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University of California
Berkeley, California

Paula Kornell

Paula Kornell: A Lifetime in Napa Valley

The Napa Valley Vintners Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Martin Meeker
in 2019

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Paula Kornell with her beloved pack at home in Napa Valley
Photo courtesy of Paula Kornell

Abstract

Paula Kornell is the principal of Paula Kornell Sparkling Wine. Kornell co-chaired Auction Napa Valley in 1992 and 2002; she served as board chair of Napa Valley Vintners (NVV) in 2009. Kornell is a Napa Valley native and her father was Hanns Kornell, the owner and winemaker at Kornell Champagne Cellars in Napa Valley. Kornell worked in wine sales after college and then at her father's winery until he lost the winery in 1992. Kornell continued to work in the industry, including at Joseph Phelps Vineyards, Robert Mondavi Winery, Carmenet Vineyard, and Oakville Ranch. In partnership with Vintage Wine Estates, she launched Paula Kornell Sparkling Wine in 2019. In this interview, Kornell discusses: family background and upbringing, including observations of Napa Valley in the 1960s and 1970s; father Hanns Kornell and his winery; NVV in the 1980s; Auction Napa Valley and wine marketing; the role of women in the wine industry; thoughts on the 75th anniversary of NVV.

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Napa Valley Vintners Project History

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

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

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

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

Interview 1: April 5, 2019

01-00:00:22

Meeker: Today is the April 4, 2019. This is Martin Meeker, interviewing Paula Kornell, for the Napa Valley Vintners Oral History Project. This is our first session together and we are here at Paula's home, north of St. Helena, in the Napa Valley. We begin these interviews the same for everyone and that is just tell me your birth name, and then the name that you like to have used.

01-00:00:53

Kornell: Paula Lisa Kornell, I don't know where the heck the Lisa ever came from, and everybody calls me Paula.

01-00:01:00

Meeker: Great. Where were you born?

01-00:01:02

Kornell: Queen of the Valley Hospital in Napa Valley.

01-00:01:05

Meeker: When?

01-00:01:06

Kornell: Nineteen fifty-nine, September 5, 1959.

01-00:01:09

Meeker: Okay. We had a really good pre-interview and thank you for spending some time with me on the phone, to give me a broader sense of your family history and then also, your personal and professional story. Your father, Hanns Kornell, had a sparkling winery here in Napa Valley, not too far away from here, called Hanns Kornell Cellars?

01-00:01:34

Kornell: Hanns Kornell Champagne Cellars.

01-00:01:37

Meeker: Okay, Hanns Kornell Champagne Cellars. Why don't you tell me the family history of how that establishment was founded.

01-00:01:48

Kornell: Sure. I have to always remember this correctly, so it was his uncle in Germany, in Wiesbaden, Germany, had a sect cellar, so a German champagne cellar, they made sparkling wine there. When he came over to the United States after the war, he ended up in Ohio, started making wine in Ohio. When he got here, he was so happy to be in the United States after being in concentration camps, he always knew that he wanted to be in the champagne business again, so of course California was the golden land, and so made his way to California with a horse. The first thing he purchased when he came to the United States was a horse, came to California and continued making wine in a place called the Red Barn, which burned in the last fire, and then came to

Sonoma, so where the Safeway Store is in Sonoma now, he had his first cellar, which was called, I think it was called Hanns Kornell Third Generation Champagne, and that of course is when you can still call méthode champenoise champagne in the United States. So had his winery there, met my mother and eventually ended up coming to Napa Valley, bought a winery that was owned by—sort of a vacant winery that was owned by Italian Swiss Colony in the past, and that's where he started Hanns Kornell.

01-00:03:23

Meeker:

You said that your father was in concentration camps in Germany.

01-00:03:28

Kornell:

He wasn't, it was just in the very beginning, sort of the beginning of the war, when they were taking political people for whatever reason. He was skiing, he was cross country skiing with his cousins and they got him at the borderline. His family was Jewish but they were not practicing Jews at all. Matter of fact, my mother was Catholic and we always said my mother was a better Jew than my father ever was because he didn't know anything, so his family never was practicing, unfortunately was never practicing.

He didn't tell many stories but the stories he did tell were obviously horrendous. He talked about his life being saved because of the Germans leaving so much potato underneath the potato skins, so you always wanted to be on KP duties so that you could eat as much of the trash as possible. He was in jail with, or in his cell with somebody that was in for murder and that was the person that actually helped save his life. He was in for, I believe it was thirteen months, and his parents somehow had enough, between lawyers and enough clout, got him out but he was given twenty-four hours to get out of Germany, period.

His mother and father packed a trunk, which we still have, and threw in just a few pieces of silver and a couple other things that the SS Troopers didn't see, and then he went off to London and under the auspice of building wine cellars for people, a Freudian psychiatrist named Dr. {Wanchavski?}, helped him—was one of the impetus of helping him get out of Germany, and I had the pleasure of meeting him oh God, I think it was in the early, probably the early seventies, I had the chance to meet him. He was a lovely, lovely, lovely man. What was great about that, great about my father's—what the concentration camp [Dachau] instilled in my father was just the beauty of life, and I think he helped to instill that throughout lives and through growing up, was the beauty of a vineyard or of a vine growing, or beauty of your garden or the beauty of winemaking.

01-00:06:11

Meeker:

You said your father was a political prisoner?

01-00:06:36

Kornell:

It was, they were taking, it's when they were taking, I think wealthy Germans, they were taking "political," which I say that in quotations, "political" Jews, wealthy Jews, people that had really nothing, they were part of the establishment and that's who they were taking. It had nothing to do with anything, it was just to make a stance and who knows.

01-00:07:02

Meeker:

It was their assertion of authority.

01-00:07:03

Kornell:

It was like nobody knew why they were thrown in there.

01-00:07:06

Meeker:

How did your parents meet?

01-00:07:09

Kornell:

Oh that was good. My mother was engaged to be married and she was singing at the time. She was going to medical school but she was also singing and there's the city of Paris department store in San Francisco, where Neiman Marcus is currently, had a beautiful cellar, which was very much like Harrods and all the grand department stores of the world, and there was the wine guy or the wine and liquor guy, oh God his name escapes me. When my grandfather, my mother's father, was going to buy champagne for one of her recitals with the San Francisco Symphony, he said oh, Peter, which was my grandfather's name, "You should buy some of this champagne from this guy in Sonoma, matter of fact he's single." And so my grandfather bought some of the champagne and then years, I think it was a couple years later, that this gentleman put them together. My mother was tall, dark hair, brown eyes, and my father was short, blonde hair, blue eyes, and my mother had no interest in any of that but look what happened. So.

01-00:08:25

Meeker:

What was your mother's name?

01-00:08:26

Kornell:

Marilouise.

01-00:08:27

Meeker:

Marilouise. Last name?

01-00:08:28

Kornell:

Marilouise Rossini.

01-00:08:31

Meeker:

Okay. The Rossini family had some history in Napa Valley, correct?

01-00:08:35

Kornell:

Yeah, so they were Swiss Italian, so many Swiss Italian homesteaded here in Napa Valley, as well as in Petaluma, Cinema County, as well as in Modesto, the whole San Joaquin Valley also. Here in St. Helena especially, there's—I

think I'm constantly meeting people that I realize that I'm six degrees of separation and I grew up thinking I didn't have any cousins. The older I get, the more I realize I'm related to, far related to somebody here constantly. She grew up between Berkeley and Vallejo, my grandfather worked at Mare Island, so he was in the Navy, and the St. Helena house where I grew up in was their summer house, so they would come up and spend the summers or the weekends here. So the place I grew up in was basically built for a summer house, so it was always a funny, funky house to be growing up in too, because it was just a mishmash of a house that grew constantly.

01-00:09:44

Meeker:

Where was that house?

01-00:09:46

Kornell:

On Crystal Springs Road, so just a little valley just east of here, and they called it affectionately, Dago Valley, because it was all these Swiss Italians that homesteaded there, and then as time went on, as I grew, there were a lot of Seventh Day Adventists that were also in the area which they didn't want, the Seventh Day Adventists didn't want their kids to play with these Catholic kids because heavens, we drank alcohol and made alcohol, so that was bad. My mother would be out there saying wait a minute, you don't think that what happened, that it was too hot out there, you thought that the grape juice wasn't fermenting in the middle of the sun time. So it was great out there, it was beautiful.

01-00:10:31

Meeker:

Who were your friends growing up?

01-00:10:33

Kornell:

My friends—it was the Mondavi kids, it was the Del Bondios, it was basically other winery friends that we all spent all of our time together, and to this day, Pete and Mark Mondavi from Charles Krug family, are still some of my best friends. The wine business was so small growing up. We'd go to San Diego every year, it was all these wine conventions, and it was the same group. It was the Petersons, it was the Mondavis, the whole group, the Martinis, we'd all go together and we'd all have a ball together.

01-00:11:20

Meeker:

When, during your upbringing, did you realize that dad's job was as a winemaker, as an owner of a winery?

01-00:11:27

Kornell:

Oh very early on because it was a playground, but it was also, the winery or the business was as if it was someone that sat at the dining room table. It was as—the winery and the business was your life, so the building itself, being in the champagne business number one is something different than being in the still wine business, so I was put to work from an early age. It was either putting labels on bottles, to riddling bottles, so in the champagne process, you need to get the sediment from the side of the bottle down to the neck, so you

have to riddle the bottle. I would get my pigtails caught in the labeling, I'd get my pigtails caught in the—we'd climb up on the *tirage* stacks to catch bats, it was—it was great, and we always were allowed to, from a very early age, to taste the wine, to taste the base wine of what was going to go into the final product and we were always asked what we thought about it. Do you like it? If we don't like it why do we not like it, if we like it why do we like it, what are we tasting. He was very big on trying to teach us what those flavors were that we were picking up, so it was really, it was very special, and it was also special to learn also how he treated people. All the cellar workers were part of the family and everybody worked hard but you saw that he worked hard also and he expected the kids to work hard too.

01-00:13:30

Meeker:

Did you actually develop a taste for the *vin clair* because that's not, it's not like a real white wine, it's pretty lean.

01-00:13:39

Kornell:

What I think it taught you was I think it showed—it helped you be creative and to sort of understand that this was the start and that it was going to develop into something else. So it helped you, starting from grape juice, when you'd be out in a vineyard, to taste a grape and to taste that sweetness, and then to see what happened a little bit later, and then to see all of a sudden, bubbles, how many years later, to see what happens in those stages and also to see the development of a grapevine.

My mother would tell a story about how I'd come in, after the first time I saw what frost did, that it killed the vine and oh my God, how that would—that she thought something horrible had happened, that it was oh my God it's dead. She thought one of the animals had died and oh no, it was a vine that had obviously been fried from frost and I reacted. So it was what he, it was how he taught us, that you know, how special that it was but it was mother nature, and I think that was important, but as far as wine goes, it was very important that he wanted us to learn why we liked something, that most importantly, that was the most important thing, if you liked it or not, don't—just because somebody else said they liked it or not, that it didn't matter, you were to trust your own palate.

01-00:15:13

Meeker:

Just over the last three to four years of my life, I've been living in the country and maintaining a kitchen garden, and I now have a really strong memory of the weather of each year, and I always wondered, by drinking wine, when people would talk about vintage memory, it seemed remarkable that people could remember that.

01-00:15:36

Kornell:

I think it is the same thing for me, I know now. I'd say for probably the last fifteen years, to me it's much more knowing my clients or knowing what wineries I've run and known what has happened to those vintages, or what

vineyard I worked with or the exciting parts of it that all of a sudden I go oh my God, that was in '17 that we did this, or whatever the fire was this year. No, it was—those were very special times, being in the winery with him and just um, and just hanging out.

