

Napa Valley Wine Library - 31st Annual Wine Seminar
“A Mentor and his Students: Six Winemakers
Share Their Experiences with Warren Winiarski
While at Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars”
Thursday, April 21, 2022 at Frog’s Leap Winery

Transcription (gently edited; a full transcription is available upon request)

Diana Stockton

First, I should like to thank John Williams, “John W” as he has now become familiarly known, and his able assistant, Jessica Hague, for our program’s spectacular setting at Frog’s Leap Winery.

This annual seminar has been an extraordinary occasion to put together. It has been a great privilege to work with such a remarkable group of fair-minded, passionate, patient, and persistent talents. I feel very lucky, indeed, to be here with you and I wish to thank Carolyn Martini, president of the Napa Valley Wine Library Association, for her continuing support of my role in planning events and editing the NVWL REPORT, and anything else I can think of that will acquaint any and every one with the production of a local agricultural product that one cannot really properly assign the term “industrial” to.

So, thank you all for coming and the way I see it right now, no, we may not have Steph or Klay, Jordan, Dray or Andrew, but we certainly do have a wonderful team that you *will* be hearing from. Our moderator, Tegan Passalacqua, is the newest board member of the Wine Library and already a force of nature. Tegan, we look forward to your moderating: Thank you.

Tegan Passalacqua

Thank *you* very much.

Well, first of all, a “thank you” to everyone who allowed us to request your presence on the panel. It means a lot to me personally, and to the Wine Library, and everyone here. Thank you, Warren, for accepting the invitation. Diana and I talk a lot about the seminars that we will have for the Wine Library. The Library had me moderate the last two, and after each we have had a kind of breakdown on how it went and after the last one, the first thing Diana said was, “What are we doing next year?”

This was a year ago, and she said, “Well, you know, it will be the 50th Anniversary of Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars. What do you think we should do?” And, right away, I just said, “What if we had Warren with a lot of the folks that he mentored over the years?”

The reason it was really fascinating to me is that the two men to my left [John W and John K] both worked for Warren and they both decided to send their children to the college that Warren went to. They didn’t send their children to Sonoma State or UC Davis or Berkeley. Two winemakers sent their children to a school that Warren went to, so there was always something

in my mind: What was it about this guy? I know the legend of Warren Winiarski, but to me it goes way beyond winemaking when you have two men like this think, ‘You know what? I kind of want my kids to have an education like Warren’s.’

So that was the impetus originally for the panel, and then it just kind of came together—a broader representation of people in the Napa Valley who had worked with Warren and learned from Warren and Warren’s commitment to teaching and training people. So, thank you everyone for joining.

To start us off, I asked Abe Schoener, whose first job in the wine industry was at Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars in 1998. Abe was on sabbatical from Saint John’s and he came out to study, what would you say—the philosophy of winegrowing, or something like that? Anyway, Abe took an internship at Stag’s Leap and has now been out here in California for 25 years. He had been a tutor at Saint John’s College, so I asked him to give us a little history of the classical relationship between a mentor and their students. Abe has prepared a lecture on the subject.

Abe Schoener

I can’t even say how honored I am at Tegan’s request and to be included in this panel. And, in spite of my honor, my gratitude to Tegan, I have not complied with his request! Instead, I have written a brief address on a somewhat different topic.

JOHN K

Not surprising.

JOHN W

We’re shocked.

ABE

In FOUR parts.

Part One--On the etymology of the word “mentor”

The word “mentor” is clearly at the heart of this seminar. The interesting thing about it as both a noun and a verb is that there is no word in Ancient Greek that corresponds to “mentor,” yet the word is from Ancient Greek. The noun and verb in English are from the name of the very important character, “Mentor,” in Homer’s *Odyssey*. Mentor appears at two crucial points in the story. *The Odyssey* is widely understood to be the story of Odysseus’s return from the Trojan War to his island home on Ithaca that he had ruled before leaving for Troy.

What we easily forget about *The Odyssey* is how much it is also about Odysseus’s son, Telemachus, who had been left behind in Ithaca. Athena, goddess of wisdom, not only watches over Odysseus but also Telemachus. And in the opening of this story, as Mentor, she goes to Telemachus and urges him to go on an expedition from Ithaca to find his father, or at least get word of what has happened to him. Telemachus is young, has never been far from home, and doubts his ability to carry out a search. Mentor comes to Telemachus on a beach, and as he

walks beside him, speaks to him briefly but vigorously, filling Telemachus with the needed spirit to set out.

It is interesting and important to note that Mentor does no teaching or instructing in any obvious way. He is, in a literal sense, an encourager. Telemachus sets out, has many adventures, and returns home to Ithaca—without his father, BUT with the hope that Odysseus will soon return as well. Mentor does not appear to the young man again until the end of the book.

Upon Odysseus's return he is reunited with Telemachus, his wife Penelope, and his father Laertes. Odysseus must then do battle with the young men who never left Ithaca during the war, but instead took over, despoiling Penelope and Telemachus' home. Mentor appears twice in these final moments: once when the battle is going against both Odysseus and his son. Athena comes again as Mentor and Homer says explicitly that he did not put victory in their spirits but chose to test them at the crucial moment, when father and son could use some encouragement from a god. The word "test" in Ancient Greek means something like "to make a trial". It is related etymologically to our word "experiment". In a certain sense, Athena as Mentor uses the battle to make an experiment with the father and son.

The last appearance of Mentor is in the closing lines of the book. Father and son have triumphed over the predacious young men of Ithaca, killed their leaders, and are assured of lasting victory on the island. Odysseus is about to slay one last young man when Athena appears one more time and orders him to hold back and put an end to the destruction of war. I'm quoting Homer now, "So spoke flashing-eyed Athena in the form and voice of Mentor, and Odysseus listened and was glad in his heart." This last role of Mentor is to give a kind of divine order that keeps the hero of the poem from doing something and this very prevention makes him glad in his heart.

If this is the role of Mentor in the *Odyssey*, how did his name come to mean something like tutor or teach in modern English? A kind of verbal detective work answers this. We can trace the modern meaning of the word to a didactic novel written in France in 1699: *The Adventures of Telemachus* by François Fénelon. You could say Fénelon rewrote the story to suit his own ends and thereby created our modern notion of mentor as guide and advisor.

Part Two--Greek words for learning and teaching

The central Greek word for teaching is *didasko*. It means, "I teach, I instruct." It seems to have the sense of an ongoing or repeated activity. We can hear this in the repetition of the first syllable, "di-dasko". It is never used as the moment when someone suddenly understands something. Socrates makes fun of the notion of teaching, of its being like pouring something from a pitcher into a glass. Teaching is never the filling of an empty vessel from a full one. Rather, it is an ongoing activity shared between two parties. It is a misunderstanding to think of the teacher as actively filling and the student as passively receiving.

One of the great lessons of Plato's Socratic dialogues is this joint activity of the two parties, an activity that is not simply divisible into teaching on the one hand and learning on the other. There is no word for "student" in Ancient Greek. And there's not even really a word for "learning." You are going to have to take my word for the truth of these claims. Before I came to Napa and made wine, I pursued a PhD in Ancient Greek Philosophy and learned absolutely as much as I could about the Greek language—and I was pretty good at it. So, instead of trying to prove these claims, I'm going to tell you a little bit about how these notions so central and fundamental to us are conveyed in Ancient Greek.

