. To me that means a hundred percent Cabernet. Our conditions here are totally different than they are in Bordeaux. We can get Cabernet ripe here almost every year. Over there, some years they can't get Cabernet ripe. They never get it as ripe as we do here. So they need these other varieties that develop more sugar, or sugar sooner, to make a sound wine. The conditions are different. I'm making Cabernet Sauvignon, I'm not making California Bordeaux.

Teiser: Just as distinctive as the Zinfandel.

J. Heitz: Right.

Teiser: Your Grignolino, you make a rosé?

J. Heitz: Oh, certainly.

Teiser: Have you always?

J. Heitz: Yes, from day one.

Teiser: Did this contribute to the rosé revolution?

J. Heitz: No, no. It's a good, dry, flavorful rosé. The ones that contributed to the rosé revolution were the Almadén to begin with, which was, I think, Grenache, very slightly sweet. The so-called rosé revolution was the sort of insipid neutral type wines that didn't offend anybody but didn't get anybody too excited, either. But it opened up wine drinking to a lot of people who wouldn't drink wine otherwise. And then from that they went on to other things.

Teiser: They're sweet enough to appeal to people who drink sweet drinks, I guess.

J. Heitz: Sure. Coca-cola, and so on and so forth.

Teiser: And you make two generics, chablis and burgundy.

J. Heitz: Yes. And the chablis has always done very well indeed, and we'll stick with that name. The burgundy is also good, but just at this point in time we're going to be changing our blend significantly. We've had a little surplus Pinot Noir in the past, and then we've blended other soft wine. So it's been, if you will--well I haven't felt too badly calling it burgundy. But now our new blend is going to be mostly Cabernet, and Zinfandel, because we bought a new vineyard and we have these grapes, and whatever else. But it will be bottled in Bordeaux or claret shape bottles. It will be more of a Cabernet flavor rather than a Pinot Noir flavor. Although, don't misunderstand, neither one are varietals, they're mixtures.

We have a little red-headed grandson, Ryan Heitz. So our new label, instead of burgundy will be different. We don't want to call it claret, that doesn't sell anything, and "red table wine" folks expect in gallon jugs, so it's going to be Ryan's Red. This will then involve the third generation, it will give us something to talk about, and we'll have a distinctive label that is ours. Ryan's Red, and underneath in small letters, Napa Valley Table Wine. [Gets up] I saw a bottle here yesterday.

J. Heitz: There! So this is not on the market yet, but we're always trying to upgrade, and we feel this is going to be a better wine and certainly a different type wine than our burgundy.

Teiser: Well, I like your burgundy.

J. Heitz: Oh, I do, too! In the U.S.A., California chablis are readily accepted; California burgundies, they're accepted, but they're kind of slow.

Teiser: Proprietary names are a good idea.

J. Heitz: But, boy, they're tough to come by! We've been trying to think of one for twenty-one years, and it took Ryan to come along to do it. This has only been bottled for two or three weeks, so it will not be released for two or three months. Our present supply should be sold out within five or six months.

Teiser: I've occasionally run into irate retailers who say you're out of this and that and you won't sell it, or you're holding it, which goes with your small supply, I guess.

J. Heitz: Yes. I get that all the time: "We can't buy them; we can't get Heitz wine." Well, all they want to do is buy Martha's Vineyard, which is on quota. Every year we allocate it according to how many dollars you had spent with us in total the year before. If somebody spends \$10,000 and somebody else buys \$20,000, he gets twice as much Martha's Vineyard next year as the one who spent ten. And that's the way we do it.

Teiser: How about restaurants?

J. Heitz: That's the only one that's on quota, Martha's Vineyard.

Teiser: What percentage goes to restaurants?

J. Heitz: I have no idea.

Teiser: Restaurants don't buy direct from you?

J. Heitz: Oh, no. We sell all over the nation. We have a distributor in each of the states; well, actually, in 44 states. I don't know where it goes. Then a year ago we put in a distributor in Southern California. Again, I don't know how he sells it. That's the reason to have distributors, to take the load off your back. In Northern California we still do everything direct, which we used to do for all of California, restaurants or retail shops.

Teiser: As part of your publicity, it's my impression that you go out and about a lot.

J. Heitz: Well, I'm doing that lately. We never did earlier. Two reasons: Alice and I--don't get out your hanky, we're not going to cry about this--but we worked hard in the early days. Seven days a week and no vacations. So we feel it's time for a little vacation. And second, as long as I'm here, I'm not really a soft pussycat, so I keep telling the kids what to do when I'm here. I've got to get out of here for longer and longer periods at a time. They know how to run the winery, but they've got to do it. So after twenty-one years--wait a minute, twenty-four, next year is our twenty-fifth anniversary--after twenty-four years in the business, I've risen to the position of travelling salesman. But when Alice and I go on these trips, of course, if we go on a sales trip, we mix in vacation. If we go on vacation, we sell a little wine, too. So that's why we're more visible lately. But, no, in the past, in the early years, it was a hundred percent product that sold. And of course, as we mentioned earlier, when people visited here, instead of taking them to the Grapevine Inn, we would have dinner at home and share our home with them. That's been our publicity.

Teiser: I took you away from the wine list. There is a port. I guess that is your only sweet wine, isn't it?

J. Heitz: Yes. We had a sherry earlier. You heard the story, how we started out with nothing. Well, these are wines we could purchase, bottle, and put up for sale immediately. The port carries a pretty good price. It's a '73 vintage. But the sherry was very modestly priced. These little wines, as we call them, give nickels and dimes to put a little grease in the wheel so we can afford to hold back and properly age fine wines. Now we are getting more and more fine wines properly aged, when the sherry ran out, we're not looking for any more sherry. Just recently we discontinued Barbera, which was a wine that we purchased. So those were just items to strictly help the budget.