01-00:16:23

Meeker:

Do you feel like you were gaining an intuitive sense of the winery and of the seasons and such, when you were a kid there?

01-00:16:31

Kornell:

I think it was more of the winery itself. I think at that point it wasn't necessarily the—well it was the seasons in the fact that more of his feeling of how things were created. As I said earlier about the horse, animals were very important in my family, as you can see here, with all the damn dogs. We'd go horseback riding together and we'd ride up to the top of the mountain and he would look over the valley and he would say, "This is God's country," and he would always make a point of you're learning. I only went to a Catholic high school, my brother went to Catholic schools all the way through, and he would make sure that it was always very—he always backed up whatever my mother believed in, but his, his religion was the beauty that was created and he always wanted to stress that, and to this day, you wake up and you drive down the road and it's—you never take this for granted because we're pretty damn lucky to be in this valley or to be where we are in California, period. That was very much instilled in us by him.

01-00:17:52

Meeker:

You had mentioned your friends growing up were oftentimes kids of winemakers or vintners. Who were your parents friends with?

01-00:18:02

Kornell:

My parents, probably their best friends at that time were Margaret and Bob Mondavi. Margie, it was Margie Mondavi, not his second wife Margrit. Margie and Bob were very, very close. There were others, quite a few other couples that they all hung around, but they also all worked so hard that there was—I don't have a lot of memories of lots of dinner parties at that time. There were a lot of great parties, [including] the Mondavis, there were a few others that they would switch New Year's parties every year, and it was the same people that would come but they'd all have different years. I remember sitting in Bob Mondavi's house and the kids' books were always at the same point, even no matter who moved into that house, whatever Mondavi moved into that house, the kids' books were always at the same, the same place. The stories were always the same though, they never—of the wives especially, they never knew who was going to come to dinner. So I'm sure Liz Martini would say she didn't know how many were going to show up, I know Margie would say the same thing, I'm sure Blanche would say the same thing too, that it was—they were experts at having a roasted chicken and making it last however long. I think we all grew up entertainers because that's what you did,

you just didn't—you set the table and you did a song and dance routine for any of the guests that showed up.

01-00:19:48

Meeker:

Was your mom involved in the business too?

01-00:19:52

Kornell:

I think for many years she just, she was the power behind the throne for years and then until later on, did she become involved, more and more involved. He was definitely it, but then as years went on, she was more involved, I think just actively, she was more active in—she was on the college board or the hospital board or then, Upper Napa Valley, what was it called Upper Napa Valley Associates, when they were doing the protection, before the Napa Valley Vintners were involved in add, prevent, add protection, there was other groups that were involved. So she was on one of the first boards of Clinic Ole, yeah it was Clinic Ole then, not Ole Health. They all changed names, so.

01-00:20:39

Meeker:

You just mentioned Napa Valley Vintners, an organization established in 1944, so seventy-five years ago this year. I know your father was chair of the board or I guess president of the board is probably how they would have described it then I think, in '63, '64.

01-00:20:59

Kornell:

I think so, yeah.

01-00:21:01

Meeker:

When did you first learn about this organization growing up?

01-00:21:05

Kornell:

My first recognitions of it was going to those meetings with him, as a little girl, and it was at Pometta's Deli on Main Street, St. Helena, which was I think now where Cook is, where we go and have Italian food today. But it was this small little Italian restaurant and the back table is where the whole group met, and it was I don't know, Louis Stralla and Beringer. It was a small group and there I was with my pigtails, after school or between school and it was an eating and drinking group more than anything else. They got together and they obviously were trying to support each other. They all worked together because there were so few of them at that point, and then it started getting larger, and then they met at the Miramonte on Railroad Avenue, so that was getting—then it got bigger, and then eventually, they moved to the Lodi Farm Center and that was for years they met at the Lodi Farm Center. It was every month they would meet and by then it was definitely an organization and they started doing—at the beginning, I think, to go back. At the beginning it was really, I think it was camaraderie, it was something that I think then, they would get together almost every week, to have a lunch together, then it got to be monthly and it was really, I think it was still camaraderie. Then, slowly but surely, it was trying to figure out how to save vineyards and how to—it was starting to protect land, from the very beginning, because there was obviously,

things were starting to encroach, businesses were starting to encroach on farmlands.

01-00:23:07

Meeker:

Back in the sixties, were kids a regular feature, was it a rare thing for you to go to one of these?

01-00:23:17

Kornell:

It was a rare thing probably, to go to that, but it wasn't rare that kids were involved in it. I think one-year school was delayed because harvest was delayed and there was a big frost and school was, I think it was delayed for four days because everybody was out in the vineyards, they couldn't get enough people out in the vineyards so it was delayed. I don't remember what year that was but so children, between farmworkers, between kids from the vineyards, it was—they were always around. I think it's Hugh Davies that tells the stories that we're—no, it's not Hugh Davies, or maybe it was Hugh Davies, that tells the story that we were all on bus number four or something. There was the bus that would start, the school bus in St. Helena would start and we were one of the first people who would get picked up on Crystal Springs, and then it would go to Larkmead Lane, turn down and go down Highway 29 and pick everybody else up. So we all would have stories about the weekend and everybody had stories about being at the winery or being at their wineries or being in the vineyard or playing in the vineyard, and that meant too, you, that's what you did. You didn't have computers and you didn't—you weren't able to sit in front of a television set either. That's what you wanted to do, was be out in the vineyard or play in the—play on your property.

01-00:24:44

Meeker:

Tell me about your involvement in the Vintners. You would occasionally go as a child, kind of as a guest, but certainly not any involvement in adult conversations I would guess.

01-00:25:03

Kornell:

From an early time, even when I was in high school, my father would have—I would give tours during the summer, I was always—we always worked at the winery. Probably midway through high school, I started giving tours, and then always went to Vintners socials, so I think most of us grew up as adults being—not being adults, they were always friends and so you didn't, you never felt strange around adults, and especially when these people were more family than anything else. During high school or during college, let me see between high school and college—I'm trying to think of how exactly it all went. When I was in college, I started getting more involved in the Vintners as far as just when they would do the wine library tasting, which were not Vintner tastings, but I would go to wine library tastings, I would do Vintner events with my father, so I knew what the Vintners were all about, I knew it was trying to promote Napa Valley and the name, getting the name Napa Valley and how important Napa Valley was, and starting to recognize that

there was a big difference between Napa and Sonoma at that time, that was really getting to be pretty obvious.

For me then, during college, I was a management trainee every summer for Stanford Court, which at that time was the queen of the hotels in San Francisco. I would be doing some staff training there and that's when I really started trying to learn more about the intricacies of the wine business and the intricacies of wine, because then all of a sudden well wait a minute, I know what I like and I know all these vintners but what do they really—what are they really producing? Then that's when I started learning, started spending time with Jim Barrett and going okay, so that was probably the first person that I went to and said I love your cabernet but I don't know why I love your cabernet, so can I spend a day with you? So, spending a day with him and then God, all of a sudden I knew a little bit more about cabernet, because my world revolved around champagne and sparkling wine. And so then going to certain different people and trying to spend a little bit more time and then so by the time I got out of college, I went to work for Sherry-Lehmann in New York, selling wine to consumers, where there was such a small amount of Napa Valley wines on the shelf, that I was the Napa Valley and Sonoma County advocate because God, every time they sold a bottle of Napa Valley wine, I was the happiest person in the world. Then again it was Mondavi, it was Trefethen, it was Montelena, it was Hanns Kornell, it was Charles Krug, Heitz, Diamond Mountain. There were so few Napa Valley wines that it was pitiful, but all those wines, I remember when Acacia Chardonnay came out and it was this oaky butter bomb that oh my God, what the heck is this, because it was so different than any style wine that we'd ever had. But trying to teach the staff there about this, so it was really, it was fun, but as soon as I came back from working in New York, I immediately was getting involved with the Napa Valley Vintners because I wanted to learn and help promote Napa Valley.

01-00:29:29

Meeker:

So that was I guess probably the early 1980s?

01-00:29:30

Kornell:

That was the early eighties, right away.

01-00:29:33

Meeker:

So, it's interesting, do you recall, did you try to do sales? In other words, were you on the shop floor there?

01-00:29:44

Kornell:

I was on the shop floor and then I was also spending a day a week working with my distributor, which was House of Burgess was also there. I spent a day a week working for House of Burgundy, which was our Hanns Kornell distributor. They represented Burgess, they represented Robert Mondavi, they represented Hanns Kornell. I'm trying to think if there's anything else in the Napa Valley, I think that was it. I would work the streets of Manhattan and I

had so many doors slammed on my face and I would want to burst out in tears because they were all Austrian, French, Italian sons or buyers, they didn't want anything to do with California. They didn't know who Robert Mondavi was, they didn't care who Robert Mondavi was, and that was still in the early eighties, they didn't give a damn, and it was quite an experience, but it was a good learning experience. Then, those people that came into Sherry-Lehmann, most of the time were either, they were very dedicated to either burgundy or Bordeaux but then they wanted California, they were totally willing and ready to learn, and it was open ears, and so you spent a lot of time reading, at least I did, spent a lot of time reading and trying to learn and then go oh my God, I know who that person is. I'll say about Boots and Al Brounstein, I'd gone skinny dipping in that pond for so many years and had no idea, I'd never put it together, and then finally, after working at Sherry-Lehmann, came back and said, "Can I come up and spend some time at the vineyard?" He said, "You've been spending time at this vineyard, young lady, for a lot of times." I'm like oh my God, I had no idea that that's where I'd been all this time. [laughter]

01-00:31:39

Meeker: That's Diamond Mountain.

01-00:31:40

Kornell: The Diamond Mountain, yeah, Diamond Creek, yeah.

01-00:31:41

Meeker: Diamond Creek. Do you recall what—I don't know if a sales pitch is the right word, but how you would, if you were given the opportunity, either with a customer in the shop or with a sommelier in a restaurant, what would you say about Napa that you thought was going to get them interested and potentially buy the wine?

01-00:32:07

Kornell: I think at that time it was the fact that it was a—I don't think we said it was a new growing area, but I think we said it was a young growing area and that it was—that California had world class, was making world class wines and that you're going to be hearing more about it and don't you want to be one of the first people to be really on that bandwagon. I think there are wines that have received so many awards already and at that time scores were still not—*Spectator* was around but it was still that little San Diego newspaper, it wasn't anything that was really important then. It was just saying don't you want to get onboard and the love of California, it was really pitching California and how special California was, and Northern California.

01-00:33:10

Meeker: Was the Judgment of Paris, was that widely known, do people still remember that, in the early eighties?

01-00:33:18

Kornell: Yeah I think that was more—it was, and I think that was a big, I think that story kept going on and on, and I think that helped a lot. I think that's why

obviously, those wines modeling on Grgich, those wines were in the store and they were probably the best sellers at the time too. To me, I just thought Jim Barrett was this funny guy that my father would hang out with all the time, he just, the guy was always in his tennis shorts when he was at the winery. But yes as a whole, I think that helped elevate Napa Valley entirely. It's the same thing with the French paradox, with cabernet, as far as red wine goes, that was, we milked that as far as we possibly could, but that's great, anything that sort of helps get that message out, I think is very important.

01-00:34:16
Meeker:

Going back a little bit. So you went to St. Helena public schools.

01-00:34:24
Kornell:

I went to St. Helena public schools and then went to Justin-Siena in Napa.