In Ancient Greek there's no simple expression equivalent to our "I have learned." There's a very interesting expression in Greek tragedy used when the hero finally understands their terrible predicament. They say in Ancient Greek, "*Arti manthano*," which means, "Oh, now I understand." Understanding is the result of what we would call learning, but it is only a result.

How do you convey in an earnest way in Ancient Greek what we would call a student? Whereas we would say 'I am learning algebra' or 'I am learning how to ride a horse,' in Greek you have to say, 'I am practicing X' or 'I am pursuing X.' Or you can use the same word that Homer uses of Athena when she tests Odysseus and Telemachus. You can say, 'I am trying X,' or you can use a passive construction, 'I'm being taught X' or 'I have been taught X.' What we would call learning is somehow nameless in Greek.

There's one more word that has a surprising importance in the Ancient Greek vocabulary of teaching and learning: The noun *pais*. There are a series of words derived from it. The two most important are *paideia* and *paideuo*. *Pais* simply means child—not just in respect of age but with a sense of innocence and ingenuity conveyed by our expression, *childlike*. It is important to know one more Ancient Greek word related to *pais*: *paizo*. *Paizo* means to play, as in to play a game, to play a sport, or even to toy with something. *Paideia*, which comes from *pais*, is usually taken to mean something like our word education, but my feeling is that you can see in its root in child that it is not simply the same thing. *Paideia* is more like playing, and by emphasizing this I do not mean to exclude learning from play, and vice versa. The Ancient Greek word that is usually taken to mean education is inseparable from play.

Part Three--The distinction between flute playing and house building

At the beginning of his master work on ethics, Aristotle draws a distinction between two kinds of human activities: flute playing and house building. Many important lessons flow from the examination of these pursuits. In playing the flute, the activity is an end in itself. The excellence of flute playing is inseparable from the activity itself. What is right and wrong, good and bad about flute playing exists only in the playing itself. House building is very different. As much as we might enjoy or celebrate the activity of building the house, it is very difficult to separate that activity from this result—namely, the house itself. Similarly, it would be hard to point to or praise excellence in house building if the resulting house itself were shoddy or unsteady. The goal of the activity of house building lies at least partly outside of the activity and in the resultant house.

These activities also have a very different relationship to time. The activities that are ends in themselves exist only in the present and have no persistence beyond the moment of the activity itself. Activities that aim at creating something beyond pure activity, activities like house building create something that persists beyond or outside the activity itself. Even cooking, that aims to produce something that is consumed immediately, has an end outside of cooking, namely the dish to be served. As much as winemaking is a kind of wonderful play, as much as the act of making wine can be like the act of flute playing and can be enjoyed and praised in itself, it is finally like house building and must be judged for its result: a product that can stand independently of the activity of its creation.

Part Four--The moral nature of winemaking

I'm going to tell one story from my own personal education. I have learned from everyone on this panel in one way or another and from Warren, himself, but only one person could be called my mentor. Tegan reminded me a few days ago of a story that I once told, central to my education as a winemaker.

One day, a long time ago, I was supervising the bottling of a client's wine. John Kongsgaard, my mentor, had introduced me to the client a few years before. By a total coincidence, almost like the visit of a god, John happened to be at the same winery when we were doing the bottling. Each of us had projects at the winery totally distinct from each other. I brought a bottle over to John from the bottling line. It was a Napa Chardonnay, a wine that I had learned to make from him. The wine was visibly cloudy through its antique green glass. John looked at the wine, then he looked at me. "This is a mistake," he said slowly and then looked away from me. "Your mistake," he concluded with a dispassionate certainty. The teaching of the mentor takes many forms.

Thank you all, so much.

TEGAN

Thank you, very much, Abe.

Now, Warren, I think you have prepared some comments on the essentials of mentorship.

Will you please speak to us on what you consider those essentials?

Warren Winiarski

Yeah, and I'll do it briefly!

Each, I think, of the "mentees" here, if that's appropriate, was assigned a job to begin with that had nothing to do with wine. I wanted to find out some things and they were puzzled by that. For example, John Williams' job was to drive the kids home from school and he probably, since he was the first trained enologist that I had in my winery, he probably expected to do enology. But my purpose was to find out what kind of human being John was before I put him on the work of wine, and I could only find that out by little jobs that were insignificant relative to the

main project. And I found out something about John as a human being through that. I'm not going to tell you what--he might refer to it himself.

I think the little things are important, as I discovered from reading about the training of Marines for the most exacting jobs in the Marine Corps. In their first training, Special Forces had to make up their beds perfectly, by regulations. And these expectant fighters rebelled against that somehow. They said, 'I'm here to fight and not to make up beds!' And they were told, if we can't count on you for little things, then maybe we cannot count on you for big things.

And with that introduction, I will pass to the next person.

TEGAN

But I have a question for you, Warren. Can you tell us about your experience with Lee Stewart and contrast that experience with Robert Mondavi?

WARREN

Yes. I mean, that's a really good question. Lee Stewart was the best master for what he was concerned with, and that was detail. There was no detail too small not to give it the full attention. Let me give you an example: When you are dealing with barrels, you have a bung that goes into the bung stave and Lee wanted, because it had grain—bungs were wood in those days--so habituation was not a matter of habit. What we do now, we have surgical rubber. It has no grain. But back then, the barrel has a grain and the bung has a grain and Lee wanted the soft grain and the hard grain to line up, bung and barrel together. So, he made a little notch in the center of that bung so that it always went in the same way, and was not twisted, to make the perfect seal.

Robert Mondavi was not a man of detail. For Robert Mondavi, the goal, the elevation of objective was the most important thing. So, I said as a formula, for Lee Stewart nothing was too small not to give it your full attention. For Robert Mondavi, no goal was too large not be exceeded.

TEGAN

Excellent. Thank you very much.

I will note to everyone that we are currently drinking the Chardonnay from Warren's own vineyard—his Arcadia Vineyard in Coombsville, made by Stag's Leap Wine Cellars (SLWC), and is the 2020 vintage. If you look on your tasting sheet, you will see what the wines are that we will be drinking. I won't really announce them when the other panelists are speaking, but you can follow along.

TEGAN

I would like to start with you, John Williams, and I know you have something prepared, but I want to start with one question: Do you remember your first day at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars?

John Williams

Well, I went to pick up the damn kids, but you may be referring to another incident which happened slightly later, but within the first week, and had it happened first, Warren probably would not have let me pick up his kids. I came to work and Warren came rushing down in his little orange Datsun and said, "There's a labeling machine over at Inglenook and it may work for our line and I want you to go over," as he handed me a tape measure. "I want you to go over and get the height, depth, and width with this and I expect you to be back in 45 minutes."

And I said, "Well, Warren, it is going to be a little difficult because I don't have a car. I hitchhike to work." He looked at me, somewhat surprised, and said, "You can take my car but make it 45 minutes." I didn't have the heart to tell him I had no idea where Inglenook was. I was only recently arrived in the Valley, but somehow for the first time in my life I asked for directions. I got to Inglenook, got the measurements, and was going to make it back in time when--coming over the Oakville Grade, coming around that steep corner--someone coming from the other direction, completely out of control, took out the whole side of Warren's car! And that was a little bit of a problem because the guy hopped out of his car, and he says, "I am so sorry, this is completely my fault but I cannot stay. Here's my wallet with all my information." He got back in his car, which was barely drivable, and took off.