I mentioned earlier, some of these people irritate me somewhat, although it's none of my business. The very first wine that they come out with is expensive. And frequently, especially in Cabernets, it's very young. Well, time is an expensive ingredient, and it's a damned important ingredient in fine wines. Rather than sell our wines before they're ready, we sell lesser wines to get a little money to live on while the good wines are sitting in the barrel or in the bottle aging. To age

J. Heitz: wine is expensive. You not only have your interest, which has been moderated a little lately, but it's been at least twelve percent a year. You've got to carry insurance, you've got to build a building to store it in, and so on and so forth.

Teiser: Your Angelica, has that run out, too?

J. Heitz: Oh, yes. That was for a different reason. It didn't sell! This is a wine we purchased in the Central Valley. We buy it in barrels and bottle it, and we thought it was delightful. We still do. As a matter of fact, when we stopped selling it, Alice made me keep a whole pallet, which is, I think, forty-eight cases, for her--she says, for her cooking wine. Well, I think it's wine to be consumed while cooking! [laughter] So we have enough left to serve us our whole life.

Teiser: It's delicious.

J. Heitz: Yes, we thought it was delicious. But we had a choice of doing one of two things: either drop it, or go into a most expensive advertising campaign, such as Harvey's Bristol Cream, and then we would have to sell big volumes of it. But we're in the table wine business. Other people were making it for us, and it got to be such a small potato, I didn't want to bother them any more.

Teiser: It's hard to find. I guess East Side--

J. Heitz: East Side has an Angelica. But it's different. Sebastiani has an Angelica that is still different.

Teiser: How do you like your mailbox being in Gallo's ad, incidentally? *

J. Heitz: I think it's great!

Teiser: It's the one that stands out.

J. Heitz: I wrote them a letter and thanked them, and then I thanked them in person when I saw them. That gets the name Heitz in front of millions of people that wouldn't see the name Heitz otherwise. All they say in their ad is very true; if you read it, it's very true. They buy more grapes in the Napa and Sonoma valleys than anybody else.

*This two-page advertisement appeared in a number of national magazines in 1985.

J. Heitz: I ran into Julio at a meeting not long ago (this was after I had written them the thank-you letter) and I thanked him again. I said, "I really think that's a good ad. You know, obviously it helped Gallo, but I think it's a nice thing; you've helped the whole industry." And Julio said, "You bet your ass it helped Gallo, or Ernie would never have paid for it!" They're not selfish people. They want their share of the business, but they want the whole business to be big so that their share is bigger, too. And that's my basic feeling. If I can help the industry, if I live in a healthy industry, I'll get my share automatically. If the wine industry is unhealthy or depressed, I'd starve to death, if it was my little peanut operation. I certainly believe in helping the industry in general.

Auctions and Competitions

Teiser: I noticed in this last auction catalogue from the Texas Art Gallery in Dallas, a number of your wines. What do you think auctions do? Do they help?

J. Heitz: I think they're sort of a joke, but a lot of people have fun, so I don't care. It's all a tax gimmick. Most of these auctions are benefits, so if somebody pays \$1,000 for a bottle of wine, he's in the fifty percent tax bracket, so it only cost him \$500 really. And then he'll save it a couple of years and he'll donate it to another auction and he'll list the price as \$1,000 because that's what he paid for it. And then he gets that write-off, so he gets a \$500 savings so he's had a lot of publicity and it hasn't cost him a nickel out of his pocket. It has cost you and I, the taxpayers, a few pennies each. But, as I say, I have my fun my way. If somebody likes to have fun that way, fine. But what I don't like is these gross bottles. It takes two men to carry a bottle. I think that's asinine. And the huge bottles bring the high prices. I'm interested in wine, not gimmickry. Those huge bottles--I agree with André Simon. He says, "Anybody who buys anything bigger than a magnum deserves to have it corked."

Teiser: What do they do with those big bottles? Do they ever use them?

J. Heitz: They keep selling them to each other. Oh, I guess once in a while, they open it at a party. They just display them in their living room or in their office. It's fun, and almost all the auctions are charitable, so I have no objection to them.

Teiser: What about all these proliferating wine competitions?

J. Heitz: Well, everything can be overdone. The best thing in the world can be overdone. I used to enter the L.A. Fair, and one year I won the Grand Championship or whatever with our Chardonnay. The next year I entered a Chardonnay that I thought was as good or better, and it didn't get anything. So I asked what happened and the man told me, well, it was gassy, so we didn't even present it to the judges. This was Nathan Chroman. So I went through case after case of my wine, top case, bottom case, and there wasn't a gassy one anywhere. So that fried my fanny a little bit, so I didn't enter any more. That's quite a few years ago.

So then a lot of the newcomers have been winning medals lately, because they enter fairs. I hadn't, Beaulieu has not. A lot of the old-timers don't enter any more. Some of the winners said, "The old-established wineries are afraid to enter because ours is so much better now." So last year I entered some at the San Francisco wine judging and we did very nearly a clean sweep of the Cabernets. I've got some cards in there I'll show you. So I proved my point. I don't have to enter again for a while.

Teiser: Is it bothersome to enter competitions?