01-00:34:27
Meeker:

For high school.

01-00:34:28
Kornell:

For high school, yeah.

01-00:24:30
Meeker:

And then for college you—?

01-00:34:32
Kornell:

I went to lovely University of the Pacific in Stockton, California.

01-00:34:36
Meeker:

And what were you studying at U of P?

01-00:34:38
Kornell:

I got a business degree, business and general management.

01-00:34:42
Meeker:

Okay. You then parlayed that into your work, beginning of marketing and sales in wine.

01-00:34:52
Kornell:

Yeah.

01-00:34:53
Meeker:

When did you come back to work for your father?

01-00:34:57
Kornell:

When my father told me that I received a one-way first-class ticket home from New York, that I wasn't going to be subsidized, he wasn't going to subsidize me living in Manhattan any longer, and I came home kicking and screaming, because it was—I loved being in New York. I just think it was a great experience, it was a great experience. Sherry-Lehmann was a great experience and it was partly because of the people that I met there. I think we were all—there were so many great kids of wineries from all over the world, and then

there was all starring actors, and so it was a heyday and fun, there was not one dull moment constantly and then working with my distributor, that I learned so much. But then it was, and it was time, it was definitely time, it was just not wanting to have the realization that I had to come back and really start working.

And knowing, sort of knowing already, that my father probably didn't want to make very many changes once I got home, but I did know that that's what I wanted, that I didn't want to go into the business. I think when I went to New York, I was probably waffling, that I wanted to be in the wine business but did I want to be in my own family business, and that definitely made me realize how special it was, that being in the bubble business was important and it was in my veins, it definitely is and still is today.

01-00:36:41

Meeker:

There are different ways of being in the wine business. You can be in viticulture, you can be in the cellar, you can be in the business or sales side. Did you think about those different options and how was it that you ended up where you did.

01-00:36:56

Kornell:

No, I did not think about those options. I thought entirely, that I would be at Hanns Kornell Champagne, my family's winery, for the rest of—Even though, as I say, I thought I didn't think it would be easy and I didn't think that my father was going to make many changes, but I also didn't really think much more, I didn't think further than that. I just thought okay, this is going to be great and we're going to go, and it was also at the height of the business, so he was in the middle of, they were buying things. They had just brought a property that I ended up moving onto, that was an old Christmas tree farm that had a big old, for lack of a better word, Victorian on it, that was this old ramshackle big place, and then they were building a huge new production facility at the winery and so things were good. They had an American Airlines, a United Airlines contract, and so it was things were going good. I got there and started spending a lot of time on the road, working with distributors, and so yeah, so at that point things were good. I would go out on the market, however, and it was, I kept hearing that people wanted a dryer product, they wanted something dryer. We had a wine called Sehr Trocken, which was bone dry but it was made out of Riesling. It was still bone dry but the fact that you advertised that it was out of—nobody would ever have known it was out of Riesling unless you told them that. It was when all of a sudden you had Domaine Chandon and Mumm and all this French money and European money coming in. He had had many opportunities to sell the winery or to go into partnership and he didn't want anything to do with that.

01-00:39:03

Meeker:

So French winemakers came to him?

01-00:39:07

Kornell:

And some Italians came in, so foreign monies would come in and would be very interested in doing it and he just did not want anything to do with that. Things were changing in the sparkling wine business and it wasn't anything like it is today where now, bubbles are an everyday occurrence, and at that point it still wasn't, it was for many years it wasn't, it was still a celebratory or a special occasion wine. However, he was listening, so there was more and more chardonnay and more and more pinot that was going in that winery, but it takes four years for anything to happen, so by the time most of that was ready, the market had changed, things had changed and the wine business for us had changed drastically, we had lost those airline clients and unfortunately the bank ended up taking the winery.

01-00:40:17

Meeker:

Those new properties, were they down in Carneros, places more friendly to pinot and chardonnay?

01-00:40:22

Kornell:

The grapes came from there, correct, but Mumm was in, what is it Rutherford, and then Chandon in Yountville, but just between that it just was there was so much more coming in. Gloria Ferrer shows up and it was just, there was just a lot more, and there was no way the cost, now, in trying to start a sparkling wine business, the costs that are in sparkling wine, I don't know how anybody can make any money in sparkling wine but truly then it was so cost prohibitive.

01-00:40:57

Meeker:

So, you have these years in the early eighties in New York, learning about how to represent Napa wines, and then you start doing it specifically for Hanns Kornell Champagne Cellars. Do you see a change over the course of the decade in terms of the broader publics?

01-00:41:19

Kornell:

The broader picture. So when I first came back, I felt really confident of helping the Napa Valley Vintners with New York especially, so we put—one of my first big endeavors with the Napa Valley Vintners was doing a big road show in New York, at the public library. So we did a hell of a show and I don't remember what year that was, but we took over the library and there were probably fifty vintners that did the road show, and then we probably did a couple other. I think we did Westchester and then we also did Manhattan but it was great, it was one of the first shows where people—one of the first times where the vintners were on the road, where of course that became common occurrence years after that. It was great, to have all these—it had to be either a wine maker or a principal for the winery and you showed your wares and we had every great key account come out and taste those wines, and that was the beginning of that type of tasting where today that's all commonplace and do we have to do to another tasting like that. It was truly an opportunity to show off Napa Valley's finest and to—at that point I don't think we did any

seminars, but that type of testing eventually, when we did go on the road, which we did many of those after that, there were always seminars attached to that, so we could get education out there so people could learn about the terroir and what makes Napa Valley special.

01-00:43:18

Meeker:

I've never been to one of these road shows, can you walk me through, like it sounds like there were many of them. What was the formula that was created and used?

01-00:43:28

Kornell:

It really was, truly a vintner stands behind a table and if you can just imagine, especially with the New York Public Library, you have that beautiful building and those beautiful catacombs that are there, so we're all in this beautiful hallway and everyone is behind a booth, but you've got your wines and your, at that point who knows what material anybody had because it was really in the infancy stage of everybody being—some of these vintners had never been to New York before. Some of them did not have distributors, so some were trying to find distributors, so it was for the vintner itself it was trying to get accounts, trying to get a restaurant or a retailer or a hotel or a club to understand your—to be introduced to your wine, oftentimes to try to find a distributor or a broker to represent your wine, and for some people just to see what that market is all about, to see maybe you don't even want to be in that market, but to learn. And then for those, for that marketplace to be introduced to your wines, as well as to your area or to your district. At that time not everybody was doing that road show. Then there was always material so that people could—so you could walk in and you could have learning materials, so there would be usually a map, so that they knew exactly where you were in the state of California, because remember, nobody really knew where Napa was in the early eighties also.

It was a sense of place, trying to get a sense of place. We'd have, I think of all the tastings we do, it would be anything from hauling dirt, in glass, so that they could understand what the dirt actually looked like. Anything that you could do to try to get people to understand what and where we were coming from.

01-00:45:37

Meeker:

Was the Napa Valley Vintners a kind of a clearinghouse where vintners would meet and share their ideas about the best way to in fact represent Napa?

01-00:45:51

Kornell:

It absolutely was, it was a great—and still is, an organization that at that time it was more, I think it was a hundred percent marketing, but it was on getting your message out there, getting the PR of Napa Valley, and so it was your PR of your winery but most importantly, the PR of Napa Valley what Napa Valley stood for, the wineries of Napa Valley, and then it was your responsibility to talk about yourself, but you, you as a Napa Valley Vintner

need to talk about Napa Valley number one and then yourself number two. Now that's been a challenge, it's always a challenge, we're constantly trying to teach vintners that, that as an organization, you're trying to better the valley and then as a whole, once the valley is bettered, it will help you also. Some people don't quite understand that but we're continually trying to teach them that. So, that's exactly, that's exactly what we do.

01-00:47:00

Meeker:

For instance, those maps that were produced, would those have been produced by the vintners?

01-00:47:04

Kornell:

By the Napa Valley Vintners, with our dues, so the vintners pay dues according to the size of their winery and then as the vintners, as it got older, as the group got more sophisticated, you'd buy into certain things. So if you were an—you wanted to be an international sales or you wanted to promote your wines internationally, then you'd go off and you'd spend more—they'd spend more money doing international sales. So for many years, when I was running a winery for Robert Mondavi called Vichon, I did a lot more international, so I would spend, there would be part of our budget would be going to the Napa Valley Vintners for international sales, and it was a great way because you can't, oftentimes even for domestic, you can't afford, for a small winery, you can't afford to go out on your own, but you can as a group, but you have to make sure, you have to understand that the vintners can only do so much for you, you have to do something on your own too, but it's a great building, it's a great block to start everyone out for their marketing.

01-00:48:12

Meeker:

It's interesting, often with growth come challenges. We talked about for your father, you get these big French producers coming in, Mumm and Chandon, and clearly that was challenging for his own business model, but I wonder, like in the context of the vintners, with the larger context of the valley, the different kinds of participants coming into the vintners. How did that change the organization and how did the organization respond to that?

01-00:48:46

Kornell:

Well, I think the vintners have seen so many ebbs and flows of the organization as a whole. Just this week, we have Gallo buying all these brands, not necessarily Napa Valley brands but there are a few; Franciscan, there's a couple. So you have a lot of consolidations, then you have things that are let go, it's gotten to be crazy. So yes, you have wineries that were very important and very big decision makers, that helped make big decisions for years and then all of a sudden they're nowhere to be seen. I think that's why, what's been very important about the Napa Valley Vintners is when you look at the makeup of the board constantly, it's always a blend of small wineries and large wineries, so it's equal representation amongst them all. I think oftentimes vintners get worried that the big wineries are all making the decisions; it's never that way and I think the leaders have always been very

cautious of that, and so the makeup of the board has been very, it's been very thoughtful and thought out, that it's equal representation. It's changed drastically over the last ten years, because you have so many wineries or you have so many members, they have no skin in the game. They have no vineyard and they have no brick and mortar, and I think that is very difficult for a lot of wineries that have vineyard or they have brick and mortar or they have both, to understand, and it's—I think they've been beneficial to the business but I think it's hurt the business too. It's strengthened the business because they have made some fabulous wines and it's helped the industry, but it's also, prices have gone way, way up because of it, not entirely because of it, but I think that's driven part of it. It's just the, the climate has changed quite a bit, but I think that's going to happen no matter what, but it has changed a lot.

[side conversation deleted]

It's changed but sitting here, who would have thought that there's no Mondavi, Robert Mondavi, it's so strange to think that there's no Martini, Louis Martini, there's no—it's interesting to see how it's all—that Gallo owns so much of Napa Valley now, and that people like Constellation are dumping where they were such a big part, now are dumping so many brands. So we're seeing, it's continually moving and I think that's the one thing that we can be sure of, that it's going to continue to be like that.

01-00:52:33

Meeker:

So I think you joined either the organization or the board in '86?

01-00:52:38

Kornell:

I joined the board very early on, so if I came back to the valley in, I think it was '81, yeah I started on the board pretty quickly.

01-00:52:49

Meeker:

There was the email that Linda sent to you and she identified January of '86, so I don't know if it was before then but certainly by that time, you were on the board. I'm curious, because you had seen the organization very early on, through the lens of your father, when he was board chair twenty years before that. When you're participating on the board, like how would you describe the changes of the organization, what are the headlines?

