

# EPISODE # 11 ANKIDA RIDGE VINEYARDS

## SPEAKERS

Fred Reno, Dennis Vrooman, Nathan Vrooman, Christine Vrooman

### **Fred Reno**

I'm delighted today to have the Vrooman family as my guests, with me are Christine, Dennis, and Nathan Vrooman, the winemaker. We're here at their vineyard in the Blue Ridge Mountains at 1800 feet, and in my opinion, they are accomplishing the impossible in Virginia, producing Pinot Noir that shows the potential to be one of the best from around the world. So, congratulations, I am uber impressed with what I see here. I really appreciate the time, all three of you have. So let me start really quickly here with Dennis and Christine. How did you get the idea to come up here, sell your practice, you know, Veterinary Hospital in Virginia Beach, and come up here in the mountains and produce wine. What was behind this? How did this get driven?

### **Christine**

Well, when we purchased this property in 1999, there was no hint or no intention of planting a vineyard, we did not purchase it for that reason. It was going to be our retirement retreat. And then as luck, fate, Destiny, serendipity, whatever you want to call it, it happened when we finally got electricity on this property. A few years later, we showed the excavator where we wanted to have our house built up higher on the mountain at 1800, 1900 feet. And we went back to Virginia Beach, we had staked out a spot for the house, went back to Virginia Beach, came back a few weeks later. And he had cleared that area properly. But he also took it upon himself to clear another quarter acre below. He felt that that was going to be a better place for our house. So, he took it upon himself to clear that little spot of forest. And if he hadn't done that, we wouldn't be sitting here looking and talking with one another. Because we would have never been so crazy as to think we could plant a vineyard up on the rocky mountain side. So, after it was cleared, we played with the idea of planting an apple orchard or Christmas trees. By then we had been starting to taste some really good Virginia wine then. Then around 2005 Veritas produced a beautiful Cab Franc. We were so excited over the possibility of making and growing fine wine up here on this elevation. And it was such a unique terrain and location, altitude, everything so different from all the other vineyards. Most of the other vineyards in Virginia, that we thought, well, if we could plant something that is not planted down in the lower levels. What would that be? Because it was going to be a passion project. It was not something that like let's start another big business because we had already done that with our

veterinary practice for many years, we didn't really have any intention or plans of doing that. So, we played with the idea of planting a vineyard and we got Lucie Morton up here. She's a renown Ampelographer and viticulturist. We asked her what we could do up here that not everybody else is doing in Virginia. We don't want to plant more of what everybody else is growing. Because this site is so unique. And it's a total passion project. It has nothing to do with profitability. Right? So, when she was up here, she said, you know, if Pinot Noir could grow anywhere in Virginia, this would be the place that it would grow.

**Fred Reno**

Brilliant.

**Christine**

Yeah. And what that is like of course, Pinot Noir would be the ultimate unique grape to plant. Because this wasn't that many years after Sideways anyway. We did not want to plant some Merlot up there.

**Fred Reno**

Well prior to this Dennis and Christine, where did your love of wine start? Was it just birthed up here.

**Christine**

Well, we drank wine, okay, we're not wine aficionados, or we didn't have a passion for the wine industry. We knew nothing about viticulture. Nathan knew nothing about winemaking. So, we just took little baby steps as we entered this world and learned as we went, it was a matter of a lot of fortuitous things happening so that we were able to successfully grow and raise these vines and Nathan made these wonderful wines.

**Fred Reno**

Nathan because I know your time is short here. When did you then come into the family business? And what made you believe you could be a winemaker?

**Nathan**

Well, I was actually living out in Colorado at the time when the vines were planted. You know, I have memories of the planting happening, and we made it a family ordeal. I think it was Mother's Day 2008 and we decided to go ahead and start planting. We had relatives in town and Dad's Dad was here. And that's one of my most vivid memories of the whole family being here and everyone just kind of going out and working on planting the vines together. The initial goal was to plant the whole vineyard. And I think we planted like, 50 vines. Yeah. So, then I went back to Denver and was just working out there living, a young, professional sort of lifestyle, working in the finance industry behind Excel spreadsheets all day, going to happy