So, this was going to be hard to explain, but there was someone who had seen the whole thing. He came down and he said, "Man, he really made a mess of your car." And I said, "It's not my car, it's Warren Winiarski's car," and he said, "You poor son of a bitch." But he helped me. He had already called the CHP, and the CHP came and we got things straightened out. And then the guy who hit me shows up in the middle of all our explaining what happened to the CHP. The guy takes full responsibility. He's got insurance, he's going to take care of everything...And, finally, two and a half hours later, I get back to the winery--with a destroyed car. I think Warren let me go home for the day, maybe the week! Maybe, yeah, that was it. I don't know, but anyway, the next week he said I could come back to work, and he still let me drive his kids back from school. So, I think that was, you know, very patient of him.

Tegan, I assume that's the incident you were referring to?

TEGAN

Well, just more like if you remembered what it was like going to the very first day of work there, what you were feeling, what was going through your head?

JOHN W

Well, this was all a whirl. It was this week, actually 47 years ago, that I arrived in Napa. That's when I met Larry Turley and it was Larry who introduced me to Warren and Barbara at the Napa Valley Wine Library tasting that was at Charles Krug that year. That's where, I don't know if you remember, Warren, but that's where we met. You said you could use some help on the bottling line. Was it the first day I got there that we did some bottling? Or was it a little bit later? Yes, a little bit later. But, of course, the wine we bottled went on to be very famous.

Well, we're talking about details...and by the way, Warren, you said most of the stuff I was going to say, so thank you. I was thinking of Lee Stewart, Robert Mondavi, and realizing that Lee Stewart would not have written his notes with his glasses on, only to leave his glasses up in his office, and therefore rendering his notes unreadable--because his glasses aren't here...

JOHN K

Can I help you, John? [He hands John W his reading glasses]

JOHN W

1.5's?

JOHN K

Yeah, 2.0, actually. I'm older than you.

JOHN W

I don't know if any of you have read this book, *Creating Classic Wines in the Napa Valley*? It is actually a transcript of an oral history that Warren did with Ruth Teisner. I don't know what you think of this book, Warren, but I recently read it again. It's a transcript of the early days of Stag's Leap and if you haven't read it, it is compelling, to say the least. But as I was rereading it, it gave me pause because it made me realize I was at Stag's Leap in 1975 and 1976: Can we say pre-Paris? I didn't realize until I was reading this book how early that was in the history of Stags Leap.

WARREN

Yes. I didn't know it was in this published form. I know it only in the transcript form.

JOHN W

Yes, yes, well there's all this stuff, it's on the Internet. You can look this stuff up. I don't think I knew when I was working at Stag's Leap how early it was, how stressful it must have been for Warren and his family. Any of us who started our own businesses know that when you are first starting, you don't know whether people are going to buy this wine. You've got investors. You've got all this—your family, you--all of them critical. You know you just don't know what's going to happen. It must have been tense, and I guess I sensed that. Now, I remember the tension probably, Warren, that was in your life at that time. You didn't know whether this grand experiment of yours and Barbara's and your family was going to be a success. And I was thinking about how that has influenced my own ability to start my own company, to start my own winery. You just don't know what form mentorship is going to come in, I guess. And you know, that has really stuck with me as I read this book, how early and how stressful, and how important a time this really was. I really think everyone should get a copy of the book.

In it, Warren talks about the hands of winemaking and the head of winemaking and separates the physical act of winemaking from the thought process that goes into the decision-making of

winemaking, and I got *both* at Stag's Leap. I remember one of the first things Warren made me do was to set up a complete sanitation cycle with a pump. And I was already to sanitize this tank when Warren said, "Stop. Take everything apart." And I asked, "Take the hoses off? Undo and take all the clamps off?" "No, no, no. Take the *whole* pump apart." We took all the heads off the pump, we took all the impellers out. Now Warren says, "I want to show you all the places germs can hide in this pump."

And that came back to me when my first wine fermented and when I had made my first wine as a head winemaker. That that's the kind of details that are important. I think when we were all starting here as winemakers, we never imagined we would turn the hands of winemaking over. We would never let someone do our pump-overs for us, we would never let someone hook up a pump. That was the *hands* of winemaking, but of course, as time goes along we realize that there's the *head* of winemaking, too. There's so much that goes on, and I can't even, in retrospect, imagine how lucky I was to be there when Warren and André [Tchelistcheff] were tasting this wine before it was bottled; or the '74 when I was bringing them samples out of the barrels, or the '75 as we were draining the fermentation tanks. We aerated it over that big stand-up tank and, literally, they were standing there discussing the involvement of *terroir* in this new region that no one had really even codified yet. What a spectacular experience that was for me.

You know, I think when you are with someone as significant as Warren was, or André as consulting winemaker there, you think that at some point they're going to sit you down and teach you the secrets of winemaking. I didn't know in what form that was going to come in, but one day, André asked me if I would come and help him prune roses. And I thought, "This is it. This is the moment when he's going to teach me the secret of winemaking," and I gladly went to his house.

It was hot that day, I remember, and we pruned roses for some time. Actually, my job was to take the prunings out and they were kind of nasty—all prickly, and so on. And I said to myself, 'OK. This is attached to this. It's good. He's going to tell me now how to make wine.' Finally, we got done with all the roses and André says, "I think it's time to have something to drink." And I think, 'He's going to pull out a great old Beaulieu and we're going to talk about, you know, what it took to make this wine.'...We had a lovely glass of iced tea and he sent me home.

So, André never taught me about winemaking, but damn, I know how to prune roses now, and I think that's something. So I guess you just never know in what form mentorship is going to come from. But, in fact, it was Warren and Barbara and their family that revealed the truth through their own generosity; be it warm soup late at night, as late as on a crushing night when it's raining and cold and Barbara brought down warm soup. Or, you know, I'd be stacking cases in the basement of their house and listening to Kasha playing, doing her piano lessons. I think the greatest lesson of all was what you have to give up to pursue this craft, this passion, this crazy thing we decided to do. Warren put his everything and Barbara put everything into making that winery a success—raising their family, making sure their kids got home from school

safely, and that's what sticks with me the most: the depth of passion and the commitment to cause. I will never forget that.

I know at some point all of us are going to be thinking about our own legacies. It comes with a time and I want to finish by saying that at some point Warren's story is going to be told. It's inevitable for all of us, but my deep regret is that the first three paragraphs of that story are going to be about 'You Know What,' and I'm not 100% sure that's how this man or how this family should be measured, quite frankly. Their work in preserving this Valley is so significant that it should be the title piece. This man almost single-handedly discovered and brought to life, with a nod to Nate Fay, the idea that this place, Stag's Leap, had a character, was a place so distinct that it couldn't be from anywhere else. They were discovering that in the cellars at Stag's Leap during these early years.

That should be, if not the first paragraph, at least the second paragraph. And the mentorship that Warren's done, because I know we're not the only hands that are trapped up in that plaster ["Hands of Time"] up at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars. There have been so many more. We can do this three times over with people who have been so profoundly influenced by you and your wife Barbara, Warren, and with that I'll close. Thank you very, very much for being my mentor. (John K said he thinks his Chardonnay is better than Warren's, just for the record.)

JOHN K

Ah, the arrogance of the students.

TEGAN

So, John Kongsgaard, why did you want to work at Stag's Leap?

John Kongsgaard

To be very clear, I was a boy in Napa when there were hardly any wineries. I went off to be a literature student and while I was studying literature and philosophy in Colorado, the wine industry kind of exploded and, suddenly, there needed to be a technical class—the enologists to help all the wealthy, inspired, lovely people who came here and didn't know what to do. So, I went to Davis because that opportunity arose, and lucky for me I am a many generations Napan.