01-53:21

Kornell:

That board too, I remember it was, there were a bunch of young—there was John Kongsgaard was on the board, myself, there were a few young—it was like the board was packed with a few young people, so it was all like bushy-eyed because we were trying to figure it all out. Pecota, I think Pecota was president, or someone, there was Jim Barrett, Bob Pecota, and there was a lot of, at that point, trying to figure out where funds were going for Napa Valley, wine Auction Napa Valley, because all of a sudden auction was becoming more and more successful. We had not gotten to that million-dollar mark yet

but it was so many of the same things that we face now but only on a smaller basis, were—it was then, it was really trying to protect the Napa Valley. We were facing development going towards Calistoga, there was all this land that was up—it's continued to be vineyard land but it was, there was questions if that was going to be developed for buildings, towards Larkmead Lane, where our family's winery was, there was lots of worrying about if that was going to happen, so really, it was a lot of land use issues, in the very beginning of lots of land use issues, and then a lot of about what the money was going to be used for, for Auction Napa Valley, and do we do Auction Napa Valley, the fretting over if we were going to have Auction Napa Valley every year or not, and where those monies would go. It was a lot of that and then again, where we were going to spend, where we were spending our dollars, on how we were marketing, how we were learning. Sonoma was getting to be smarter, they were starting to go on the road now too. We had already done the New York tasting, and we were starting to do more and more events on the road, so it was really—I think we were also starting to do more of the international trips too; they weren't large trips but they were smart, knowing that we needed to get the word out internationally. There was obviously, the Paris tasting had been—wineries were starting to go individually, but now we were going and we knew the strength the Napa Valley Vintners would be on the road too.

01-00:56:07

Meeker:

One of the things that I've found to be really interesting about the vintners in doing these interviews is it's constantly changing, as you just mentioned and changes are not always easy, and in the 1980s, you talk about some of the French winemakers coming in, some of the consolidation begins, but you still have a lot of independent wineries like your family's, and then all these other things are going on, the land use issues, the auction and what to do with the funds, and then the continuation of the marketing questions. All of those different interest groups on the board in an organization could conceivably have different, if not conflicting, opinions. How did the organization deal with that likelihood? Does that make sense?

01-00:57:07

Kornell:

Yeah, no, no, no. I think we didn't have, until Linda Reiff became the director, the executive directors were never really very strong, so it really relied on whoever the presidents were, and so you have some strong presidents than others. So always, it ebbed and flowed as far as who was sort of the loudest person in the room, but again back to the fact that it was—the fact that one thing the vintners have always stood for, the one thing that we've always done is having that equal representation between smaller and larger wineries. I think that's always been a great balance and I don't know how that's always remained the same, but because of that, it's kept everybody sort of on an even keel, that when someone has said we need to go right and everyone else said well wait a minute, for the better good of the community or the better good of the vintners as a whole, we need to be going in this

direction, I think it's always, it's prevailed, and it's prevailed that land has been, the protection of the land has been the most important thing, and the message of quality and instilling that in all our vintners, that it's not taking the shortcuts, by showing them from—yeah, by showing that we're not taking shortcuts as an organization. And so I think it's been, I think that's been just primarily very important, but it's been, I think we've been on the steady, there's been enough, I think everybody's been honest enough constantly and some years, I think it's been harder than others.

01-00:59:23

Meeker:

It's interesting, so despite the fact that there might be differing opinions on specific issues, it sounds like one, there's an equality I guess, I don't know if maybe that's the right word, but kind of an equality baked into the organization in terms of how and who is represented on the board.

01-00:59:44

Kornell:

Yeah, I think we have—there's always going to be mistakes. This last couple years, we had Measure C and it was a disaster. It was because someone just didn't think before they talked and obviously, they had their tail between their legs later on because they were thinking for themselves and for their own winery, and not thinking about the entire vintners. I think that's what is the beauty and the beast of this whole, of this business, but it's not like so many other businesses too. You've got to be selfish at times, in agriculture especially, we've got to be in this—we're all in this together and yes, you might want it one particular way but for the betterment of the community, we've got to be able to do this together.

01-01:01:19

Meeker:

So, some of those issues that are easy to agree upon are maybe not Prop C but recognition that agricultural land should be protected and not turned into suburban tract homes for instance.

01-01:01:31

Kornell:

Right, right. Exactly, and where we have problems is how much is too much, of growing grapes on hillsides and how much is too much of growing grapes next to streams, and when is it—what is an extreme. I know for myself, you drive into a backwoods or drive into the mountains and you think holy hell, is there not anyplace, there's vineyards everywhere. So you do get to a point where God, when do we stop, but it is your land and it is ag land and it is, but at the same time, you can't go rogue. We have so many rules and regulations, we are very monitored as it is, thank goodness, and they're there for a reason. It comes to a point, do we have to be monitored any more, and I think that's the problem, I think we're all at this point, we're wait a minute, we have all these checks and balances, there doesn't need to be more of that, and I think that's it.

01-01:02:54

Meeker:

Historically, when there have been differences of opinion, how have they been addressed successfully at the vintners?

01-01:03:03

Kornell:

I think they've been looked at right on. I think the first thing I remember clearly was Viader, when they first did the big clearing of their vineyard, living in Bell Canyon, living on Crystal Springs Road, looking at it, that was the first—she went in there, Delia went in there and planted that vineyard and all that silt went into Bell Canyon's water supply and unfortunately, that's what started all the regulations. But in the long run, thank God, somebody had to do it, somebody had to screw up first. So she was the first screw-up and I remember that was the biggest damn deal when that happened. I don't remember what year that was but I do remember that was a huge ordeal for the vintners, because that was now you have the county, you have the city, you have everybody involved, you have every vineyard manager involved. So it's learning that dance with the county, with the vineyard managers, with the grape growers, with the Napa Valley Vintners, and doing things responsible and respectfully, and treating the land, so. That's the first thing I remember really clearly as far as land, as far as a vineyard going in it, being a disaster.

01-01:04:34

Meeker:

These issues, I assume would come up at board meetings or committee meetings. How were these impassioned issues, difficult issues adjudicated, how were they dealt with?

01-01:04:54

Kornell:

Well in the early days it was just the board or it would be the board and then it would be the membership would talk about it, but not very—now we have community issues, CIIC Committee, which specifically talk to those issues, and that committee has been around for probably the last ten years. I don't know when, they could kill me and it could be a lot longer than that, it might be a lot longer we have had this. I think they're pretty hands on if somebody is—if there's somebody that's doing something wrong, that they're talking with them, that they're talking to that person or that winery. They're on it. Oh yeah, it can be pretty volatile, it can be pretty volatile.

01-01:05:56

Meeker:

At the same time it sounds like there's also a mechanism so that volatility is somehow diffused or solved.

01-01:06:02

Kornell:

We've had the city hall meetings, we've had everything so that people can get their—because of course everybody wants to, people feel much better when they hear their—their thoughts are heard, and so I think in the last, I'd say the last ten years, there's been a lot of that. When there's been anything that—any changes in regulations, there's been many town hall meetings that people can say what they need to say so that they feel that they're part of it.

01-01:06:40

Meeker:

You had mentioned before Linda becomes executive director, oftentimes the president of the board was maybe the most influential figure in the organization for that year. Can you recall any particularly strong and effective board presidents over that period of time?

01-01:07:05

Kornell:

Unfortunately, no. I should have that list in front of me, of all the board presidents. It's funny, I think more of all the years, because of being so involved then, in the auctions, I spent a lot of time, a lot of years working on Auction Napa Valley. I spent, so '92, I chaired Auction Napa Valley and it seems—I was always on the marketing committees, even if I wasn't on the board, but it seems like I was more—if I wasn't on the board, then once I got on that board, then I was always just more on the, working on Auction Napa Valley. And then later on, it wasn't until I was at Oakville Ranch, that I was in Sonoma County for a couple years, on the Sonoma County Vintners Board and then when I came back to work at Oakville Ranch, that's when I got back on the Napa Valley Vintners board, and things were entirely different, entirely different.

So then I guess what I was saying, that my involvement for many years, for Napa Valley Vintners, was just seeing how Auction Napa Valley had changed and it went from being hands on, loving hands at home, you doing everything, papier-mâché flowers at John Kongsgaard's house to potting plants to now, extravaganzas, so it was truly too, the year I chaired it, finally broke \$1 million, to now we make \$15 to \$18 million, so it's pretty amazing.

01-01:09:08

Meeker:

You chaired it in '92.

01-01:09:09

Kornell:

Ninety-two.

01-01:09:11

Meeker:

Let's go back. Why don't you tell me what Auction Napa Valley is, for somebody who has never heard of it.

01-01:09:18

Kornell:

Auction Napa Valley started in 1981 and it was started to, (a) it was promotion of Napa Valley again, so but it was also to raise monies for charity in Napa Valley. So it has always been towards children and then over the years has been towards healthcare, towards better living, better living for children and families in Napa Valley. It's always been at Meadowood, started as Robin Lail and Margrit Mondavi, and it was making quiche and rosé and bubbles at Meadowood, and few auction lots, to now being millions of dollars, and it's morphed over the years to this incredible, incredible event. It's been for the beginning years, everybody in the community worked on it to now, they're still an incredible volunteer organization, its volunteers are behind it, but for a good twenty of the beginning years it was everybody in this

community worked on the auction. Now it's smaller amounts of volunteers but everyone in this community has a story about Auction Napa Valley.

01-01:10:50

Meeker: What's your favorite story?

01-01:10:52

Kornell: I think my favorite stories are just all, it was always volunteering, it was those days of—you'd be in the middle of a grocery store and forget that you have your walkie-talkie on, or after the party, after the auction, everybody, all the volunteers jumping in the Meadowood pool, we had so many great times as volunteers, for this organization, it was great. But it still is, it's still wonderful. This year we're having Katy Perry and Ayesha Curry, it's come a long way, it's come a long way.

01-11::11:31

Meeker: Do you recall any key moments in the growth and transformation of it, from being a really kind of community based homespun event, to something that is known worldwide.

01-01:11:42

Kornell: I remember when Far Niente came out and it had a six pack of Far Niente wines. I can't remember how much money that made but that was incredible. Bob Mondavi and his cork jacket, there's been so many great auction lots, but there were years when experiential lots just fun lots, would go for—when \$20,000 was a huge, huge, huge thing. Now, \$2 million, \$5 million lots, nobody thinks twice about, but then it was, in the beginning it was just to be able to be sitting with vintner, oh my goodness, people loved to do that, and now it still is, it's still special to be able to sit down with a vintner, but in the early days that was really incredible. How many organizations outside of Napa Valley have now mirrored what we have done, so you have Naples, you have Atlanta, you have Florida, you have everywhere in God's name has basically tried to take this same equation and done this for their own communities and it's wonderful, it's wonderful.

01-01:13:11

Meeker: So you representing Hanns Kornell Champagne Cellars was chair in 1992, correct.

01-01:13:17

Kornell: Ninety-two.

01-01:13:19

Meeker: That was a transformative year in your own life.

01-01:13:22

Kornell: It was a hell of a year for me but it was a great opportunity for me too, because the winery was going through hell, it was the year that we were closing, and so I think the community, the close community knew what was going on or at least they had a good feeling towards it. I had already

committed to being the chair and was not going to let that down, so as I'm standing up there at auction, it was heartbreaking to know that my winery is basically gone, so in the next couple months it was going to be over with. However, I did know that I personally was—I had a job. Joe Phelps had done an event at, I think it was at Cal Poly, with him, a few months before and out of the blue, he offered me the job of coming to work at Joseph Phelps. So even as I'm standing up there, I knew that I probably didn't have my family wanted me to be at much longer, but that I would be continuing in this business, but to see the out—just this whole community spirit and community circling of love was pretty incredible, I will never forget that, it was pretty cool.