hours early. So, I was living the good life. And I guess in 2009, late 2009, it was just me and my parents and were up at their house talking about the looming vintage. 2010 which was going to be our first vintage. I think this is probably December, we were talking so, we're going to be harvesting you know, the following August we're just wondering what we're going to do with the fruit. Are we going to sell the grapes, or were we going, you know, to hire someone to contract, a wine maker to make the wine for us. But ultimately, I think it was just one conversation, one discussion that we had where we decided that is was best for us to just go ahead and figure out how to how to make the wine and just do it. Just like we did with the vineyard, we figure out how to do it and make it happen. And between us and whatever resources we have, we just figured out a way to just to get it done. So, that was at the point where I sort of volunteered, I was going to be moving back from Denver to the central Virginia Charlottesville area. So, I said, Yeah, I'll take that task on and, I volunteered to learn how to make wine.

**Fred Reno**

Well, I see you got hooked up with Matthieu Finot from King Family Vineyards. Were you spending time over there or were you learning from him?

**Nathan**

Yeah, well at the time, we decided we're going to make the wine. I just thought I was going to be the winemaker, you know, in training. We hired Matthieu as our consultant.

**Christine**

We actually sent an Email, not having any idea what he would say. We said would you be interested, he got back like almost immediately, saying I would love to do that.

**Nathan**

So, a fun project. Matthieu works with a lot of different people. You know, he's a really influential guy in the industry. He works with a lot of different people and a lot of different grapes, but at the time he wasn't really working with Pinots. I think it was a really fun opportunity for him, you know, a fun challenge for him. He came up here and looked at the site. I remember that day he brought a bottle of Chardonnay that he had made to show us what he can do, and we all thought it was great interview. We said, okay, let's do it. So, at that point, I started working with Matthieu as far as just getting to gather the supplies and all that we were going to need. One thing we didn't have was, we didn't have a winery to make it in, minor detail.

**Fred Reno**

So yeah, so where do you make your first vintage?

**Nathan**

Yeah, so what happened was I started to sign up for classes at PVCC, Piedmont Valley Community College. They've got a pretty good enology and viticulture program. At the very first class, a winery design and equipment class at Jefferson vineyards. I met Rachel Stinson and Scott Stinson, father, daughter duo, they were just building a winery in Whitehall. So, we got to talking with Rachel and Scott, coincidentally, they were using Matthieu as their consultant. They were using Lucie as their vineyard consultant so that all the stars kind of aligned.

**Fred Reno**

Yeah, very serendipitous for sure.

**Nathan**

Yeah, so then we ended up bringing the wine, the Pinot Noir up there to be made. And then Rachel and I got to know each other.

**Fred Reno**

And then you got married.

**Nathan**

Yeah, ultimately, Rachel and I, we became a couple learning this whole process together. And she had as much experience as I had going into it, which was none. We worked really closely with Matthieu, Rachel and I worked very closely together. Long story short, we're now married with two little girls. Yeah, it's a really cool story. So that's kind of how my role was developed.

**Fred Reno**

So now your vineyard itself as I understand it looking at my notes, is a little over a five acres estate. And what is the Mountain Terrace vineyard?

**Dennis**

We planted a very limited amount of Chardonnay because we wanted the grapes of Burgundy. Little did we realize that the clone that we planted of chardonnay was probably the most scant producer in the world. So now we realize that we're going to need to make more than two or three bottles. Get another source. Mountain Terrace owners were friends of ours, approximately five miles from here and were growing at that point, Cabernet Sauvignon, and the Chardonnay and so we made arrangements to buy part of their production.

**Christine**

Amherst County as well.

**Dennis**

We want a little different site in terms of exposure, somewhat the same soils, not the same elevation. The flavor profile of their grapes was different than ours, which actually turned out to be a good combination. Now, we only worked with them for three or four years. Now we're getting our own production in place.

**Nathan**

Which still is not enough.

**Dennis**

Yeah,

**Fred Reno**

because you're leasing part of this.

**Dennis**

Yeah.

**Christine**

Yeah, we're leasing there our vines in that vineyard, but now with our second planting we have, everything can be from our own estate.

**Fred Reno**

I was going ask you a question. You touched on it, Dennis, So what are the clones that you planted here? For Chardonnay and then Pinot Noir? I'm curious.