When I said to my dad, to his utter dismay, that I wanted to be a winemaker he said, "Well, OK. There's one who lives down the street in Stonecrest, and that would be André Tchelistcheff." André was our neighbor for years, so I went to see him and he said, "You'll have to sacrifice everything you're doing if you want to be a winemaker. You're a literature student. You'll never read a book again because you'll be so tired when you finish your workday in the field. So, read up now!" And I said, "Well, what should I do?" And he said, "What are you interested in?" And I said, "I'm interested in, you know, chocolate and vanilla: Chardonnay and Cabernet." He assigned me! André said, "You will go work for Fred McRae. Your dad knows him at Stony Hill.

And then when that is done, because the white wines are easier, you go work for Warren Winiarski." And I thought, "Wow. Simple," and I did exactly that—lucky me.

So that is how I had the good fortune to, let's say, be guided to Warren. And I don't actually remember--yes, I do: John W got me the job. We were Davis students and John had been Warren's "victim", as we called ourselves in those days. Victim is another word for mentor, I guess—is the whip-cracker, anyway. John said, "You might have the temperament to work for Warren." Now I thought, "I don't know if that's a compliment or what!" But I got my nerve up and asked Warren if I could be his crush fellow and that's how that began. Yeah, lucky me!

TEGAN

When I met with Warren he told me stories about most everyone on the panel. And one that he told me about you [John K] was that you discovered something during harvest: that the unmarried men were working the night shift and the married men were working the day shift, and Warren said you came to him and said, "Hey, I figured something out. You've got the married men, they get to work in the day and go home at night," you said, "and if this stays the way it is, I'll never be a married man!" And Warren told me his response to you was, "Read Dante."

JOHN K

Some of you know Rick Kinzbrunner, a wonderful Australian colleague, and Rick I were together working for Warren in the winery and we both posed this question to him: "What are you supposed to do between us working the night shift with the married guys having the day shift and then us with the clean-up, the all-the-hard-work shift?" We asked Warren what we were supposed to do between our shifts, and that was the answer--I think he said, "Read Plato."

TEGAN

Yes, OK, same difference. So, did you know of Saint John's before you met Warren?

JOHN K

No, no, no. And Warren became an inspiration for us in many ways.

I'll tell you an education story: On my first day I did, I wasn't trusted with the car (You, John W, had taught Warren, "No new guys with the car!"). I was asked to walk down to the bus stop and escort the kids back up to the house. That was my first day, but my real first day on the job--this is kind of like the Marines making the beds situation--I was ready for, you know, my blast of wisdom to come from the great man and he took me over to a house where the tractor driver and his family lived and said, "Well, your first job is to put a linoleum floor in the bathroom of the tractor driver's house." And I said, "Sure." Warren had been to the hardware store and there was a roll of rollout linoleum. This wasn't like putting the squares down and then figuring out the final thing. It was like I had to measure it and mark it and cut it and put it down. And I

looked a little terrified and Warren said, “Well, you wouldn’t have this job if I hadn’t checked out your education and you’ve had a good education and I’m sure you can figure this out.” And it *was* fine, I did it--it *was* a little funky there in one corner.

JOHN W

But anyway, it wasn’t as if you were in his *own* house.

JOHN K

No, no. Anyway, that was my first day: the kids and the linoleum.

TEGAN

So, this question is kind of for both of the Johns because it’s, I mean, you both sent your sons and daughter to Warren’s alma mater which ended up in theory being a wine school because both sons came back to work with you.

JOHN W

Yep.

TEGAN

What do you guys think about that?

JOHN W

I had nothing to do with my son going to Saint John’s. I don’t think he knew anything before. I mean, he picked Saint John’s on his own. I can’t blame Warren for that, but I’ll tell you, it *is* the perfect wine school. I mean it is. I can’t think of a better education to become a winemaker so I’m glad he did and, of course, most of you know [my son] Rory’s a passionate winemaker.

JOHN K

Yes. And I’m happy to say that *my son* has taken over for me with his Saint John’s training. You know, you get to not just learn about chemistry and philosophy. It is an amazing education. I’ll swing another Saint John’s loop into this. Our daughter, before our son, discovered Saint John’s. She knew about it from us and I learned about it from Barbara and Warren. And when we were still learning when Helen was already there and she told Alex, her little brother, that the hard part about it is the Greek. You must have two years of Modern Greek or a year of Ancient Greek. When Abe was working for Warren, a Saint John’s connection, we heard about Abe and we drafted him to teach Alex Ancient Greek before Alex got there. So that was another, and that’s when Abe and I became friends, and I got to be his nasty mentor. So, anyway, a lot of Saint John’s.

TEGAN

Thank you. Anything else you'd like to add—anything that you do today that you think is influenced by your experience there?

JOHN K

Well, I just have to share a few moments. I'll be little more light of heart. Warren, as John W said, was, I think, a wise man. And as a wise man, a scared rabbit when he was starting Stag's Leap because, as John W said, there was a big cash outlay, and there were partners, and how is this going to work? This was pre-Paris, and so on, and so Warren, to make sure his chaps were doing everything that we could to make sure he would have a success, would sometimes come down during our all-night shifts. Kinzbrunner and I would be down there doing all the really important work in the middle of the night. The other guys were just crushing the grapes. We were *really* making the wine, and Warren would give us this incredible list of stuff to do. He would come down in a tan bathrobe and his slippers like at two in the morning and make sure that we'd done everything correctly. And Kinzbrunner, who was, of course, an Australian, had a funny way of speaking and listening. So, Warren saw us doing something that he didn't expect. Warren didn't lose it, but he expressed some emotion by saying, 'You guys have wrecked my wine, wrecked my wine!' You know, terrified. Kinzbrunner thought he said, "You've racked my wine," and, of course we *had* racked our wine. That led to a "Who's on first?" moment where of course: 'Ve haff wrecked your wine!' 'You haff wrecked my wine.' "Yes." Anyway, so Warren was very, very careful that we did everything to make the Marine bed perfectly.

Warren always told us what he wanted, but once in a while we would express our, we would match his exasperation by saying, "I think we know what you want." And Warren would say, "I don't think you know what I want, OK? And I'm just going to make it a little *more* clear." And he said, "There is..." --and this I take with me everywhere in the winery--he said, "...There is a reason for everything that we do." He didn't just mean it like, "Read the List." Rather, "Go in your mind and your heart and think 'Why are we doing this?'" And that was like how we learned about the wine we were making. It wasn't like Warren said, "This is why we do it." He said there is a reason why we do it. And then he would just leave us with that and then we would have to reflect on what the reason was. And that has stuck with me, I can tell you.

It's 45 years that I've had the pleasure of this friendship and we have really kept it up through music and kids. It's been a marvelous thing, a really great thing for me. I had, I think, the greatest honor of my life as a winemaker and a mentee and a mentor when I was visiting Warren a couple of months ago. He said, "I have someone to recommend for you to be your intern in the fall of this coming year." And I thought, "Oh, god, [your daughter] Julia did this to me once," and I was really obliged to hire her friend. Turned out it was a great thing, but anyway...I was ready for, like, 'Oh boy, who's this going to be?' Instead, Warren said, "I would like to come and work for you for the harvest." So, pretty great for me to have that come around to me.

I have one more little, maybe two, anecdotes to say. There was this whole thing about how are you going to find a wife and, you know, this whole problem of Plato and the middle of the day.