01-01:14:50
Meeker:

Who were the people who really reached out to you, there was Joe Phelps.

01-01:14:54
Kornell:

Joe Phelps as far as a job goes, but it was truly I have to say, it was just everyone was great. No one in particular, I think comes out, it was just the community as a whole. You just knew that the spirit was entirely there and it was absolutely great, it was wonderful. Michael Mondavi had chaired it the year before and it was just around \$850- almost \$900,000 and we just made it over the million dollar mark that year that I chaired it, so it had gone incredible after that.

01-01:15:34
Meeker:

In that year that you chaired it, do you remember any particularly notable lots?

01-01:15:38
Kornell:

I don't remember a darn thing from that year. I remember certain things that happened that year, of standing in the fountain at then it was Inglenook, which now was not, well now it's gone back to being Inglenook. For photos, it was totally a blur. There were so many people and it was so—it was an emotional, crazy couple days but it was also, it was wonderful.

01-01:16:10
Meeker:

Tell me about your personal transition to Joseph Phelps, where you became VP of marketing, correct?

01-01:16:20
Kornell:

Joe had decided that he was—he had shaken things up at his own winery and on one day he hired Tom Shelton to be his director of sales and myself, director of marketing, and so Tom and I both went in one day, we had not known each other, and Tom eventually went on to be president of Phelps later on. Joe was first of all, again, I came from a sparkling wine background, so I knew enough about cabernet. Phelps had just started a program called Le Mistral, which was all Rhone varietals, and it was basically that was my deal. I was given Le Mistral, all those Rhones and Insignia, so this was, all of this was, it was fabulous, so immediately I fell in love with the Rhone varietals and to this day, it's still my favorite, some of my favorite wines. So it was

great and it was a great place to learn. Craig Williams, the winemaker, was a great person to learn more about those varietals under, and working with Tom was the best because he was the quintessential salesman and a fabulous person to work with. However, Joe was, I thought my father was a tough person to work for which, my father was, he was hard, you knew the meaning of work. Joe was really tough but at the same time Joe was also, you knew that he was a one person—Tom was the person to be the sales and marketing person, there was no question, so I was there two years and when I went to Phelps, Bob Mondavi had also offered me a job and I thought that was too close to home, but when it was time to leave Phelps—His name just went out of my head. Harvey Posert, who was the public relations manager for Robert Mondavi, came to me and Harvey was the most incredible guy, Harvey came to me and said, “We need somebody to run Vichon Winery,” and so it was a perfect out for me from Phelps. So I went right into working for Robert Mondavi as GM of Vichon Winery that’s no longer there, but it was a small winery up on— which is now part of—

01-01:19:21

Meeker:

Promontory.

01-01:19:22

Kornell:

It’s Promontory. It was sort of this stepsister of the Robert Mondavi organization, they made a sauvignon that was sauvignon blanc and Shannon blanc that was this great wine, and they had cabernet and it was sort of the renegade of this and it was a great place to be. So it was really—but then I learned the Robert Mondavi culture and for ten years I was at Mondavi doing that, and then oh God, then I was in national accounts and it was great, and it was really being part of the family, and I was never pigeonholed so I loved it, because I was part of the sales, the national sales team, so nobody ever knew where I really was so it was great, I got a little bit of everything. When the family couldn’t do something, when none of the family members could do something, I was the second tier to do something, so it was great, that was truly how, because I learned and you could speak the lingo.

01-01:20:39

Meeker:

What did it mean to learn the Robert Mondavi culture, coming from Hanns Kornell and then Joseph Phelps?

01-01:20:45

Kornell:

It was home, it was home, it was much more—it was something, it was familiar, it was pretty much from the heart, it was real. Not to say that Phelps wasn’t at all, it was just, it was much more contrived than the Mondavi school was, the Mondavi school of thought, I just said that, it was not. It was just to me it was very, this is the way we did things. It was sort of you could speak about the family and you basically spoke about the family because you knew the family and you didn’t really have to come up with any false or any fake story. Isn’t part of our life all the stories that we have in our life and things that we’ve done, and I think that was pretty easy for me to walk into and it

was easy to walk into a small team to run. The winery needed some TLC and at that time I think I needed TLC too, so it was great to be in that little team, and then when I transferred to national accounts, it was great because I got to learn that I can sell and that I can sell to you Four Seasons buyer, or you Hyatt buyer, and sort of knew, after my hotel background and other, I felt like I knew what you needed, so it was great. I felt very comfortable and it was a good fit, it was a really good fit.

01-01:22:37

Meeker:

So this is really coming into your third decade then, of selling wines from Napa Valley.

01-01:22:44

Kornell:

Yes.

01-01:22:45

Meeker:

The very late 1970s in New York and then at Hanns Kornell in the eighties and now working with Mondavi in the nineties. How did selling Napa, how did communicating Napa, change then, into the nineties?

01-01:23:05

Kornell:

Then it was that's what you wanted, back then it was night and day from those years before. It was walking into a buyer's, walking into Four Seasons in Toronto or walking into Hyatt in Chicago, that's what they wanted, me walking in and saying well by the way, I have Vichon Mediterranean from the Languedoc, they're looking at me like oh, you've got six eyes. We don't want that, we want Vichon Napa Valley or we want Robert Mondavi Napa Valley, we don't even want Robert Mondavi Coastal, we want Robert Mondavi Napa Valley. So it was, that's when it was really interesting, when all these wineries were coming out with this coastal or this whatever, and what was coastal? Trying to explain what coastal was when you don't even know what coastal is, wait a minute. So, that was truly, you could understand what Woodbridge was, because it was very clear that this is where, in California, the San Joaquin Valley this is, and where Napa is or where Carneros is, but then when you got into coastal it was—

01-01:24:31

Meeker:

What was coastal?

01-01:24:33

Kornell:

A lot of Monterey, a lot of King City, a lot of things that weren't necessarily coastal, the Monterey yes obviously, but there was a lot of that King City.

01-01:24:45

Meeker:

Salinas Valley. Which are now beginning to be regarded as good wines.

01-01:24:51

Kornell:

Right, absolutely, and they were good wines. It was just, it was that whole Appalachian driven—It's funny because now you say—at that point you didn't want to say California, you wanted it to say North Coast, and now you

want everything to say California because California is really much more—California is pretty damn good and we're pretty lucky. Napa Valley is the best but California is where we are definitely blessed. But it did teach me the importance of Napa Valley and then and in selling that book, because that book was opus, it was all the Mondavi wines, so soup to nuts, to be able to show where those wines were, where the appellation or the sub-AVA wines of Robert Mondavi were too.

01-01:25:52

Meeker:

But so by the mid to late 1990s, it sounds like it was well understood around the country that Napa was the top of the heap and that's what everyone wanted.

01-01:26:03

Kornell:

Absolutely, yeah, and then after leaving there, going to Sonoma County and working. I ran a winery on the border of Napa/Sonoma, so I would say that whole ridge of Moon Mountain, I love that district to death but it's all Napa wannabes. I was the AVA director for a while and they all say, in their PR, they are Napa-like, so it is—so being in a property that was very similar, with soil similarities. It was pretty funny to be on the Sonoma side, and that's when I really learned how important the Napa Valley Vintners were, because I learned quickly that when I took advantage or I took for granted was that the strength of Napa Valley, but also the organization and how strong our message was and had been, and that Sonoma had a lot of—because of how large Sonoma County is and how diverse it is, but also they never have figured out a way for the whole county to come together and so there's still that problem, but at that point there was still argument about how to—those board meetings would be how to keep the lights on, how to pay the electric bill, versus how are we going to move forward as far as marketing plans and what we were going to do to move the business forward or move the organization forward.

01-01:28:06

Meeker:

That's so interesting because if you look at the map and you look at the geography, Napa County is large and quite geographically diverse, different grapes grow better in different places, people are making different kinds of wines in different locations, yet like you said, there is a cultural difference that appears to play itself out on the Sonoma County Vintners and the Napa Valley Vintners, that Napa Valley Vintners seems to have figured it out.

01-01:28:40

Kornell:

Yeah, yeah.

01-01:28:41

Meeker:

Why do you think that is?

01-01:28:44

Kornell:

And I don't think it's for the lack of, there's been strong leaders in Sonoma County and I think it's—I honestly don't know. I do think it's the diversity of

the individuals too, because there's a lot. You've got diversity of crops, you've got—Napa Valley is very—you've got grapes, you have grapes and more grapes. You have very little cattle any more, you have very little—there's not much cannabis there's not much fruit here any longer, there is not many—there's olives but not very much of it. Sonoma County, you've got a lot of everything else. We've got old time farmers here but you still have, there's a lot more in Sonoma County. So there was a lot of people that were, at least that time when I was there, they're just plowing down fruit trees and planting vineyards and they don't even give a damn that there's not—they don't have a permit to do that. It's like wait a minute, how did that happen? And I know things have changed drastically since then, but it was definitely very different, so by the time I got back, Linda had already been here for a couple years and this, the vintners had really shaped up to it being much more—How did it change? It changed so that it was, we were much more, we were looking ahead and not being trying to put out fires constantly. It was kind of where are we going, where do we want to be, versus looking in our rear-view mirror all the time and trying to—where do we want to be internationally, globally, versus just in our own hometown and what can we do for our own hometown too.

01-01:31:10
Meeker:

When you leave Hanns Kornell, start at Phelps and then work with Mondavi for the next six years, you maintained a membership in the Napa Valley Vintners, correct?

01-01:31:24
Kornell:

Mm-hmm.

01-01:31:25
Meeker:

Can you tell me how that works and what the eligibility of, for an individual to become a member?

01-01:31:33
Kornell:

Well I was a member under Robert Mondavi, so I was a member under Vichon, so then I was under Mondavi. Then when I came back it was under Oakville Ranch, so when I was board president I was under Oakville Ranch, and when I left Oakville Ranch, that's when I become, sort of I guess as—that's when I'm an individual member, because as being a past chair and I think being, I don't know, being part of the organization for so damn long, I think that's where they put you out to dry, I don't know. [laughter] But soon to be a vintner member again.

01-01:32:27
Meeker:

Well, we'll talk about that near the end. How long were you at Oakville Ranch for?

01-01:32:33
Kornell:

Oh Jesus Criminy, how many years was I there? Nine years.

- 01-01:32:38
Meeker: Okay, so basically 2002 to 2011 or thereabout?
- 01-01:32:39
Kornell: Yeah.
- 01-01:32:44
Meeker: Okay, and you were board chair in 2009.
- 01-01:32:46
Kornell: Correct.
- 01-01:32:47
Meeker: So you were basically like general manager of Oakville Ranch?
- 01-01:32:50
Kornell: I was general manager, yes.
- 01-01:32:52
Meeker: The vintners, the members of the vintners are the vintners, those who own a winery.
- 01-01:33:03
Kornell: Correct, or own a brand or a, whatever that may be.
- 01-01:33:08
Meeker: Yeah. Have you been involved in those conversations about determining eligibility?
- 01-01:33:13
Kornell: Yes, and that's, I think controversial, as we talked about before. I think it's very controversial for a lot of people because it's in the early days it was you had to have either a vineyard or you had to have brick and mortar, you had to have some stake in the game, and now that's not true. Now you just have to have a brand and you have to be selling, you have to have, I don't know exactly how many cases it is but you have to be selling it for a certain amount of time and you're eligible. You have to have Napa Valley—you have to be buying Napa Valley grapes, it has to be from Napa Valley, and made here in Napa Valley, so you can put your live on it, so you could basically buy somebody's juice or buy somebody's grapes, it can be done many different ways, and I think that's hard for so many people. I equate it to I walk every morning in the town of St. Helena and it's hard for me to walk through St. Helena and see so many houses with no lights on because most of those houses are all second homes, and so those people are not voting and it changes the way the town of St. Helena is, and that's so many other small communities it's the same way. So I think the year I was president, I could stand up there and I could pretty much look out and I pretty much could know everybody's name, or if I didn't know their name I knew their face. I walk in that Christmas party now, I don't know who half those people are, don't know who half the vendors are, couldn't tell you who these people are for the life of

me, and I would say that there's most—I'd say that most of the people you've interviewed would say the exact same thing. There's not even one familiar—they don't look familiar at all, like where did they come from.