**Dennis**

Well, the clone for Chardonnay was Tablas Creek, Nova Vine clone called Petit Venuse, which is a I think a Dijon clone. That was the one bottle of Chardonnay that I drank early that I liked. Mostly I didn't care much for Chardonnay, but that particular clone appealed to me. I don't think it was the clone, I think was the way it was made. So that was what we ended up with our initial Chardonnay. Now since then, we've replanted in the newer vineyard, another Dijon clone 9406, which has this?

**Nathan**

I don't remember.

**Christine**

I don't even remember what it was

**Nathan**

in the original vineyard. It was 667, 776.

**Dennis**

I'm talking about Chardonnay.

**Nathan**

Oh, Chardonnay. Oh, yeah, sorry.

**Dennis**

So that's got a similar minerality to it, that we like about this petit venuse. The clones of Pinot we started off with was 115,114,667 and 777. for no good reason other than that was a suggestion for Lucie Morton, we knew very little about what we were getting into at that point. Since then, with a new vineyard, we planted additional clones with the idea that it would lead to greater complexity in the flavor profile.

**Christine**

However, we still planted more 667,777,115

**Fred Reno**

Well, it will be interesting as you chart this, from my experience with Pinot Noir, the clonal selection ends up having a mutating effect once it gets in its own terroir, in its own field, it starts to take on the vineyard character. It starts expressing its original clonal expression at first, and then it really kind of mutates and gets its own identity. It'll be really interesting to follow that progress.

**Dennis**

Yeah. It would be nice to have a lot more experience with Pinot Noir. So that we had a broader base of knowledge. We're sort of learning as we go on the fly. And so, things that we think we're learning or we're finding out, we're not actually true. It's really been a super learning experience. And at the same time, we're opening up the possibility, I think, for other people to deal with the same type of stuff. I think that's our goal or at least the thought in the back of our minds.

**Fred Reno**

Well, there's not a lot as we both know, there's not a lot of Pinot Noir planted. There's not a lot of Pinot Noir being produced in Virginia right now. And that's why you stand such head and shoulders above everyone in Virginia. Not just everybody here, because it must have been quite an honor to be invited to the IPNC see back in 2016. Talk about that experience a little bit. How did that come to be?

**Christine**

I got an email one morning, and they said that the deadline is tomorrow, we haven't heard from you. And I'm thinking, what are they wanting from us? We'd never received the invitation. They sent it to our rural route street or rural route address or something. So, I never received anything. I emailed back and they said, Well, yes, we've invited you to be one of the, you know, one of the vintners at the IPNC this year. It was a remarkable honor and experience. I believe we were the only vineyard outside the west coast in the United States, there might have been one from Michigan, I wasn't sure. But we were the only Pinot producer in the United States outside of the three West Coast states and the rest of the world.

**Fred Reno**

I'm just curious, did you ever find out how they got tuned to you and they sent you an invitation?

**Christine**

We got so much press. I think before up to that point. Dave McIntyre was totally surprised right out of the gate. When we did the wine bloggers conference in 2011. The wine had been in the bottle for seven weeks. And we went to it because it was too big of an opportunity to miss. And if they understood that as freshly bottled, you know, just understand that. So, we were standing at our table, Nathan and I were there, and it was 110 degrees, this big tent, there was a little fan up above behind us. Dave McIntyre came up and was tasting the Chardonnay, coming back, and bringing people back. He had Jancis Robinson back, Eric Asimov. All of these amazing wine writers kept coming back to our table. I said to Nathan, it must be, they need to get some fresh air from the fan. But they were so interested. For us it was right out of the gate. Dave then wrote an article the next day in the Washington Post or blog, and it was like, the Pinot Noir that wowed the crowd. I was like, Oh, I guess it's good. We had no idea. We're just taking the risk and going out there and showing the wine.

**Nathan**

We liked it. We knew it was good.

**Fred Reno**

That's fantastic. So, Nathan, as long as I have you here still, question for you. I understand why you would do this. But talk to me a little bit about Rockgarden, the Rouge and the Vert, what was the inspiration behind that?