J. Heitz: Well, yes, and it's costly. You've got to pay an entry fee, you've got to donate expensive wine that people are waiting in line for some quota, you could sell anyway. So it's costly. There's very little bother; you just have to pack and ship it. I don't feel that the awards really mean that much. I base this on my years' experience at Beaulieu. One year at Beaulieu we entered sixteen wines. Eight of them won gold medals and four won silver medals. Wonderful, beautiful. And of course we blew about it--promotions, and we put a little sheet in every case of wine that went out. Sales remained right where they were. The next year we said, "Well, let's not enter and see what happens." We didn't enter. They haven't entered since. There wasn't one letter of inquiry, "How come you didn't win any gold medals this year?" Not one letter. So you sell wine through distributors, through restaurants, through retail stores. You don't sell it by gold medals. They make you feel good, but that's all. And there are so many. Quite reasonably, quite logically, the same wines will be entered in, let's say, three different fairs. There will be three different results. And that's human nature. We're not machines. So I don't enter. As I say, I entered in the San Francisco last year, and came out all right.

Teiser: Someone told me a story about a wine entered in a competition that was just at an awkward age, so they didn't give it any medal. People who knew, knew it was about to be a good wine after a while, but they couldn't give it anything.

J. Heitz: Well, judges can't judge futures. They have to judge what's in the glass in front of them.

Teiser: You yourself were a judge at the California State Fair.

J. Heitz: For quite a few years, yes. Also the L.A. Fair.

Teiser: What is it like to be on the other side?

J. Heitz: Oh, it's interesting. Kind of going back to what I said about three different events, three different results. You have a committee of five. It's very difficult to get a uniform decision. You're working with a committee; you make compromises.

Teiser: Do you ever serve on juries or committees with people who you think have no right to belong there?

J. Heitz: Absolutely, absolutely. A lot of them, certainly at--well, I shouldn't say specifically where--but a lot of them, the man in charge of selecting the judges and running the thing, he's got a lot of political payoffs to do. He'll get certain wine and food editors or radio personalities or something like that to serve on the committee so that he gets a little newspaper space. A lot of those people--just because they're a famous name in the movies or something, doesn't mean that they have a good palate. So, yes indeed. And some of them, understanding you're voting four to one against them say, "Oh, that's all right, I'll change my vote." But others can be very adamant: "Oh, no, that is the greatest wine." So then you get a compromise, instead of getting a gold medal it will end up with bronze or something in between. You know, committees tend to bring things to a common denominator. But that's as fair as having any one person do it, because my taste and your taste are different. If I say a gold medal, you might say, "Well, I don't care for that one. I think this one is better." That's human nature. And these things are--well, let me elaborate a little more.

I think county fairs are a great idea, and state fairs, where from the very beginning, you raise the biggest possible pumpkin you can. Or if a housewife is baking an angel food cake,

J. Heitz: or knitting a sweater, it's the very, very best. That then is a goal to shoot for. But in wine they want your average production. See, it's different. They want regular production. When you take a cow to the fair, you don't just go out and lasso the first cow that gets in your rope; you take a specially groomed cow. This then shows what can be done, not what is being done. So wines are judged on a totally different basis than other things in these fairs.

Teiser: Because they want to judge only wines that are generally available, isn't that it?

J. Heitz: Yes. But your prize cow, your prize pig, your prize sheep, they're not generally available. Do you see the difference there?

Teiser: Yes. Has anyone ever had a competition of the best wine?

J. Heitz: No, I don't think so.

Teiser: That would be interesting.

J. Heitz: We're all accused of it,* but who's going to make a special lot. Wine doesn't lend itself to that.

Teiser: It boggles my mind a little bit to think--

J. Heitz: Yes, I would enter some of that, what is it? \$450, \$465 wine, 1968 vintage?

Teiser: Imagine!

The San Jose Mercury News has a system of judging with a professional panel and a consumer panel and giving both ratings. Does that seem to you to be reasonable?

J. Heitz: I don't care. It's their show, let them do what they want.

*Of entering specially made wines not generally available.

Vineyards and Wines

[Interview 3: August 20, 1985, with Mr. Joseph Heitz]

Teiser: Have you done some experimental planting of vines that are customarily not planted here? Other than Grignolino?

Heitz: Well, Grignolino is the one that's now widely grown. But, no.

Teiser: You haven't tried anything else unusual?

Heitz: No. I repeat. I think I've said this a half a dozen times: I like to consider myself a winemaker and not a vineyardist.

Teiser: But in spite of yourself you're a vineyardist.

Heitz: No, not really. We hire that work done.

Teiser: Yes, but you have to direct it. Don't you make the decisions?

Heitz: Just what to plant. I'm not out there on a daily basis.

Teiser: But you do decide what to plant.

Heitz: Oh, sure, and when to pick.

Teiser: But your decisions are made from inside the winery, in effect.

Heitz: Well, I don't know what that means.

Teiser: Well, what you want to come into the winery--

Heitz: Oh, sure, grapes we need and where they should be planted, and so on. But as far as hiring the vineyard help and being out there doing the budding, the grafting, or overseeing it, no. That's for someone else. As we're growing we're getting into the vineyard business, but then again, we have three children working for us. We have to gradually develop more work. You know, there's more to running the vineyard than being out there doing the supervising of the crews. It's the dollars and cents, and the taxes, and blah, blah, blah.

Teiser: Where do you get your stock?

Heitz: Oh, just from standard nurseries. No magic.

Teiser: People have said in recent years that the advances in the wineries of the past couple of decades have been made, but that the new advances now, in this period, are in the vineyard.