But I can say, Warren, that I can thank you in some ways for my Maggy because my marriage proposal was on a crush pad at Stag's Leap. She came with an ultimatum and I had a bucket of pomace in one hand and a hose in the other hand. And I had figured out how to ask her that day, so you did get me a wife and a good one. And I would also say about Warren that he always wanted, always listened, in a way as if he were our students when we were working. Like André, he would come around.

This was in the days when you drained the red tanks before dryness, and that was a whole way of being. Lots of decisions followed that we didn't understand and we were all--Kinzbrunner and I at least--were Bordeaux heads. We'd ask, "What about maceration, Warren? I mean, why don't you leave the wine in the tank for 30 days after the end of the fermentation?" And he gave us a good answer and then always came back and said, "Well, what do you guys think?" And we always, *always* had a discussion. It was very inspiring to me that instead of top down, we always had "asking": Warren asking the students 'what did we think?' and him accepting our kind of impertinent challenges in a very gracious and wonderful way. Thank you.

Sorry, I missed one thing. There was always the list of stuff to do, like if you can't think of what to do there's always, "Go look at 'The List'." And one thing on it said "Polish the heat exchanger." Polish heat exchanger? We looked at that and laughed. Warren being Polish, we thought it said Polish Heat Exchanger, so we *never* cleaned the heat exchanger. We just thought he wanted us to know it was from Poland. I'm sorry, Warren.

JOHN W

Did you have to use the kidney dialysis machine as a diatomaceous earth dosing pump for filtration?

JOHN K

Unh, unh, jeesh.

Yeah, OK, I yield the floor to my esteemed colleague.

TEGAN

Nicki?

Nicki Pruss

Yes?

TEGAN

You weren't always making wine, Nicki. What were you doing before you started making wine?

NICKI

I come from a healthcare background. I was a foot and ankle doctor and, you know, it takes a lot of years of training to do that. When I came back home to California--I had gone to graduate school in Chicago--so, there's the Chicago...

TEGAN

Where Warren is from.

NICKI

Yes, ...connection. I was, just like, I don't know if I want to hang my shingle out. I just...there was something inside of me that enjoyed the art and the science, but there was...I just felt there was *something* that was not hitting me in my soul. So, I took my bike and packed it up, and went riding in Europe for five months, camping along the way.

I camped in every winegrowing region in France and, of course, I went up to Belgium for the beer. Beermaking had been a hobby, so fermentation science was something that was very interesting to me. And as I was sitting on the Atlantic Coast in Bordeaux, drinking a white Bordeaux--I couldn't tell you the producer at that time--it was like: "This is just delicious!" Right? And I looked around, saw where I was and thought, "You know, I had to come, what, 5,000 miles away from home to realize what it is that I wanted to do: I wanted to grow and be involved in growing grapes and making wine." So, when I came home, I started taking classes at Napa Valley College. I had different teachers there, one of whom happened to be Bob Broman.

Bob Broman was one of Warren's disciples—disciples, "victims"—and one day (I'd been taking classes for about two years) there was [my Professor of Viticulture,] Steve Krebs, who—Oh! and Axel Borg, who is here and Axel's a great guy at UC Davis for anything Wine Library you need to know. Well, anyway, Steve comes out of his office with a college notebook-lined piece of paper and said, "Winery: a grape sampler needed at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars." I read it and said, "Well, you know, I'm at that point in my training, the didactic portion, that I need to jump in and see what it's really like at the larger scale." I went to Bob Broman and asked, "Bob, what do you think? What do you think?" And he was like, "Well, here's the thing. You have a background in science, and everything like that, and that's great. Go! Warren is a task master. Watch him, learn from him. You'll only be there for a harvest." "Well, OK."

What happened was, Michael [Silacci] was in Chile. Michael was the winemaker and happened to be down in Chile, so Brooks Painter was the person that interviewed. I went through at least three interviews to be a grape sampler and then Michael came back. I went into his office for my interview and, as you can imagine, this is September of 1998: Michael's phone's going off, his radio is going off, his landline's going off, and I'm sitting there in his office thinking, "Wow! This is just like being in an OR. You know, there's stuff happening all the time. This is *awesome!*" Michael's asking me all these questions about things like quality and grape growing because both he and Brooks were putting me through the paces before I would ever meet Warren.

I think I went through at least *four* interviews for grape sampler. And one day, I get a phone call and it's Brooks again and he says, 'We'd really like you to come back here for a, you know, another round,' and I just said, 'You know—' At this point in time I was just like, 'OK, I'm probably cutting my own throat,' but I finally just told him, 'You know my background. You know

I have an undergraduate degree. I have a graduate degree. I've specialized training. If you don't think I'm qualified for a grape sampler, please let me know and I'll go back and, you know, do more.' Brooks said, "Let me call you back." And when he called me back, he said, "Come on in," and I became the sampler for the harvest.

Now, how I first met Warren (he probably won't remember this), but Brooks and Michael had me out there sampling the estate vineyards and the grower vineyards. I'm up and down the Napa Valley learning all the different vineyards that Stag's Leap Wine Cellars would buy from for the Napa program. Sampling in the estate vineyards was like a super treat because it's looking at a painter's palette with Cabernet. At the time we also had Merlot and Petit Verdot, so it was this really, *really* special place to go into, to walk into, especially knowing the history of those two vineyards. But what had just happened that day was: I had been out. It was hot. I'd come back to the winery, and I was just dehydrated. I thought, 'I gotta get some ice water.' So I go up to the break room in Building 3 and, you know, you're sweaty, you don't look great...I open up the freezer. I grab some ice out and, of course, a few pieces fall on the floor. I am like, 'Oh, shoot.' I go to look down for the spilled ice, and there are the shoes that I'm looking at *right* now! Oh, dear god, this is my... ! I got up, closed the freezer door and said, "Hello." Warren said, "Hello." "Hi," I said. "I'm Nicki Pruss. I'm your grape sampler this year." And that was my first encounter with him.

TEGAN

When did you meet Michael?

NICKI

I met Michael during the interview process, so we worked together from '98, '99, 2000 and then he left in March of 2001. And, along the way it's interesting, because here I'm sitting between two people that really got me to understand what wine is about. You know, Warren always talks about, "It's the ground, the grape and the guy or the gal." He and Michael weren't hammering you over the head with, 'OK, here, take this test, do this.' It's more like, it becomes, it's almost like part of the DNA of becoming a winemaker. Michael was like, 'Get from behind the desk and out into the vineyard,' because I was all concerned, worrying about, 'I gotta put the work orders together for people.' As I progressed in my career at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, I wrote work orders, then was an immunologist, then assistant winemaker, associate winemaker, and finally got to be winemaker--a long interview process there--but it was a fantastic experience. I don't think if I had gone to any universities (and I would have gone to UC Davis, no disrespect to anybody that's taken that approach), but these two gentlemen give you the world. It's just a phenomenal experience with meeting people, the opportunity to learn, to persevere.

You know, before anything is made, it's made twice. First, it has to be a thought. And then you execute in creating it, in its becoming...a 'thing'. And when you work for Warren, oftentimes you would go up into the office, and on his desk there was a little table pin with a little saying that always said, "Expect it to be pushed back." So you knew--the first time you went in--you knew, whatever it is you're gonna talk about or discuss, it's not gonna be an automatic. There's not

going to be a rubber stamp. You *have to* come in with a persuasive argument, plead your case, and then expect to get pushed back, and then come back at it again.

But, I think in my era, we had just started going into the caves. The cave system was being built under Michael and Warren and when I got there we put in the first vintage of wine. It was after the '98 vintage that I started putting things in. I also got to see Warren make the Round Room, the Great Room, the Foucault's Pendulum—all these amazing things that are all thought-provoking, beautiful things to look at, and they all have symbolism in the making of wine.