01-01:25:30

Meeker: So ten years has made that much of a difference.

01-01:35:32

Kornell: A huge difference.

01-01:35:33

Meeker: It's interesting, historians tend to try to periodize history and sort of figure out the chunks of time when something is relatively similar and then it goes through a period of change, and then there's a new era if you will. Your father, and by extension you, were here really, at the first era of the Napa Valley Vintners, were very small and I think you had to be invited to join even.

01-01:36:03

Kornell: I think so.

01-01:36:04

Meeker: To then in the seventies and eighties, it expands, and that was the era when you first became involved as an adult.

01-01:36:13

Kornell: Yeah.

01-01:36:15

Meeker: How would you characterize that era in general in terms of the organization? Could you know most people?

01-01:36:20

Kornell: Absolutely, yeah, and everyone was so proud to be. And not to say people aren't proud now but they were so proud to be part of this, they had just bought a piece of land or—Now I remember when John Shafer was hanging out at the winery and Chuck Shaw, because there was a Chuck Shaw, a real Chuck Shaw, versus two buckshot. All these guys, I just don't remember thinking they were young, these young guys that would hang around with my father and he loved it because he just loved it, there were these people from other businesses that wanted to come and be in the wine business, and everybody was really proud. That's what I remember the most, was pride, and that when somebody—I remember whenever we would go somewhere and you'd have a bottle of—I'm going to use Shafer as a good example, you had the first bottle of Shafer on a wine list and my mother or father making a note that they were going to call John and Betts [Shafer] immediately, to tell them that they had a bottle at, Joe Blow restaurant, and that was very much like that because you were so excited for somebody to be successful but now you just don't know who those people are. I think that was that you were happy when you knew the story, you knew Bob Pecota was a coffee roasting guy and now

that he went into—you knew their stories. Now you don't know these people's stories.

01-01:38:02

Meeker:

But you're saying that even in 2009, it was still more like the eighties than it is today.

01-01:38:08

Kornell:

There was a reason, there was a story, there wasn't just oh well, somebody made a gazillion dollars and now they bought a home here and they should be making wine because there's a lot of that.

01-01:38:27

Meeker:

Why do you think the change has happened since the 2000s to today? I guess we're getting close to 2020.

01-01:38:35

Kornell:

Lifestyle. I think they're living the dream, people have come here for vacations for years and loved this and it's a fabulous place to be, and I think that they decided that they too, maybe they're in that place in their life where they can grow grapes or they can at least buy grapes and put their name on a label, and that's what happens, so they show up here. And then oftentimes some are successful, some, I think they were a lot more successful fifteen years ago, doing that, and I think now they're finding, a lot of those people are finding there was that time, that when maybe it's twenty years ago, where high end, you could throw a \$300 price tag on your wine and it would work. I think people are finding that that's not so easy these days, and that's when I get these phone calls now, help me, or those people that are coming in and want to do those \$225 bottles of wine or \$300 bottles of wine and it's not so easy.

01-01:40:00

Meeker:

Well, so since 2011 or so, you have been working doing consulting.

01-01:40:05

Kornell:

Right, and so I started a consulting business. Nancy Duckhorn, who is my best friend, had always said, "Paula, you need to start. You know where everybody is buried." So I jumped off, I stepped off that staircase and it's been eye-opening to me and I've had some great clients, some I've had for the whole time, some come and go, and a lot of them are then brands that started out with high end prices and realized that they couldn't do that, or I get a call at least every month by one that says I'm thinking about coming out with a brand. You want to stay right away, well why do you want to do that, because if you just want to do it to put your name on a bottle, do not do this, it's not so easy. But for those that have got their heart and soul in it, it's still a wonderful business to be in, and especially if you have your own vineyards. If you have your own vineyards, absolutely you want to do this.

01-01:41:20

Meeker:

I'm sorry I'm jumping around a little bit, but there's one thing that I was just thinking about and I did want to ask you about. The way in which people tell the Napa Valley story as often like Gustave Niebaum, John Daniel Jr., Louis Martini, Robert Mondavi, these are all men right? But in the way in which you're telling your story, there's Margrit Mondavi and Robin Lail, the beginning of the auction, there's Linda Reiff's pivotal role in transforming the Vintners organization, you talk about your friends, like Nancy Duckhorn and other folks, there are a lot of women's names in this. Can you tell me a little bit about maybe the role of women in Napa Valley Vintners or in the valley in general?

01-01:42:18

Kornell:

Well there's a great group of women in Napa Valley and first of all, I have an incredible trekking group, that we have trekked all over the world, that is Nancy Duckhorn, Karen Cakebread, Lyndsey Harrison, who used to have Harrison Winery, Katie Murphy, she's the Sonoma interloper from Alexander Valley Vineyards. Who else from vintners have been on this trip? Janice Mondavi from Charles Krug. We've climbed Kilimanjaro, we've done Nepal, we've been to mountains in Turkey, Mongolia, so we've done some great fun adventure travel. I think the women have always, I guess from the beginning—with the mother that I had as a role model, it was always women could do anything, so to me it's never been anything different and always seen from the beginning too, of Margit Mondavi and all these women that always were the power behind the thrones, that the guys always had to have, that they couldn't have done what they did without because the wine business is the entertaining business. The wine could never be done by—the wine had to be with food, and so it was always about entertaining and lifestyle and it had to be together, so they came home to these great meals and maybe they weren't as fancy as they are now but they were certainly pretty incredible, so the women were always a big part of it.

Now, there are so many great winemakers too, and every woman winemaker I know hates to be called a woman winemaker, because they are winemakers and they just happen to be women. My tasting group has Margaret Duckhorn, Cathy Corison, Karen Cakebread, Michaela Rodeno, Julie Johnson, I'm forgetting people, there's Dawnine [Dyer]. We're just lucky that there are so many and all different ages too, and I think the most thrilling thing is to see so many younger women, I think that is what is so great. I'm turning sixty this year and I've always been the youngest, it cracks me up, with all my friends, and so now I love the fact that now I try to spend time with so many younger girls too, and it's so great to see so many younger women winemakers too and it's just great, that are making so many great wines. And then we've just got so many great chefs and there's a lot of great spirit out there.

01-01:45:30

Meeker:

This tasting group, is it all women?

- 01-01:45:33
Kornell: That tasting group that I'm in yes, it's women.
- 01-01:45:36
Meeker: How did that come to be?
- 01-01:45:39
Kornell: I think this original group started with Jamie Davies. It was a longstanding group.
- 01-01:45:46
Meeker: And it was, from the beginning, an all-women's group?
- 01-01:45:49
Kornell: From the very beginning, yeah.
- 01-01:45:53
Meeker: Have you been involved in other groups, can you describe how this one might be different?
- 01-01:45:57
Kornell: It's different because it is actually, I think it's more professional than a lot of them. This group meets on Monday mornings at nine-thirty and it's done in an hour and a half. Everybody is out of there and it goes once a month, the host chooses whatever the wine is, so it can be anything, and everybody literally, everybody is out of there in an hour and a half and it's a great—you've had a great tasting, you're out and there was camaraderie, you learned something, but it's really, you're done and out of there because everybody's got something to do. Most tasting groups I'm in, it's either lunch or dinner is involved in it and it's a big, like more of—it's more of a pain in the ass than anything else, it's like oh my God, and that's when there's men and women involved. It's funny you ask that question because this is sort of really regimented. Everybody knows it's the same day it's the same time, and you have to RSVP and that's it.
- 01-01:47:18
Meeker: It sounds not only professional but also sober.
- 01-01:47:22
Kornell: Yeah, it definitely is, you're just, you learn something. Sometimes there are more—there's always a Christmas one that's always champagne, that basically it is really, you always feel like you got something out of it and yeah, it's good, it's really good.
- 01-01:47:44
Meeker: Which ones have you hosted?
- 01-01:47:45
Kornell: I just hosted, what did I just host? I hosted, right after Premiere [Napa Valley], it was just after Premiere, and I had no idea what to do, so I did all Moon Mountain wines and I did double blind, because they didn't know where it

was from, and it was all varietals, so it wasn't just cabernet, and it was different vintages and it was all across the board and it cracked everybody up because no one could guess what it was, and it was funny. It turned out that not only was it all Moon Mountain, but it all ended up being farmed by the same vineyard manager, that of course if I would have thought twice about it I knew that, but as I'm talking about the wines I realized that, so it was good.

01-01:48:35

Meeker:

Was it wines from the Carmenet—?

01-01:48:39

Kornell:

There was one from Carmenet. One of my clients, when I first started doing consulting, was the Moon Mountain AVA, so Phil Coturri, who is a vineyard manager, was my vineyard manager at the ranch too, so it just so happened that all those wines were his. It was good because most everyone had been up to Carmenet when I had been up there and so it was good. Karen Cakebread one year, had just come back from South Africa visiting Zelma [Long], so consequently, it was—I'm the only one that knew that she'd been in South Africa, so it was all white wines, I went, "Let me guess, they're South African." [laughter] So it's good, it's a good group.

01-01:49:24

Meeker:

That sounds really cool.

01-01:49:26

Kornell:

It's fun.

01-01:49:29

Meeker:

So you became board chair in 2009, that's a position you're elected to, right?

01-01:49:36

Kornell:

Yes.

01-01:49:37

Meeker:

By the whole membership or by the board itself?

01-01:49:40

Kornell:

You're elected to the board by the membership and then you're elected, the positions on the board, by the board.

01-01:49:51

Meeker:

When you run for the board, say the whole membership, do you have an agenda or a platform that you're running on?

01-01:50:02

Kornell:

Not really. You sort of write a little position statement and I couldn't remember what the position statement was. I think it was more just that I was—I think that by then, I had chaired the Marketing Committee, I had chaired the International Committee, I had chaired so many committees in this second round now, about being back in the vintners, and it was just, it was

time to get back on the board. By that time I was involved in—I think I had been on every committee and had worked—I felt like I was living at that vintners office, so it was good timing. Oh, and then we'd also been—the vintners, we'd already all co-chaired the auction again, because they brought us all back, whatever year that was, all the past chair people, past chairs of the auction, to co-chair the auction, to shake the auction up again. Yes, so then that was the second time on the board, which was very different, so this time then it was—now it was all much more serious than the first time being on the board.

01-01:51:17

Meeker:

So then when you're voted by the board to be the chair, how does that happen? Do you lobby or is it musical chairs?