Heitz: A lot of people say a lot of things, Ruth. And it's awfully easy--nobody wants to say, "Well, things are going along quite normally." People who write and people who talk have to have something to say. So they always have to have some magic catch phrase. I have said that myself, that shortly, well, from the repeal of Prohibition up til, I don't know when, some time in the middle sixties--and I repeat, I don't know. I don't think these periods start and stop. I think it's a continuing thing. But there were great advances in winemaking and winery equipment during those days. I don't think that means that we've stopped making better wines. But in the very early days, after the repeal of Prohibition, people kind of just planted the grape vines that they were growing before. Since then, not new varieties, but better strains or better clones of the old varieties have been developed. Better vineyard techniques have been put into play. Vine spacing, different types of cultivation, different types of chemical sprays for weed control, and so on and on.

But of course, you understand, if we do something in the winery one year and we don't like it, we do something different another year. If we plant a vineyard, it takes three to five years to see what you're going to get, and you certainly don't get a return on your investment in three to five years. You have to have a vineyard in several years before you get a return on it. So you don't go flim-flamming, jumping around, changing techniques and changing varieties, and so on and so forth, in the vineyard as rapidly as you can do in a winery. That's one reason why perhaps the full fruition of the changes in the vineyard have come along more slowly and are attracting more attention now than the techniques of winemaking.

Teiser: Of course, I suppose popular demand requires certain types of grapes.

Heitz: Popular demand is a strange phrase, because that can change overnight, and does. A few years ago, a lot of good Cabernet vineyards were being pulled or grafted over to Chardonnay. Now there's a big glut of Chardonnay, and the public is drinking more Cabernet. So the same vineyards are going back to Cabernet now. So that's public demand or public desires or whatever you want to say. If you could just be a fortune teller, it would be great.

Teiser: I guess, however, that most winemakers of quality wines have a consensus on what the best varieties are, Chardonnay and Cabernet, is that right?

Heitz: Well, the ones that we get the most money for. So we like to concentrate on those. As long as there's a market. Any market can be oversaturated.

Teiser: But those, I think, have been agreed upon generally as the wines of greatest quality in California?

Heitz: They're referred to as the king and queen, yes.

III INDUSTRY ORGANIZATIONS

The American Society of Enologists

Teiser: I wanted to go on, then, to your activities in the wine industry as a whole. Were you one of the early members of the American Society of Enologists?

Heitz: Yes, I was one of the founding members.

Teiser: I've been collecting recollections of people on the founding of it. What do you remember as the beginning of it?

Heitz: You're stretching my head! That's a long time ago.

Teiser: I know it is.

Heitz: Well, Charlie Holden was the founding father. You know all of this.

Teiser: Go ahead.

Heitz: He came to California from the beer industry, where they had a similar beer institute. I don't know what it was called. Got a few winery people together and said, "Let's do something." Like Topsy, it just "grewed."

Teiser: Who were the few wine people initially, do you recall?

Heitz: Well, this is all on the record somewhere. Leo Berti, Ted Kite, Dale Mills, I guess, and probably Charles Crawford. Certainly the people at the university, Dr. Winkler, Dr. Amerine. Dr. Castor. I can't remember all of those names. A lot of the poor devils are dead now. But as I say, if you want the historical background, it's all available at the American Society of Enologists.

Teiser: Somebody has been working on the history.* Louis P. Martini described the first meeting that they remember in Stockton.**

Heitz: Wolf Hotel in Stockton.

Teiser: Originally did it take in viticulturists?

Heitz: Not at the very beginning, no. It's just the last year or two that it's changed its name to American Society for Enology and Viticulture. It used to be, American Society of Enology.

Teiser: What have been your activities?

Heitz: Well, I don't know whether I was the first secretary or not, but certainly one of the first. I remember one detail, specifically. We talked and talked, the board of directors, for hours, whether or not we could afford a used \$35 mimeograph machine that you turn by hand. We finally bought it, and Alice and I in the evenings would whip out the annual programs and things like that on our used \$35 mimeograph machine. Now the organization has thousands and thousands of dollars at its disposal. Giving money away for scholarships and research and things like that. It's truly an amazing growth for a society.

Teiser: I suppose a good deal of its income comes from exhibits at its meetings?

Heitz: Yes, exhibits, and of course, memberships. They've got a lot of members now. As I say, I was the secretary for a few years, then went on up through the chairs and eventually was second vice president or whatever. Then chairman, 1965-1966. That too was a long time ago. That was twenty years ago.

Teiser: What did you think your main contributions were, besides running the mimeograph machine?

*Leon Berg of Lockford, California.

**Louis P. Martini, "A Family Winery and the California Wine Industry," an oral history interview conducted in 1967-1973, The Martinis: Wine Making in the Napa Valley, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley, 1973, p. 94.

Heitz: Well, doing the bloody work is always important. I get a little hazy; I don't know whether I was ever treasurer or not, or whether this was secretary's duties. But I must have been treasurer, because all the checks would come in. Yes, I was. I had to send out all the bills and collect all the checks and deposit them. You speak of contributions, and a lot of people think that you have to have an earthshaking discovery or invention or something like that to contribute. I don't think the world operates like that. It's just the people who do the grubby work day after day who make the achievements, not somebody who comes in and makes a spectacular speech.

Teiser: Did you contribute any technical papers?

Heitz: Probably, in the early days. I contributed some technical papers--at the moment I'm not positive whether it was before or after the formation. We had wine meetings before that, technical wine meetings. In the early days I did some work on the benefits of clean fortifying brandy and improving the quality of fortified dessert wines.

Teiser: So there had been forums for discussion prior to that?