One day, when we were in the office having a conversation, talking about the caves and talking about hygiene in the caves, wine hygiene and the hygiene of the facility, Warren said to me, "Do you know what the importance of the caves are?" And I'm thinking, "Is he asking me from a technical standpoint, or is this more philosophic?" So I, you know, I gave my technical answer first. Then he said, "Think about it. The wines go in there in their inchoate state." And I'm thinking, 'Oh, my gosh, are we going back to SAT prep?' Then he said, "That pendulum is going back and forth and it's marking time, and as you walk in, or anybody walks in, that wine is transforming. It's becoming more fully formed." So, I always take that with me, in any wine that I make--or being out, being involved in this whole industry--that it's a continuum. It's something that we're, I think, really lucky to be a part of. And I wear my Stag's Leap pin proudly -- it's part of who I am. So, thank you.

TEGAN

Thank you.

I have one complaint. I didn't get any of Nicki's wine while she was talking. If someone could? OK, I thank you very much.

TEGAN

Françoise?

Françoise Peshon

You are asking about the first day?

TEGAN

No, no.

FRANÇOISE

I don't remember.

TEGAN

That's not what I'm asking you.

FRANÇOISE

I was so nervous.

TEGAN

Well, you remember that!

FRANÇOISE

Yes.

TEGAN

Your first full-time job in the wine industry?

FRANÇOISE

First full-time job, yes.

TEGAN

And how long were you there?

FRANÇOISE

So, I went to UC Davis, spent a year in Bordeaux, and then came back and did a harvest job in the Valley, and then went to work for Warren at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars in '87.

TEGAN

And why did you go there?

FRANÇOISE

Because I was interested in making Cabernet from a single vineyard on estate property. Just the continuum of it, the purity of growing grapes and making wine in one spot. And really, that estate model rang true while I was working in Bordeaux. It's very different around the world. Here, you buy grapes, you custom crush. There's this discontinuity. But estate properties are the things that are of interest to me.

And I wish, before I had gone to work at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars for you, Warren, that I had taken a course in the Socratic method. I just feel, intellectually, I'm so far behind all of you, but I never knew what the Socratic method was. I knew that Warren would come in—his office was on one side, the lab was in the middle, and then the breakroom and the offices. And he would just come in and ask these questions. It's like, 'Where is that coming from?' Just the most esoteric questions.

I was hired by Lynn Penner to be in the lab

TEGAN

Full-time or part-time?

FRANÇOISE

Part-time. So we have this cabinet of all these different fining agents, and one of them was charcoal. We would play around with certain things. We wouldn't always act on them, but we would get to know the tools of winemaking. And one day, Warren saw the charcoal sticks and he started by asking me, "Why is charcoal in this?" "Well," I guessed, "to take out color and aroma." And he asks, "Have you read Pliny's book on husbandry? If a rodent should fall into your wine vat you must retrieve the rodent, burn it and add its ashes to the wine." I'm all, "Oh, my God."

But he was such an amazing teacher. He didn't really, always know the answer, and he wasn't interested in the answer. He was just interested in the dialogue. Yes, I wished I had worked for you, Warren, when I was in my forties, or now, fifties. I would've known so much more.

WARREN

You would have had so many more questions.

FRANÇOISE

I know.

TEGAN

Your daughter, [Isabelle Straka] who's here tonight, is now a winemaker?

FRANÇOISE

Yes.

TEGAN

What have you learned that you have been able to teach her in dealing with the wine industry as a whole and kind of navigating women in the wine business?

FRANÇOISE

Hmmm. Well, first, she came to a lot of winemaking jobs early on, because there *are* early mornings and I wanted to expose both of the kids to how much fun the wine industry is; just the natural ebbs and flows of the season, and how you mark time. So I think she really enjoyed that. Being Catholic, it was always this, "fruit of the vine, work of human hands." And I think it's the best job in the world. What I learned from Warren, though, is that wine is a thing of beauty, and hopefully I've instilled that in my daughter.

One of the best lectures I heard from Warren was about the golden mean, the golden ratio. You have excesses and deficiencies, and what's in the middle is the harmony. And once we, as winemakers, find that harmony, wine is *the* most beautiful product.

JOHN W

Warren, you never told me any of this stuff.

WARREN
Oh, really?

FRANÇOISE
Oh, and the one about the Nautilus, is that in that book, too?

WARREN
No.

FRANÇOISE
Because I'm totally going to Amazon that one.

TEGAN
Well, thank you very much.

FRANÇOISE
Sure.
Don't you want to know any fun stories?

TEGAN
Yes! Go, girl.

FRANÇOISE
The most fun story was Stephen [Warren's son], who came out to the crush pad very early in the morning, and he had hoisted up his VW on that big gondola hoist. Do you remember that? It was awesome. We went into work under it. I wish I took pictures of that.

The attention to detail was unbelievable. And not just in wine, in everything: the Tasting Room floor in... that was Building 3, right? There was just... it was flagstone from Arizona, right? And how you and Barbara had arranged the tile so that all of the veins kind of flowed.

WARREN
Yeah. Mainly Barbara.

FRANÇOISE
Mainly Barbara? Yeah, you were a dream team.

WARREN
She got tennis elbow from carrying around all the tiles, asking, "Where do they go best?" Yeah. She did that in the break room as well.

TEGAN

Well, thank you.

Michael, are you ready?

Michael Silacci

Always.

TEGAN

So, the final panelist...Warren had told me that you were his most experienced winemaker when you went to work for him, and that you worked the longest. And one other thing: what was your last day like working for Warren?

MICHAEL

Ah, it was very painful. When I told Warren I was leaving, I think I said that I would give 10, 8 or 10, weeks' notice. And I would make sure that all the blends, well, that all the blends were done, that everything was...Actually, I told him, "You and I will go through denial for a couple of weeks, and then we'll tell everyone else, and they will go through denial for a couple of weeks, and then we can get everything together, and we'll wrap everything up." And I had never worked so many hours as those last two weeks. I left my desk at Stag's Leap on March 4th, which was a Sunday, at one in the morning and I was at work at Opus that same morning at eight o'clock.

I went back to Stag's Leap Wine Cellars every Wednesday for about eight more weeks to finish up all the blends because I didn't want to leave them undone. The last day was very hard. It had taken the eight weeks of going back every Wednesday to really come to grips, to come to terms with my leaving. It was a transition. I became a butterfly.

TEGAN

So, a similar question as I asked Warren: Can you talk about the difference between Warren and André Tchelistcheff? You worked with André before Warren?

MICHAEL

Yeah. André was, you know, André. First, he came back to Beaulieu [where I was the viticulturist and enologist] to consult, and he was with me a half-day a week. We'd go to the vineyard. He always wanted to start at BV-5, which he had struggled to get the Board of Beaulieu, the family, to purchase. And so, I always went there with him. I would actually pick him up at home where he and I would have coffee and biscotti.

TEGAN

For context, can you tell us what BV-5 is now?

MICHAEL

Oh, BV-5: it's across the street from Acacia in...sorry, it's in Carneros because André believed in Carneros. So, anyway, I would go have coffee and biscotti at his house and we'd talk for about 40 minutes on what the two of us would do to make Beaulieu great again. Then we'd go to the vineyard. The first couple of times he was very complimentary: "Oh, this is really fantastic. You are doing a great job." And then I remember at BV-5, I stopped the pickup truck and turned it off. This was at the end of our session, and I said, "I don't think they're paying you a lot of money to be telling me what I'm doing well. I think you are supposed to be critiquing me."