**Nathan**

Yeah, that was the problem we had was we were opening a tasting room, and we just had the two wines, not very much of them, they were of a higher price point, wine that we wanted to

establish from the beginning. So, we thought it would be interesting to have a second label made from you know, kind of like at the time, whatever. You know, whatever is out there. It was just kind of a free for all, but it gave us the artistic freedom to do whatever we wanted with it. In order to differentiate these wines from Ankida Ridge, we wanted to do another label because it wasn't made from Ankida Ridge. It wasn't made from Pinot or from chardonnay. So, we did a second label and called it Rockgarden.

**Fred Reno**

That's clever, Rockgarden.

**Nathan**

Yeah, when I was living out west, I was really big into mountain biking. And one of the obstacles when you're riding a mountain bike is a rock garden. So, you kind of come up on a bed of rocks, and you run over it, you go around it, you do whatever you have to do to get through the obstacle. So, I wanted to have a sort of a cycling, somehow mix that into the name. And also, it worked out because out here at this site, it's basically a garden full of rocks, there's rocks everywhere. It just made sense as it was a great name for that brand

**Fred Reno**

So, From a stylistic standpoint, you decided to make a white wine that was somewhat in the profile of a Vinho Verde. Where did that come from?

**Nathan**

I was actually talking with Matthieu, like, what would be cool and be an interesting project to add, because we started out with a port wine. I've always loved port. So, I thought it'd be really fun to make a port and then a Bordeaux blend just because the grapes are available. They're easy to find in the state. We needed a lower priced easy drinking white. And Matthieu was like how about a Vinho Verde style? And I said yeah, that's sounds great. So that's what led us down that path. We just sourced the Vidal Blanc and picked it early with high acid. And when we bottle it, we put a little bit of a sparging stone of co2 in the tank a couple days before cooling the wine down. And it just adds a tiny bit of effervescence to the wine, and it filled that spot that we were missing in our in our lineup.

**Fred Reno**

Of course, I always ask everybody, and I remember mine. I'll start with Nathan here. What is the bottle of wine you've had in your life that you were like, Oh, that's it.

**Nathan**

Oh, geez.



**Fred Reno**

Is there one you can point to? Sometimes there may not be? What was yours?

**Nathan**

I'm just trying to think a couple years ago, I drank a Sicilian wine. I don't know what it was. And I assume you're talking about wines other than the ones that we make.

**Fred Reno**

But that's okay if your wines are like the one.

**Nathan**

Well, a few years ago, I had a Sicilian wine that was so interesting. I don't know the name of it. But it was just so interesting. It had so many like really beautiful floral characteristics on the nose. The taste was just a lot of interesting spice and tea, and it was a really interesting bottle of wine.

**Fred Reno**

Christine.

**Christine**

So, I remember the table we were sitting at, I remember where the window was. It was this gigantic farm in Ithaca in the early 70s. And we were there for our anniversary, I think or my birthday. I can't remember that. I think it was my birthday. But it was called Ch Lafite Rothschild. I think it was \$22 and we had it with seafood. And that was that moment that wine and food. Oh my gosh. I mean, so clearly. And I wish I bought a few more bottles.

**Fred Reno**

Do you remember the vintage?

**Christine**

Well, this was the early 70s. So, it was I guess maybe the late 60s? I'm not sure. I don't remember that.

**Fred Reno**

Well, Dennis, I assume you were at that table.

**Dennis**

Yeah, I was. But she wouldn't let me drink any. However, my ah ha moment is a little different. It was in Ithaca at Cornell, and it was a bottle of Ripple. I drank too much of it and my aha moment was Aha, I don't want to do this again.

**Fred Reno**

Well, I've had both those moments. So, I can relate.

**Nathan**

I remember when I had just turned 21. I think we came up here and stayed over at the Bakers. My dad and I had a bonding moment, you know, with steak and a bottle of red wine. I couldn't drink the red wine. I hated it. I was too young in my in my drinking career.

**Christine**

He was in the beer stage.

**Nathan**

Yeah, yeah, but I remember that.

**Fred Reno**

What do you find different? If anything about growing Gamay. I know its young, I think this is a fourth leaf maybe, for you. But what do you find different about that versus Pinot Noir?