Heitz: Oh, yes. They were held at the university, usually very small groups, about a dozen of the leaders in the industry. And that would be about all. It was a very small group that would get together once a year.

Teiser: And this was apart from the Wine Institute's Technical Advisory Committee?

Heitz: Oh, yes.

The Napa Valley Vintners

Teiser: The Napa Valley Vintners--you weren't here at the time that began, were you?

Heitz: Not at the time it began, but--I don't know whether what I did was good, bad, or indifferent, but once we bought the winery--

I used to be able to attend once in a while when I worked for Beaulieu, and the Napa Valley Vintners was a nice little group of eight or ten folks who would meet once a month, have lunch and

Heitz: talk. So when I started our own winery down on the highway, I asked if I could join. And they said, "Well, we think so. I'll let you know." Hell, they didn't have any--the by-laws didn't make any provisions for new members or anything. So, "What the hell are we going to do?" Finally I did get in. Then that opened the door and now, I guess there's--I don't know, fifty, sixty, eighty members. It's quite a large group now.

So anyway, I was one of the first, I was the first outsider outside of the original group. It was just a good old boys' eating and drinking society, and they would talk common problems while they ate and drank each others' wine. Then, of course, as years passed, I went through the chairs there, too.

Teiser: You have been president there?

Heitz: Yes, 1970-71.

Teiser: How has that group functioned relative to the industry of the valley as a whole?

Heitz: Well, I think it has been a focal point, offered guidance to a lot of newcomers, and kept the old folks friendly instead of being competitive and stepping on each others' toes. It's a great moving force to keep us working together.

Teiser: I suppose when it was started those people never had any idea that there was going to be a whole crop of new wineries, did they?

Heitz: No. No, the wine business was rather unimportant, relatively speaking to what it is today in Napa County. Napa County had a lot of beef cattle as the leading agricultural pursuit. Had a lot of prunes, a lot of walnuts in the early days, some cherries--so on and so forth. Now Napa County is predominately wine, which of course means wine grapes.

Teiser: Were there factions early on? Did the older members have one point of view, and then as the younger members came in did they have another?

Heitz: No, I don't think so. Not in the way you phrased it. Certainly that's the idea of having a group and having meetings, is to mold your different ideas into one that you can all live with. It would be ridiculous to think that even two people thought alike all the time, let alone ten or twenty or eighty.

Teiser: But there was no sharp division of old boys and new boys?

Heitz: No.

State Fairs

Teiser: Then I think we mentioned that you had been a judge at California State Fairs--for several years was it?

Heitz: Yes, that was during my time at Beaulieu Vineyard, I was judge at Sacramento for some time.

Teiser: For Cabernets particularly?

Heitz: No. As I recall, I was always on the white wine committee, chairman of the white wine committee. I did all kinds of wine, not just Cabernet.

Teiser: I think you said you had done a lot of other judging too.

Heitz: Well, at the Los Angeles County Fair, and I've been up to Seattle a couple of years, judging wines of the Pacific Northwest.

Teiser: What do you think of them?

Heitz: They're very good Northwest wines. They're quite different than ours, and there's a place for all--

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Teiser: Now that they have reinstituted the competition at the State Fairs, have they consulted you about it?

Heitz: No. I'm past tense. There are a lot of new bright young folks, and it's a whole different wine world than it was thirty years ago.

Teiser: Yes. When they asked me to get up some material on it, they apparently didn't know there was a yesterday.

Heitz: We all have to repeat history many times before we discover that it existed.

The Wine Institute

Teiser: I think then we come to the Wine Institute. Were you active in that when you were first in the industry?

Heitz: No, I don't think so, not until after we bought our own winery. And like any other thing, and repeating what I said earlier, somebody's got to do the bloody work before you sit up there and wield the gavel. So I served on quite a few committees, the usual thing. I went up through the chain of officers: secretary, treasurer, which frankly are more or less titles only--the staff does all the real work of the Wine Institute. But it gives you a chance to sit in on the inner council and learn what's going on before you go up through the various vice presidents, I should say vice chairman and then chairman. There is a big distinction, because the president is, at the present time, John De Luca, and the president runs it on a daily basis and he gets paid. The chairman is elected from the industry and conducts meetings and directs principles and policy, and of course doesn't get paid. He shouldn't. He's working for his own self as well as for the good of his industry.

Teiser: What were the main policy matters that came before the group when you were on the board?

Heitz: Dozens. I can't remember all of those details. That goes back quite a few years. But it's a growing, changing industry, and to remember any one or two specifics, I think you're pushing me a little.

Teiser: Well, you weren't in there fighting for or against one sort of thing or another, I gather.

Heitz: Yes, against ingredient labelling, various state tax hikes, etcetera. Also we were having some initial talks with growers' groups that have now led to a better working relationship through Winegrowers of California. There is always a new supply of problems.

Teiser: When you began, it was after Harry Caddow's time, wasn't it?

Heitz: Oh, yes. Quite a while.

Teiser: So the present organization that you've mentioned was in place.

Heitz: Pretty much. I'm an old-timer now, but not that old.

Teiser: What do you think the place of the Wine Institute is in the industry? Suppose there hadn't been a Wine Institute?

Heitz: Well, I can't imagine the industry without an Institute. I can't imagine any industry without an institute or an association or something to take care of your own needs as a group, rather than fighting individually--instead of spending one dollar to get something done, either politically or promotion-wise, to spend one hundred dollars because of the hundred members. The Institute works as its name implies. It's an institute representing the wine industry.

Teiser: Do you think it represents the actual needs and desires of the wine industry?