And so, we started to talk about that, and André asked, "Do you want me to say whatever I really think?" I said, "Yes, of course." And he said, "Do you know what that means?" "Yes." He then asked, "When I am done, will we still be friends?" I said, "Yes, of course." André goes, "So I can say whatever I want, and at the end of every session we will still be friends?" "Yes." And he held his hand out, and he shook my hand. After that, it was like--I don't know if you have seen "*Little Big Man*," the film--but it was Custer going down and being buried. I mean, André would just pick everything apart. And he was very critical, but always, he was very direct.

Working for Warren? I had ten interviews with Warren. The shortest was two hours long, the longest was four. And I had three take-home assignments, one of which was to—he gave me three [SLWC] wines: a bottle of Cask 23, a bottle of Sauvignon Blanc, and a bottle of Reserve Chardonnay. Then he said, "Take these home and taste them and write a report on what you would have done differently during the growing season, during the harvest, and making of the wine and aging, to have made the wines better." So, I mean, that's something that you either just totally freak out at or you have some fun with. But I made somewhat of a mistake. I thought, 'I should give these some context.' George Schepler [Opus One Co-CEO] had already given me a bottle of Opus One, and Pahlmeyer was the hot Chardonnay at the time, so I bought a bottle of Pahlmeyer. I had already tasted the Sauvignon Blanc with our group—a competitive tasting—so I didn't feel I needed to do much with that. So, I compared the Pahlmeyer with the Reserve Chardonnay and Opus One with Cask 23.

Because Warren had said, "Yeah, taste these wines, and anytime tomorrow would be great," I turned in my report the next morning and waited...Warren looked at the report and said, "What is this?" He was very upset with me because I had actually written about Opus One and Pahlmeyer. He said, "Why in the world would you have tasted these wines? I didn't ask you to do that. That wasn't the assignment." I said, "Well, I thought you would like to know how they compared and contrasted to wines that are supposed to be very good as well and would make me appreciate yours better." He seemed to feel, he *seemed* to be OK with that... but not completely. And you know, Nicki's right about that, "Expect things to be pushed back."

I did find out something fairly early with Warren and that is: He loves puns and he has a great sense of humor. [The COO] Randy Pace had tried for years to convince Warren to put the Napa Valley Cabernet into a punt bottle. Warren had always pushed back. Randy also wanted for the winery to try tin capsules and Warren always pushed back. We had happened to have been together with Karen MacNeil earlier in the week, and Warren was prompted to make a

reference to Karen, the reference, he said, that Aristotle had made between height and beauty. So I wrote that in the report--trying to convince Warren to allow us to have bottles with foil capsules. Warren got to the part about the relationship. I then said, "You made this reference to Karen about the relationship between height and beauty that was from Aristotle, and I think these wines will be much more handsome and more beautiful on the shelf if they're a little taller." Warren started laughing, and he was laughing so hard he took out his pen and he signed his approval. He approved the whole thing. I went back by Randy's office and I plopped the orders down on his desk, and just left. He comes running out, calling: "What did you do?" I told him, "You have to have a sense of humor. Warren has a great sense of humor, so he approved it all."

TEGAN

Sweet. And you're well-known in the Napa Valley for mentoring a lot of folks who have come through and worked for you. Is there anything that you have taken from your time at Stag's Leap that you try to pass on to others?

MICHAEL

Yes: Make sure there is water around the island.

TEGAN

Can you elaborate?

MICHAEL

I was basically also doing vineyard management. I had started in March of 2001 and Warren had said, "You know, I know you've done viticulture and you started making wine at King Estate [in Oregon], but you're only going to be doing winemaking here. You'll be involved with some principles of viticulture and strategic planning, but you're not going to be involved in the vineyards." I had said, "OK, that's cool." Then in August of that year, our vineyard manager left. So, I took over and then brought three different candidates to Warren that I thought were exceptional. But Warren would always find something; he'd find a crack in everyone. So, I had to think he was happy with probably two things about me: I loved viticulture, I loved vines, and I also thought he was happy that I was working well with the team. Also, he didn't have to pay that second paycheck!

John W

None of us mentioned that part.

MICHAEL

Anyway, one time we started doing something a little bit differently in the vineyard and I went up to the house and Warren asked me, "Is everything going well?" And I said, "Yes." He then asked, "Did you explain this and that and the other thing?" "Yes, I did." "Well, is there water

around the island?” “What do you mean?” And Warren explained, “Have you gone back and made sure that they understood what you asked them to do?” I said, “Hmm, I’ll go check.” And I came back and said, “You were right. It was a peninsula!” So, I use that a lot, you know? Make sure everyone understands why, how, and repeat it back to you, and then go back over it again and make sure it was understood.

WARREN

Since it’s not enough to say, “It’s an island.” You have to say, “It’s an island completely surrounded by water.” If you can’t get to that point, you’re not there.

MICHAEL

If you grew up in Mont Saint-Michel you could be in trouble.

TEGAN

Warren, is there anything you’d like to close with, anything you’d like to say?

WARREN

I’m very proud of these people. They’re all, they all live wine, they all—the hand part, the head part, and the heart part are all together.

TEGAN

Thank you. Now if there are any questions for any of the panelists from the students out there? Would anyone like to ask any one of these panelists a question?

DIANA

We need the name of the book and its author that John W mentioned

TEGAN

Creating Classic Wines in the Napa Valley by Ruth Teiser. She did oral histories, not just on wine, but kind of on all things California. There are a great many that have been printed if you really want to get geeky with Axel over there. There are oral histories going back to the Martinis and the Sebastianis. They are fascinating histories to read.

WARREN

A University of California publication?

TEGAN

Yes. And in the Napa Valley Wine Library Collection at the Saint Helena Public Library. Part of a series. She [Ruth Teiser] is truly amazing. She is really California’s top oral historian.

Any questions for any of the panelists?

JOHN W

They are all so shy.

TEGAN

I know.

JOHN K

Don't be afraid of Warren. We all made it. We survived.

QUESTIONER

Indistinct question for all the panelists: Can you tell us about how you have mentored others?

TEGAN

Let's go down the line.

JOHN W

I think that's a great question. What I'll say about this is that most of the wine in this valley is actually made by hand by our Mexican-American community. Let's be honest: all our cellar people, all our trained staff, all the people who work in our vineyards. My mentorship has turned towards working with that community.

My cellar master, Pablo, for 38 years, is now our production winemaker. His daughter is now our assistant winemaker. A young Hispanic man who was working in our vineyard crew I sent to Napa Valley College and he's now an associate winemaker with us. So, I'm working mostly with that community, and I can't even tell you. I think anyone here who is in the wine business understands how hugely important it is, their role here. We need to elevate them, and mentor them, that community, so that's a particular part of my deal.

JOHN K

I have kind of an opposite story. My mentoring period was for the 13 vintages I worked at Newton Vineyard in Saint Helena. A lot of my colleagues--this is pretty early days--but a lot of my colleagues would find somebody, often from the field, who were part of the barrel-washing team, and they'd say, 'I've got a future for you. Come in here.' And then, you get a stable crew, and you keep that crew, as John has, for 30-something years.