01-01:51:30

Kornell:

To be honest with you, this time I did not want to be the chair. My mother wasn't well, there was just lots of things going on so consequently, it was—but it was good, it was a good experience and it was a good time. We were opening our vintner office, we were building the office, so there was a lot of that going on. That was part of those years of being on that board, was the building of our office. Do we sell the property that is near our office, and there was a lot of arguments about, that we needed to sell the property. Thank God we did not sell that property because the vintners office, it's small now and who would have ever thought? We were preaching, here we're preaching saving land and then we were going to sell off the property right next door to us, and it was, that's when it was really very apparent that there was sort of the older guard and then there was—Here, you watch your dollars and meanwhile we're all thinking wait a minute, we're thinking ahead, and look what Premiere Napa Valley is getting us, so Premiere has been very successful for us, Premiere Auction Napa Valley is for the consumers and is raising money for the community, and Premiere raises money for the Napa Valley Vintners, so that money is for our programs but has also helped us build our offices and keep that land next to us, so it's been great for us.

01-01:54:36

Meeker:

Interesting. You had mentioned some of the issues within the organization at the time you became chair. Does solving some of those issues become part of your agenda then, as board chair?

01-01:54:54

Kornell:

Yes and those problems continue on, again, it's always—I think it will be something that will always continue on for the Napa Valley Vintners and other organizations is land use, is your right as a winery, what rights do you have as a winery owner, how many tours can you give, what is a winery, the definition of a winery. Everyone wants to have events, everyone wants to have more people, and so that's going to be a continual argument and fight no matter what, and there's always those people that are going to break the rules. The county doesn't have enough people to enforce the rules that are out there

and you have all these little brands, the brands that have no brick and mortar, they have to market their wines somehow. Where are they marketing them? At their kitchen table, which is 100 percent illegal, and so if one person is doing that then why can't I be doing that, and so it's really difficult for everyone to understand what the rules are. That was a big issue for when I was president, it's an issue every single year.

01-01:56:32

Meeker:

Well it's interesting, here's—I don't know that it would be called an existential crisis, but it's a real challenge for Napa. Do you think that the vintners can play a role in solving this in some ways?

01-01:56:51

Kornell:

That's a good question. I honestly don't know, I don't know. I think we try hard, I think we try really hard to work with accounting and try to play that intermediary to have all the voices heard. At the same time, it's hard for, I think those people that don't—or even a person that has a winery. For someone to say that it's not legal for you to be able to sell something out of your house, it's hard for people to understand that.

[side conversation deleted]

01-01:58:40

Meeker:

It's interesting because maybe in a larger county where there's a lot of other stuff going on, like one house that's doing that might be fine, but in Napa County, maybe there's going to be five houses on any given street in some ways.

01-01:58:54

Kornell:

Yeah, so it's just, it's—and then you don't want a bunch of tasting rooms in your own, it's like Healdsburg, they don't want a bunch of taste—it doesn't want—so where do those wineries that are just, that don't have brick and mortar, where do they—So it's, I don't know.

01-01:59:18

Meeker:

It's remarkable, again, going back to the Vintners organization, there are plenty of issues and it's remarkable that there is this organization that exists, a nongovernmental organization, that takes on all of these issues, at the same time promoting Napa, thereby increasing attention, but also trying to address the whole wide variety of issues that come with that success.

01-01:59:54

Kornell:

Right, and I think that's what they are the best at, is promoting, is promoting Napa Valley and enlightening everyone on how incredible the wines are, the valley is, and I think that's what's so special about it. I think it's hard for the community oftentimes, when the vintners become political and for years you would you say the vintners are not political, and I think it's difficult for them. They have to be one way or another, they can't not be—they have to take a

stand in things, and so you're always going to have somebody that's not going to be happy, but what we do the best is promote and help protect the valley.

01-02:01:00

Meeker:

Have you gone on any of those international trips in which Napa name protection is on the table?

01-02:01:07

Kornell:

Yes, I've done a couple of those D.C. trips and it's been pretty amazing, to be able to talk to all the congressmen, to talk about this and to see the similarities in so many places. When you're somebody from Kentucky and they're talking about their bourbon, it's very similar. We think we're by ourselves all the time but there are so many places, or obviously different countries, for champagne and for burgundy, but it is just in our own country we have the same.

01-02:01:44

Meeker:

Do you recall, from any of those meetings you would have had with legislators and how you present this concept?

01-02:01:53

Kornell:

In the meetings that went, it was all smaller groups, we broke out in smaller groups and would be visiting with Mike Thompson, because of our congressman, Mike Thompson, who is so supportive of us, and breaking out with, I remember specifically with—Oh, I cannot remember his name, from Kentucky, but it was very interesting, listening to him talk about his total understanding of where we were coming from because the importance of the district of various areas in Kentucky that were naming, that were calling Kentucky bourbon and they weren't in the bourbon counties.

So he was saying it was the exact same thing, well I didn't know that, you as a consumer wouldn't know that, unless you knew that there were certain designated counties that were bourbon counties. So it was in most cases, everybody listened to us with very open ears and they were all very understanding, so I think it's just like anything, there's so many things on the table, but definitely understanding the importance of if it says Napa on the label, that there would be Napa in the bottle.

01-02:03:22

Meeker:

Do you ever get any pushback like well, how is Napa different or why is Napa—why do you think Napa is special?

01-02:03:33

Kornell:

Not there, because they know that, but in the marketplace, absolutely, in the marketplace there's always that, why is Napa so expensive, there's always why is Napa—what's so special about Napa Valley, and all you can do is give the great merits of Napa Valley and it's what great land we have, it's the climate, it's the land, it's the people, it's everything.

01-02:04:03

Meeker:

I probably need to wrap up. I'd like to let me see here, let me make sure I'm not forgetting anything before we get to this point. Well actually, before we get to kind of concluding, and this is maybe a way of getting there. After 2011, you move into a consulting realm and you're working with a bunch of different labels. Now here's a different phase in which you're working with people making wine in Napa Valley, giving them advice I assume, on how to present their own wines, maybe how to talk about the role of Napa in their wines. What is it that you're doing now that is different than what you did in the late seventies and early eighties?

01-02:05:04

Kornell:

That's a good question. I feel now, I'm much more, I'm guiding a lot more, it's more of guidance and more of trying to really—I think most of the people that come to me, they already know the importance of Napa Valley. They're either here and they've made the commitment to Napa Valley, they might—they've made the commitment to Napa Valley, they haven't probably stressed that enough to their customers. They've probably taken it for granted themselves, so trying to get them—they think that Napa Valley is a household word and to most of us, we feel that, but there is a hell of a lot of people that don't understand that when you say Oakville, they think it's Oakville, Ontario, they think it's Oakville—To this day, I will do the same thing and forget too, but trying to keep instilling that, instilling that Napa Valley, that they need to be members of Napa Valley Vintners, that's the first thing I say to everyone. The first thing you need to do is become a member of the Napa Valley Vintners. Why? Because that will help you in so many numerous ways. It helps for camaraderie, it helps for you to start—all these numerous different marketing opportunities that you would never have on your own, so with me or with, if it's another marketing person, but you have so many other opportunities that you just would not get, that a small little winery, if it's being in a tasting with, if it's Robert Parker, or if it's with a restaurant group, or something, Joe Blow wanted to have the opportunity to do that, there's just no way that they could do that. So it's a great time, it's the auctions, it's being in front of people that they would normally not have that chance to do, and there are still those that sometimes it takes, why should I do that, I don't want to do that, or I don't like those people, I don't want to be social. So there's always that.

Trying to be more strategic about everything. It's no longer, it's working, and also trying to tell people it's still working with other vintners and don't lose sight of that because we're all in this together, and that it's great for you to come in and say that your wine is the best but we are blessed with a lot of great wines in Napa Valley, and you've got to be humble coming into this business because mother nature is in control I think so many forget that, they forget that we're still agriculture.

01-02:08:18

Meeker:

Are you successful in getting most of your clients to join?

01-02:08:20

Kornell:

Yes. Yeah, absolutely. Now I have to say that some of them, after we have split ways, have also split off from the Napa Valley Vintners.

01-02:08:30

Meeker:

Interesting.

01-02:08:30

Kornell:

Yeah. So there are just those that don't want to play with others or can't seem to see the value of what the vintners have to offer, and it's such a minimal dollar—the dollars are not even unreasoning. So if you're not successful, if you were to say that you're not successful working within the Napa Valley, you just haven't tried, that's the bottom line, you haven't taken advantage of any of the opportunities that they—and I would venture to say that half the vintners don't even read the emails that come in, so.

01-02:09:14

Meeker:

Well and some people aren't joiners I guess too, so. I met you first very briefly, in January, at the seventy-fifth anniversary, I guess annual meeting of the vintners, held at the Lincoln.

01-02:09:32

Kornell:

That's right at the Lincoln Theater.

01-02:09:35

Meeker:

The Lincoln Theater, at the Veterans home facility. That's been an opportunity for a lot of people, particularly people who have long family ties in the valley, to think about the long history of the valley, where it's been, where it's going, to think about the longer role of the vintners in the valley and where it's been and where it's going. Were you one of those people that sort of the weight of seventy-five years maybe inspired you to think about the longer history of your family here?

01-02:10:18

Kornell:

I just thought that day was great because, that particular day was great because it was to see all those wines on that table, and to see it all marked off, number one, was pretty fascinating, because you sort of that was ominous, to sit there and look at that and to see first of all how—and to taste how great some of those wines were, the older wines were just phenomenal. And then to see so many young people there that were just like open eyes to some of those wines that they will never have the opportunity to taste, it was pretty incredible. It was great to hear some of those archived voices, voices that are so familiar to you that it's great, and then the comments, and then to hear something about French Laundry, the lunch at the French Laundry was going up and I thought oh my God, half this group doesn't even know that the French Laundry isn't the French Laundry that they know today, they don't know the history of where the French Laundry started.

But yes it was pretty incredible, and to be in the greenroom or whatever room they called it, before all of us walked out on stage, to see the interaction of all of the past presidents was pretty great, because some of these guys are, they're old and in doing the auction, for the planning of the auction this year, it's the battling of the hearing aids, but those are the people I remember. Most of those, that's—they're the guys that I've been around all my life and it's great to see them all together, and so it was a great day. And then after that lunch, I went to one of my mother's oldest friends that's still alive, celebrating her ninety-fifth birthday. And so I went to her ninety-fifth birthday celebration and the Martini girls were all there and it was just so good to see this ninety-five year old just, spring as—she's walking around, she didn't care about a damn thing and it was, she was the last of the Mohicans and it was really wonderful, but there's not many left.

01-02:13:15

Meeker:

What you were talking about, just so when people are reading this interview later they understand the context, and that was the greenroom was the backstage room at the Lincoln Theater and all of the living past presidents of the board of the organization came on stage together at the beginning of the—

01-02:13:38

Kornell:

Correct. In honor of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the vintners. I also have to say, I do need to say that for me, the year I was president it was very special, because I was the first father/daughter, the daughter following the father, president, so it was really, I have to say that there's got to be some good juju somewhere in that whole thing. Yes it was great to see some people need help walking on stage, some people don't, but it's just it's like anything, just to see sort of the rites of passage and to look out and to see all these new faces, and then the older, older guard on stage is saying to me, as still being one of the younger ones, saying, "Who are all those people out there? I don't know who they are."

01-02:14:37

Meeker:

Because they were involved when it was really small.

01-02:14:38

Kornell:

Yeah, yeah.

01-02:14:42

Meeker:

How do you think your father would have responded to that day?

01-02:14:47

Kornell:

He would have loved it and he would have loved the fact that he didn't know all those people out there, because he would have been—I'm a total introvert when it comes to things like that. He would have been out there shaking hands, meeting people, kissing babies, he'd be like, "Oh honey, how are you," it would be never know a stranger. But no, he would have loved the fact that there was youth and there was new blood coming in, and even those people

that I would say are questionable, okay they're building a big house and they're just doing this, he'd be welcoming it.