Heitz: Well, how could it be otherwise, Ruth? It's composed of members. It's no outside force dictating. It's the members that formulate the policies and the actions.

Teiser: All the members, or the board members?

Heitz: All the members. Like any organization, the board makes the major decisions, but it's the members that elect the board members. You know, doing any individually, you can act instantaneously. But when you have a committee, it takes a little longer, because there are different approaches. But if you have the entire membership debating every little issue, nothing would ever get done. The membership elects its own directors, then by and large the directors make the decisions. If they make the wrong decision, there will damn well be new directors next year.

Teiser: It always looks to me as if the directors are more appointed than elected. They are named and then their election is agreed to by the membership.

Heitz: Who do you think appoints them?

Teiser: The last board. No?

Heitz: I don't know where you get these ideas.

Teiser: I don't know. I'm asking you to clear them up.

Heitz: Well, do you think our U.S. Senators are appointed by the previous senators? Or are they elected by votes? Certainly there are connections. A young man from Minnesota not long ago was Hubert Humphrey's protege and he's been pretty influential in politics since then and is now running for president. You develop contacts, of course.

Teiser: Let me put it another way, and you'll say no to this.

Heitz: [chuckles] You're just trying to stir up an argument, and you came to the right place.

Teiser: Has anyone who has been nominated for the board of the Wine Institute ever been defeated?

Heitz: I don't know. But this is done by districts, Ruth. The whole membership didn't vote whether I should be District Seven's representative to the board of directors or not. We do that within District Seven. And I don't know how many districts there are, ten or eleven.

Teiser: Do the district members then actually--

Heitz: The district members talk it over among themselves and make suggestions, recommendations. They don't make appointments. And then at the annual meeting, the members of that district vote whether they want to agree with who has been suggested, recommended. And by and large, they go along with it. Sometimes beforehand, not usually at the annual meeting, I repeat and I emphasize, the directors are recommended and put on a slate. But there is a lot of bickering in the home territories, I'm sure, as to who should be--and there are various suggestions. They are weeded out, and it's the usual thing, like in a family. You don't carry your family differences out and broadcast them downtown in St. Helena. You settle your differences at home and go forth as a united family. Or you damn well should. And that's the same way. If there are differences within Napa County, say, as to who should be representing them, we meet and we argue and we make our decisions as a group of reasonably intelligent people should. Then at the annual meeting, do the final voting.

Teiser: Good. Thank you for explaining that.

I'll go on stirring up arguments now; you can refute this, too. I heard somebody say recently, "The Wine Institute is not open to new ideas."

Heitz: That's hogwash. I've got a better word if you want to hear it.

Teiser: We have to protect the ears of our transcriber.

Heitz: Why do you keep speaking of the Wine Institute as being a separate entity from the wine industry? How can the Wine Institute be closed to new ideas unless the wine industry is closed to new ideas? To say that the wine industry is closed to new ideas is one of the most foolish statements I've ever heard.

Teiser: It represents a large percentage, but not the entire industry, does it not?

Heitz: Not the entire industry, but by far the majority of wineries. By far. And if the others don't like it, they can join, bear their fair share of the cost and have a voice in it.

Teiser: There have been some notable holdouts, haven't there, for reasons of their own?

Heitz: Yes. That's their problem.

Teiser: Thank you very much. People take the Wine Institute for granted, and I like to hear discussions about it.

Heitz: I've always felt it's a very fair organization. I've heard various things in the past. "Why do you join? Gallo runs everything." That's simply not true. Gallo listens, Gallo talks, Gallo has some very firm ideas. I am one of the tiniest peanuts in the business; certainly I was when I was chairman. I was allowed to go up all the way to be chairman, with the full consent and approval of Gallo. They could have outvoted me. We vote by the amount of dues we pay, and of course, if Gallo wanted to be all hips and elbows, they could. But they don't. Everybody has a chance to speak there, Ruth. It's a very democratic organization. That doesn't mean everything I say is going to be accepted. Everything I say in my house isn't accepted. It's a democratic organization, and intelligent people reason things out and argue behind doors and settle their differences.

Some people can't stand it. They say, "Well, I'm right; I don't give a damn what you think. If you don't do it my way, I'm going to take my baseball and go home." Well, the hell with them. Let them go home. And in the meantime, while they're home sitting out, not paying any dues, they're collecting all the benefits that Wine Institute does--all the political work we do, all the promotional work we do, and the multitude of other little details that are done all the time for the industry--the non-members are benefitting just as much as the members.

Teiser: I should mention something from my point of view about the Wine Institute. I use its library that Leon Adams had gotten started. It's a marvelous resource that I use all the time for these interviews. I don't know how many members are even aware of it.

Heitz: Well, we're aware of it. I'm afraid sometimes we're a little lazy and don't make full use of many of the services that are offered. I know I don't think I've ever really used their library. I never had the particular need, I guess. I know it's there.

Trade Missions and Travels

Teiser: Let me go to your trade missions, in 1979 and 1980. You went to the Orient, was it both times?

Heitz: I don't know the years. The first trade mission I went on was with March Fong Eu, and we went to--Well, practically anywhere you go in the Orient, you land in Tokyo first. So we spent a couple of days in Tokyo just talking to our U.S. agricultural people there. No big public tastings or anything. Then we went to Hong Kong and Singapore, and Taipei. I think Taipei first. And in all of those places we put on tastings of wines and brandies. Then the individuals that went could talk to the individuals on that end that they would want to work with on purchasing California products or whatever. That was very well arranged and very well done.