I took the opposite view and said that I would like to have kids from...I needed a seasonal crew at Newton of four or five people, so every year I would go over to Davis and put the shingle up and get four or so people to come over. So I had an absolutely unstable cellar crew and I would keep people for just one season. They were all assigned: 'OK, you're going in the cellar for Chardonnay; you're the vineyard person; you're the Cabernet, etc.' And then we had, I made a big deal out of having, the lunch table where everything would stop. We'd all come up to the office, somebody had to go in the cellar and get a wine and try to surprise me with "What do you think this is, boss man?" And then we would debate it ...and I would embarrass myself.

So I had the pleasure of each year for 13 years of having three or four bright kids from Davis who would come. And I spent a lot of time...unlike with Warren, when we would, John and I were like, 'Can't you just tell us something about winemaking?' 'No, we're just going to prune the roses,' like André, or, you know, 'Take the kids to school.'

TEGAN

More linoleum.

JOHN K

Yeah. Anyway, so, I made a big deal out of going through what we did every day, of having the kids, the Davis students, get the full explanation--even if it made me late for dinner. So that was fun and I have a whole family tree of wonderful people who have gone on to take the secrets with them and make their own lives.

TEGAN

If you [meaning the audience] stay around long enough, in 20, 30 years, you'll want to do this too.

JOHN K

I hope so.

NICKI

I think, based on having a medical background, when you train in that field, in those fields, a lot of it is, "See one, do one, teach one." And so I came into the wine industry and grape-growing with that kind of mindset. But I think it really focused, working with Michael and Warren. You always had interns that wanted to come from around the world to work at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars. Pretty much just like people want to come to Opus to work because it's like really great vineyards and attention to detail. So you would go through and interview those folks and see what their interests were, and where they wanted to go. But you always take the time with your own team.

I would take guys, I would grab a couple of guys out of the cellar and go, "Come walk in the vineyard with me. Let's go spit in our hands." We would each take a block, like in Fay [Vineyard], go from one side to the other, everybody in a different row, and I would tell them, "I want you to sample the berries, chew them up, and spit the seeds into your hands. When we get to the end, we're all going to hold the hands up (I learned that one from Michael), and then look at the ripeness of the seeds." So, by showing the people that you work with, as John [W] was saying, say you have so many people that are—we had a lot of people from Michoacán that worked in the cellar. They are your family, you know? They're the people that are going to get you through the hard times during harvest.

And when I would have the academic interns coming in, I'd say, "Look at all these people around you. This is not their first dance. This is not their first rodeo. They're a wealth of information." So, I think in terms of: You have mentees that come to you, people that come to you for maybe a season--but you have the people that are around you every single day that you can help just by imparting a reason why you are doing something. And you learn so much from them because you teach them to learn, to use their nose: "If you smell something off, come get me. If I haven't smelled it walking through the room, come get me."

This is as much why making grape wine is a team sport. It's not just one person. It's everybody that's involved in creating these sweet wines that you see in front of you.

FRANÇOISE

My experience is a little bit different in that I don't have a winery or my own place, so I mostly work with individuals that are on estate properties. And how I can mentor them—it all starts in the vineyard. So, time in the vineyard, and just to be able to have them coax and express what that vineyard site wants to do, first and foremost. And the winemaking should be secondary.

So, Warren taught us with the SLV and Fay [Vineyards] that there is a purity and a beauty in the natural that should be expressed. And wines are a thing of beauty, and they *are* to be, since wine is to be consumed not just tasted. I always look for that balance, that freshness. And these are all ways that we didn't used to talk about, but we're talking about now, because we've strayed a little bit. But to be able to pass on that idea, that wine is a thing of beauty—what more is there?

TEGAN

Michael?

MICHAEL

So, you know, when you go to work every day, you have a plan of what you're going to do but it never actually follows through? So, my interviews, I'm the last to interview candidates and I have a Zen garden. There's a couple of people in here who have been through this [interview]. In the Zen garden are some rocks--those are obstacles. You have the rake, and it's 'a period of time in your life.' There are temples that are goals. The first thing I ask the person is to explain--just that. I say, "Do a timeline of your life. I want you to identify obstacles, challenges that you had. How did you overcome them? There's a bridge that is like the somebody who gets your resumé from the bottom of the stack to the top. That doesn't get you the job, but it gets you noticed. And then, goals." And to watch people, the look in their eyes, the way that they explain this to me when I come back is, it's an exceptional experience that I go through.

I think that if mentors don't learn perhap--more from the people they're mentoring--they probably haven't learned their job. And then, from that, you know, we hire interns. Then the internship is just, well, that's the long interview for me. And then it seems, Opus seems stable,

but there's a constant evolution. And it's really cool to watch an intern go through an internship, to put them in a position in which they are always challenged. We challenge them to go a little bit, reach a little bit further than they think they can. And all the workers have to, whether it's in the vineyard or the cellar or the lab, they have to teach each other, and make sure that...The best way to learn is to actually teach somebody what you learned.

TEGAN

Thank you

MICHAEL

People go through that.

TEGAN

It's amazing. And Abe was also an intern the same year Nicki started at Stag's Leap. Another grape sampler at times, right?

ABE

I was sometimes a subordinate grape sampler.

TEGAN

Right. They sent you to Cookie's place, right? Nicki and I talked about that. You've mentored plenty of people, not just in education—in life, and in wine. Do you want to add anything?

ABE

My somewhat academic talk was a gesture to the tradition that I feel like I inherited from John [K], who inherited it from Warren, and it all flows from Saint John's in a very interesting way. And this is how I would, in a way, sum it up, and it is exactly what I'm trying to pass on. And that is that the activity that we share with the people that we work with has two sides, and one side is constant inquiry. There's no laying down of the rules. There's no memorizing things and spitting them back. And all of the anecdotes about Warren point to that. There's another side that's very interesting and that is also part of the Saint John's tradition, and that is athleticism. The whole thing is a struggle and a contest, and it involves your body as much as it does your wine...your mind! And one of the most interesting things I learned from John on the crush pad at Luna [Vineyards] was that it's a seminar until you have to finish the race, and then you finish the fucking race. That's what I pass on.

TEGAN

Yes, sir?

QUESTIONER

The one word that I haven't heard too much tonight, but we would all agree with, is Warren was a visionary. He saw it early on, before anybody else: the potential, the obstacles, etc. What we

have done before has brought us here, and we are incredibly successful. I'd like to hear what Warren says about what the future brings us?

WARREN

Well, let me be brief. It will have different challenges, but there will be challenges to keep the activity of making something that expresses completeness in the way that there's nothing else like it. And to keep it will be, there will be challenges. Completeness is something, as humans, we don't possess. But we can possess it somehow in things like wine. And, if they are well-made, with the balance that was talked about, the harmony, the euphony of parts, they all take a very great skill with the hands, but they're worthy. That experience is worthy of the challenges, so keep your eyes open for the challenges.

TEGAN

There was another question in the back, earlier on. Did someone else have a question back there? No? Hands?

Well, I would like to thank Warren for all you have done for the world of wine. I would like to thank you for bringing all these people together. I am very honored that I could even sit at the table and be part of it. And thank all the panelists and thank the Napa Valley Wine Library. Diana, thank you for all your hard work that you always do to put these seminars together, that I think the value of is indescribable, so thank you.

DIANA

I understand far better now why you are such a pleasure to work with. Thank you, and all the panelists we have here. I feel very lucky to be here and I hope you all do, too. Thank you.

TEGAN

And I believe there are still tickets for the Wine Library tasting this Sunday at Silverado Resort and Spa in Napa. And if you haven't been, it is the best tasting in America. It really is. Now, I believe we are allowed to mingle for a little bit.