01-02:15:30

Meeker:

They spend a little bit of time talking about how the organization has changed, there was that great bit from the video we showed, from Eleanor McCrea, when she said oh, it used to be a men's marching and chowder society.
[laughter]

01-02:15:50

Kornell:

She's so great.

01-02:15:53

Meeker:

Did you think about that too, in terms of the seventy-fifth anniversary, how the organization has changed?

01-02:16:00

Kornell:

Yes but years ago, one of the things I had to do for the vintners was the "Living Legends," a million years ago, in San Francisco, when Eleanor was still alive, and it was an event we did in San Francisco and it was Legh Knowles when he was still at BV, and that's why I think I really was—Louis Martini and it was my father and Joe Heitz, but Eleanor was still alive. I've got a picture right over there, because Eleanor was the only woman and she just looked at me and she goes, some comment about, something about the dying breed, she goes the last dying breed of old wine farts, or something or other, it was really, it was absolutely cute. I thought of her that day because gosh, she would just be laughing at this whole thing, of all these people being paraded. Yes, because I think it's changed drastically. I think the wine business will obviously go on and it will succeed and it will continue to be great, but I think it will be very different and I think it's going to—I don't know how it's going to, it's just going to be very different, sort of the heart and soul is out of it.

I was in a meeting the other day, more about cans and it's just there's something different about it now. I don't know if it's the grit of it, but you still—I was in a zinfandel tasting yesterday though, with some young winemakers and there's still that zest and zeal that is there, that they want to do things differently, but they want all these different fermentations. So I speak out of both sides of my mouth. I think it's changing, sometimes for the best and sometimes I don't know what's going to happen, I don't know where it's going to go. You've seen Louis Martini, the new beautiful winery, so they've done, that's over the top incredible, so they're preserving the past and making it better for the future, so you have that, but then you don't know what—are we going to have half the valley making wine in cans? It's to be seen.

01-02:18:47

Meeker:

What was the conversation about cans, that's canned wine, right?

01-02:18:51

Kornell: A lot of canned wine, and there's more and more vintners that are going to be making more canned wine.

01-02:19:00

Meeker: What was the conversation about?

01-02:19:04

Kornell: That there's a feeling out there that you can—the quality of the wine remains the same as if you put it in a bottle, and it's the same conversation is going on as the conversation that was with the screw cap. We had that conversation with screw caps and oh my God, you can't put screw caps, that will look—nobody thinks twice about a screw cap.

01-02:19:35

Meeker: How does the organization think about its own history, does it see it as a resource?

01-02:19:45

Kornell: I believe it thinks of it as a great resource, that we have a tremendous history and we only—we look at it as our stability and thank God we have that. I think the industry as a whole, I think we're blessed with that and I would say not only the Napa Valley Vintners, but the California wine industry as a whole, I think that's why we've been so successful, is that it's a very strong, strong foundation that we have. Napa Valley has been very strong, but we've had great leaders. It's been Napa Valley, but you have to say the Wentes, the Concannons, and there has been so many in other areas in California that also brought the California wine industry together, that was so strong and Gallo being one of them too. I think they all had to go that together, and Napa Valley obviously, we're just blessed that we have this incredible little enclave right here and we've got incredible grapes in the soil, but I think as a whole, California just is a very special place.

01-02:21:23

Meeker: Looking forward, you talked about how one of the things you do for your clients is you recommend that they join the vintners. What do you want to see the vintners continue to do going forward, so that you, yourself, want to continue your membership and you would continue to advocate membership more broadly?

01-02:21:47

Kornell: Good question. I would say continue to give back to the community, because I think that that's been very important. I think that's been very important for the community, the community obviously relies on us, but we wouldn't be able to have this great relationship with our community because it has—we have to work together. I think the education factor, that we're educating the world actually, on Napa Valley, and the importance, the benefits of Napa Valley, the benefits of Napa Valley wines, how incredible the valley is. I think keeping some—continue to bring people here, bring those educators, bring those

decision makers here, so they can see this and witness it firsthand, that it's great for us to go out and preach it, but until people come here and pick their first grape or are doing their first pump-over, or are walking through a vineyard or listening to whatever winemaker firsthand, that's when it all clicks, because you can be the MW somewhere and you can be taking a test and you can be thinking you're high off the hog somewhere, and then you come here and see it firsthand, it changes your whole way of thinking. We've turned so many head of people who think oh Napa Valley, it's seen its better days or another bottle of Napa Valley Cabernet, and then they come and spend time here and realize hey, there's a reason that there's the price on that bottle, or it's a reason why Napa Valley Cabernet is so special.

01-02:24:10
Meeker:

I might be one of those people. My father, my parents were big consumers of Napa wines, going back to the sixties and they had some '66 Mondavi in their cellar.

01-02:24:21
Kornell:

Excellent.

01-02:24:23
Meeker:

But I grew up and a way of rebelling was not liking cab and Napa wines, but through this project and learning about it more, have become more interested, so it works.

01-02:24:36
Kornell:

No, it is definitely, it's not to say that I live in a cab world and it's—I too, I live and breathe cabernet and it's like wait a minute, I want to drink other things too, but this is what is—we're very lucky to have it here and it's our natural resource when it comes down to it.

01-02:25:04
Meeker:

What is the Vintners greatest contribution over the last seventy-five years?

01-02:25:09
Kornell:

Oh my goodness. It would be preserving this valley, preserving this valley, preserving the agriculture of this valley, the footprint, preserving healthcare for all children in this valley, putting Napa Valley in the spotlight internationally. I think educating, educating internationally about wines and helping Napa Valley, helping vintners, helping the vintner—helping the vintners have a community as a whole. It's really having a platform.

01-02:26:22
Meeker:

What are its biggest challenges going forward?

01-02:26:27
Kornell:

The wine industry itself, future. Let me see, traffic, population, climate. Traffic is going to be—it already is and it's, I think only going to get worse. Who knows what's happening with climate, competition I guess, I think it's always going to be, maybe—I was going to say consolidation but that's

always going to be, it's cyclical so. Political, I don't know if it's—if you listen to the news and I don't know, how many more tariffs can be put on things and if we keep going, when you keep not liking another country, it's not good for anything. If we go into a recession that's not good for wine consumption, especially our high-end wines.

01-02:28:07

Meeker:

Do you think that the Vintners has a role to play in addressing these challenges?

01-02:28:15

Kornell:

I think yes. I would have said probably no ten years ago, but I think we've become, as much as we say we're not political, we have become political and I think we have to, I think we have to be. I think we have to be in the forefront, addressing anything that comes our way that's going to be in the way of the success of our industry, because we are the spokespeople for our industry. The Wine Institute was that for many years and not to say that it isn't, but it's not as strong as it should be, and I think the Napa Valley Vintners have surpassed the Wine Institute and we, I think we've become—I think we have to come to grips as an organization, that we have become political, and I think that's one of the things that we've been fighting the last few years, is no we're political, yes we're not political, I think we're internally trying to figure that out constantly.

01-02:29:32

Meeker:

So you yourself are about to reenter the wine industry in a way that you haven't been in a long time.

01-02:29:39

Kornell:

Yes.

01-02:29:41

Meeker:

Does this mean that you're optimistic about the future of wine?

01-02:28:47

Kornell:

Yes, absolutely.

01-02:28:49

Meeker:

Can you tell me about what you're embarking on?

01-02:28:53

Kornell:

So, um, a year ago, a good friend of mine who is the president of Vintage Wine Estates, who owns Clos Pegase and Swanson and B.R. Cohn and probably everything, they keep buying everything in God's name. I knew, from many years ago, who was actually one of the people that the bank had put into Hanns Kornell, to make sure that we had a marketing plan, and so I'd worked with him and we've been friends ever since then. He came to me last year and said that they needed—they had a spot in their portfolio and did not have a rosé and did not have a sparkling wine and would I start a sparkling wine with him and went, "Absolutely," which just came out of my mouth

because he had mentioned quite a few times, let's do something else together and I've said no, no, no, no, no. So it's been a very interesting year because trying to work with a larger company, number one, and trying to learn another whole way of doing business. So yes, I am doing a sparkling wine and it's going to be called Paula Kornell Sparkling, and doing a California blend that will be in the price range of the Chandon and Mumm, and then a higher end that will be probably forty-five-dollar, fifty-dollar range.

[side conversation deleted]

01-02:31:47

Kornell:

One will be a California, that will be a blend, it will be around that Chandon, Mumm range, and then another one that will be a Napa Valley, which is Carneros. Chardonnay and pinot noir and will be in probably the forty-five-dollar range, and that will be coming out soon. Yeah, it's pretty exciting.

01-02:32:14

Meeker:

Are you playing a role in the blending, in the tasting?

01-02:32:17

Kornell:

Oh yes. Vineyard sources are a vineyard for Napa Valley, it's a vineyard source that was a Clos Pegase Vineyard that Jan Shrem gave to his wife years ago, he gave a box to her with dirt in it for Valentine's Day and said there is an acre for every day of the year that I love you, and so how very sweet, but that vineyard is gorgeous, in Carneros, so that's where the fruit for the Napa is coming from, and the California is a blend of a little bit from Napa, Sonoma, Mendocino, and I don't know exactly when that will be out but hopefully one is going to be out this year and then at least I'll have something for my table for Auction Napa Valley this year, and then so we'll see, so it's exciting. About five years ago I thought about this, I sort of walked down this path before and did get some DBAs, I got some names registered, and then it sort of went on the backburner again and so it's been in the back of my mind but loosely and so I'm excited about this, because it would not be still wine, it had to be sparkling wine, so I'm excited about doing this. The funny thing is that all my clients, they all burst out in tears, every single one of them I told. I thought oh God, somebody is going to have a heart attack or they're going to say we're done. No, everybody was very emotional about it, so I'm excited and I think it's got to be good juju somewhere out there.

01-02:34:11

Meeker:

Where are the wines being made?

01-02:34:12

Kornell:

The wines are being, the still wines are both being made at Clos Pegase and both the sparklings are going to be over at Rack & Riddle in Healdsburg.

01-02:34:24

Meeker:

So the still wine is going into the—?

- 01-02:34:27
Kornell: Yes, the still wine is the base wine for the champagne, yeah.
- 01-02:34:29
Meeker: Okay, yeah. Are they going to be available for tasting?
- 01-02:34:37
Kornell: They eventually will be. There will eventually be a tasting room, there will eventually—that's being figured out right now. Oh, there's many, there's—we're still working on the package right this minute.
- 01-02:34:50
Meeker: Well, congratulations.
- 01-02:34:51
Kornell: Thank you.
- 01-02:34:52
Meeker: That must be very exciting and something to look forward to.
- 01-02:34:55
Kornell: It is, it's very exciting and it's scary at the same time, it's really scary, but it's good, it's good, and it will be really exciting to be back and go full circle, back in the vintners as Paula Kornell Sparkling.
- 01-02:35:11
Meeker: Well, maybe that's a good place to end today, thank you very much for your time and for all the thinking on the spot I've been asking you to do.
- 01-02:35:20
Kornell: No, thank you.
- 01-02:35:22
Meeker: I think it's been a very product interview, thank you very much.
- 01-02:35:25
Kornell: Thank you.
- 01-02:35:26
Meeker: Is there anything that I didn't ask that you still would like to speak about before we turn off the camera?
- 01-02:35:33
Kornell: I don't think so. I think you got it.
- 01-02:35:35
Meeker: All right, well thank you.

[End of Interview]