Later, Alice and I had the privilege of going to China. Once we landed in Beijing we were guests of the government for twelve days until we ended the trip in Hong Kong. This was arranged through our California director of agriculture, who was Richard Rominger at the time. That was a very interesting trip, quite different from the other. You could almost say, more of a social, making-friends trip, and we'll do business next time around. But also that trip stopped in Tokyo for a day or two. A lot of people on the trip who had contacts in Japan made use of that day or two to cement them. I'm thinking specifically of the citrus people and the almond people. So they were able to do business there.

And then, of course, looking around China, making friends, and return visits from Chinese who are coming and going all the time here. We had an agricultural trade mission from China here, just a couple of weeks before we went there. Among other places they had been, they came to the Napa valley, and we had lunch in our winery for them. The leader of that Chinese group was--I don't know his title--he's the head honcho out of Sinkiang Province,

Heitz: way out west. While our original tour was just up and down the coast, the usual tourist spots, he insisted that he and his group had such a good time here that he changed the tour, and we went way out to Urumchi, which is the capital of Sinkiang Province. That was, I believe, in 1979. Only one commercial airliner a week flies in there. So we went in on a commercial airliner, but to get us out, they flew in a special empty plane to fly us back to Canton. We had to stop a couple of times--it's a pretty long distance--on isolated bases to refuel. So that made the trip much more interesting.

While the trip was mostly visiting state farms and communes, agricultural communes, and visiting agricultural places, we also had some time to do some sightseeing. The usual, Great Wall, and so on and so forth. So that was a very great trip.

Then later, Alice and Kathleen went on another trip with March Fong. I think they went to Manila, and--what's the capital of Korea? Anyway, they went to Korea, and I think Hong Kong again. But that was Alice and Kathleen. We're not massive enough, we don't have enough wine to saturate the world, we like to help wherever we can, letting the world know that California has some good wine. And other products, too.

Teiser: Perhaps this isn't a very good question, but did you find any difference in the acceptance of California wines between those two trips?

Heitz: Well, I didn't go on the second trip, so I can't tell. And the trips were different. But the acceptance on the first trip was very good. Going through the details of marketing is another, tougher story. But the product was thoroughly appreciated and enjoyed, we opened the doors in Taiwan. They came over here looking to buy California wine, and I'm sure they did. I don't know what the follow-up has been. We changed some regulations in Hong Kong so that California brandy would qualify to come in. So, yes, the trip was worthwhile. But any one trip isn't going to accomplish miracles. You've got to keep pounding and pounding.

Teiser: The Wine Institute is doing that now, isn't it?

Heitz: Oh yes. They're expanding those activities. And now it's not only Wine Institute, it's--I hope I can remember the name--California, no Winegrowers of California. The growers and the vintners are working cooperatively. Again, one of their main objectives is opening foreign markets. But it's not their only endeavor.

Teiser: Does the Orient seem to you a great prospect?

Heitz: Oh yes. First of all, we're all on the Pacific Rim, and we're already shipping a lot of fruits and vegetables there. There are a lot of bodies over there. Historically, they have not been wine drinkers. Certainly in China people can't afford such luxuries today. But the spread of travel, the fine international hotels all around the world which are the center point of bringing in, if you will, western styles of eating and of drinking wine. It will spread out from there.

The French and the Germans, particularly the French, are already pretty entrenched in the Orient. They've been at it a thousand years longer than we have. So we still have to compete with European wines.

Teiser: Do you expect to go again to the Orient?

Heitz: Oh, I'd like to go as a tourist. Both Alice and I much prefer travelling in the Orient to travelling in Europe.

Teiser: Have you gone frequently to Europe, however?

Heitz: No, not frequently. Three times, I believe.

Teiser: Did you feel that your wine knowledge was expanded notably by your trips there?

Heitz: No. We were not there to study wine. We were on vacation. However, whenever and wherever you go, if you're still awake, you're bound to pick up a little knowledge about something.

Teiser: But you haven't done big trips to European wineries to see what goes on?

Heitz: No.

Teiser: You were on the State Board of Food and Agriculture a few years ago, too. What was your function there?

Heitz: Well, just sitting on the board and listening to all the problems that go on in agriculture. Medfly, the cattle diseases, surplus milk, everything. And if you had anything to say, say it. Just another board, same as Wine Institute, you know.

Teiser: Are grapes a primary concern of that board?

Heitz: Everything in agriculture is a concern of that board, including what kind of grapes are imported from Chile that are substandard and shipped around and interfere with our American market. Sure, every agricultural product is a concern of that board.

Teiser: Were you the one winery representative at that time?

Heitz: At that time, yes. I don't like to think I was there representing the wine industry or the grape industry. I was there representing California agriculture. Perhaps I knew a little bit more about the grapes than some other people, but other people on the board that grow peaches, nectarines, other fruits, also have big vineyards. We also had people on the board--what do you call them?--public members, and every once in a while they would say, "I represent the consumer." I just don't like that. We all have to think of the consumer. My God, if I'm selling wine and I'm trying to poison the public, that isn't going to help my business. We all have to think of the consumer, first and primary. Those people who think that every farmer is out trying to ying-yang the public are simply mad. They're not thinking soundly.

Teiser: You're reflecting a little of the attitude about the Wine Advisory Board, aren't you, too? The end of the Wine Advisory Board. Were you a member of the Wine Advisory Board?

Heitz: Yes.

Teiser: What did you think of its demise?

Heitz: At that time it had to be. It's been sort of revived in a different format now,* and this is essential at this period of time. But when the Wine Advisory Board was disbanded, we were all putting in our funds for promotion of our product primarily, and promotion of product implies a lot of activities. It was turning into a board that was going to be run by public members, and our monies collected by us could be spent anywhere in the state for anything. Well, that's asinine.

*In the Winegrowers of California.

Teiser: It was to go into a general fund?

Heitz: Anybody could get their fingers on it if they had a good excuse. I may be exaggerating, and you may be exaggerating beyond that when you refer to the general fund, but we would not have control of where and how the money was spent, let's say that. The people who were putting the money in would lose control of how to spend it.

Teiser: The public members would be so large a group that they could out-vote the wine members?

Heitz: As I recall. Again, this was a long time ago.

Teiser: 1975. Ten years ago.

Heitz: Ten years; it seems even longer. It was a great idea for a good many years, but times change and you've got to change with them.

Teiser: You've been active also--I'm looking down my list here--in a wine and food society, have you not?

Heitz: Oh, you know--yes.

Teiser: What do you do?

Heitz: Eat and drink! We're not active any more. I helped form, and I was one of the original members of the Fresno branch of the Wine and Food Society. Oh, I belonged to the Berkeley Wine and Food Society. Nothing spectacular at all there. Just getting together and tasting wines and hopefully learning something about them and maybe in a small way, helping teach others a little about them while you're learning yourself.

Teiser: They're mostly consumer societies, are they not?

Heitz: Yes. And then, of course, in addition to that, we belonged to several little wine tasting groups in Fresno and here. It's just a pastime.

Teiser: Are there other activities in these kind of public spheres that you are involved in?

Heitz: Well, I don't think so. The Wine and Food Society can't be described as a public sphere; that's strictly private and personal. When my children were in school, I served on the school board in St. Helena. I was chairman my final year. That's just, again, a local public service. I think everybody should give it a try.

Teiser: Have you had anything to do with Napa County zoning?

Heitz: No. I stay away from things I know are going to be fights.

Teiser: Well, I guess we've covered pretty much your activities, unless I've skipped some great big ones.

Heitz: Nothing great big has ever happened. Poke along day to day.

The Future

Teiser: I put down in my outline, finally, "Present anticipations for Heitz Cellar and California wine industry as a whole"--do you want to give a speech?

Heitz: Sure. I think I want to get rich. I think the whole wine industry should get rich.

Teiser: Those are hopes, not anticipations. Do you think it's going to happen?

Heitz: The wine industry is in a little low spot right now, but you mentioned going to a reference library. If you ever read a little bit about history, everything is cyclic, especially the wine industry. We've been in lots worse messes in the past than we're in now. Certainly I'm optimistic. If I weren't optimistic I'd sell and retire and go hide. Now we have all three of our children involved, and I think if I was pessimistic I wouldn't have allowed that, because there are a lot of wonderful things to do in this world and I wouldn't like my children to go into something like the wine industry if I believed it was not going to prosper.

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Teiser: I should ask you if you anticipate that this current temperance/prohibition/I-don't-know-what-it-is movement which seems to have come up in the last year or so will in the long run have an effect upon the wine industry.

Heitz: It's having an effect right now, of course. But I don't think it's going to hurt the wine industry as much as the hard liquor industry. Especially if you want to call it a temperance movement; most so-

Heitz: called temperance movements really want to prohibit alcohol. I think we have enough people still living in the United States that remember the other Prohibition and aren't going to knuckle under. Several things, such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving--that's an excellent idea. Drunk driving is horrible. But don't blame the wine producers. Blame the people who are drunk and kill somebody, and then blame the judges and the juries that turn them loose with six months' probation, and they go out and do it again. I just read in Reader's Digest this past week of all of the people who were killed or who killed somebody else during a period of one year in the United States because of drunk driving, and most of them, if they got any sentence at all, it was six months with a year's probation. Well that's terrible! With such a small penalty they're going to do it again and again. If you just read the newspaper accounts you know that many of the people who kill somebody because of their drunk driving, it's the second or third or fourth offense that they've been caught drunk driving. Put them away, put them away the first time for six months. That's without killing anybody, just for an arrest.

I also tend to believe--now this I know is prejudiced--most wine is drunk around restaurants or homes with a meal. And sure, we get to feeling more mellow. But it's not like going to a tavern, coming in hot and dry and thirsty after a hard day's work, and belting back four or five beers or cocktails. I repeat, I'm probably prejudiced, but I think more drunk driving arrests and more drunk driving deaths are associated with beer and drinking hard spirits than with drinking wine in social conditions. That doesn't mean wine is totally innocent. People get drunk on wine and get in trouble, too. But percentage-wise I think we're rather clean.

Teiser: Do you have any trouble on the highways here?

Heitz: Surprisingly little. When you say "here" you mean Napa County?

Teiser: Napa County, yes.

Heitz: The highways are jammed. It's amazing there aren't more fenderbenders, at least. Some say, well, they go from winery to winery, drink at every place, and get drunk. You don't get drunk in a tasting room. You get a little tiny sip. A little tiny sip. Moving from one tasting room to another, you work it off. So people who come up and visit the tasting rooms don't really get drunk in the tasting rooms. Now if they may have a big picnic and overdrink or something, sure, it's possible. But the number of accidents in Napa County from drunk driving is exceedingly small.

Teiser: It seems to me that's a case in point.

In spite of everything, the industry will live?

Heitz: Sure.

Teiser: I'm sure you will help it live, you and your children.

Heitz: We're sure going to try.

[End of Interview]

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Ruth Teiser

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