**Nathan**

It's hard to say. But my opinion is that it seems to bear a lot of fruit. Or at least the few plants that we have about 300 vines planted, and you know, they just would bear a lot a lot of fruit. Other than that, it seemed pretty similar. It seems to ripen a little bit later than the Pinot but that's probably because there was so much fruit on these vines. My opinion is it's very similar

**Christine**

Grape cluster, I've never seen Gamay growing before, but the grape cluster is bigger. It's looser, more pulp to skin. Rather than, you know, in the Pinot Noir, there's more skin to pulp ratio. So, I was just impressed with the quantity of clusters. And the size of the clusters and the size of the berries are a little bit bigger, they weren't huge, but they were bigger than those of the Pinot Noir.

**Fred Reno**

Have you made wine yet from the Gamay?

**Christine**

We're making it is this first vintage?

**Dennis**

We made a little five-gallon jug of nouveau style last year in a variable capacity tank that held 50 pounds of grapes that we ended up in the tasting room to let people taste.

**Fred Reno**

But 2020 would be the first vintage

**Nathan**

we have a barrel of Gamay. A Cru and then about 10 cases worth of the nouveau. This was my parents' project. You know it's a project they took on their own and did all the research on the carbonic maceration and did everything on their own. I supply the yeast and, a few supplies here and there, but It was a fun project for them.

**Fred Reno**

So, Dennis, Christine you are the winemakers for the Beaujolais here.

**Christine**

It was fun learning about carbonic maceration. Because really, we didn't know anything about it. And when we decided, we were going to do it last year. We said it's just a little bit of berries. Let's just go ahead and do it. Let's see, there's something about carbonic maceration what is that? I pick up the phone, goggle carbonic maceration And I started doing a lot of research and just kept doing more and more research. It was practice, a little bit last year and then felt we have more grapes. So, we were able to use a regular full size variable capacity tank,

**Nathan**

which is like 300 liters,

**Christine**

Yeah, fill it with co2, and just let it sit. And then we're doing a partial carbonic, we ended up doing alcoholic fermentation when it was about halfway through. And then we did the regular yeast and alcohol fermentation with the rest. And then I actually stomped the grapes. And then we added the yeast and started fermenting in one ton/ 2-ton bins with about 10 inches of fruit?

**Fred Reno**

Well, because I don't, and I admittedly, don't quite understand it myself, because I've never been a farmer, although I love growing tomatoes and everything. Talk to me about your sustainable farming practices. Describe what does that mean? If it can be even explained,

**Christine**

It's a mindset. I think more than anything, that one of the most important things for us in that vineyard is to maintain as much balance in nature as possible. This a French phrase "raison de

lutter". And that translates to the reason to struggle. So, you never give up that desire to spray as little as you can. You always have the desire to do as much as you can, to the to the canopy to keep it healthy. We brought in chickens to help eat the insects to diminish some of the insect population. We have cats to help with a rodent population. Sheep that does some fertilizing and massages the soil and don't use herbicides. But we wait until the leaves starting to c'nest. And then we put them in the vineyard, and they keep everything clean down, like food to budbreak and were trying different ways to get those sheep to be able to keep them from as they would love to eat the vine leaves and the fruit. It's a continual project, it's being observant, it's just a mindset of maintaining a balance in nature. And the way you maintain a balance in nature, I think is to create a balance in your vines to make sure your canopy is balanced with the fruit and that helps diminish disease pressure. And it's that site up there though because it is so conducive to sustainable practices and diminished disease pressure. Because of our altitude and the cool temperatures, we have in the afternoon. Typically, five to 10 degrees cooler every afternoon in the summer, we have a very narrow diurnal temperature range, so it doesn't get really cold during the nighttime. I know in California; they want that so they can maintain their acids, but we don't get that hot during the day. So, we don't need to have it that cold at night. And not having that narrow diurnal temperature range. We very rarely, in fact I don't even remember if we ever have reached the dew point. Having not reaching dew point overnight is a huge benefit for us because morning dew on leaves, especially if the sun doesn't hit it right away, is very conducive to have a fungal disease.

### **Nathan**

Fungal that's probably the biggest one. That's probably the biggest benefit of where we are as you look at the forecast, you know and there's no rain in sight for the next 10 days. But every morning you're getting soaked with dew. Essentially getting rain every day. So, you're having to cut back those fungal spores but without getting that dew the leaves just stay dry.

### **Fred Reno**

Is this site mostly southeastern facing? Then you get protection from the storms coming over top.

### **Christine**

Sometimes we are under the waterfall, sometimes the storms will just bypass us and coming over. And then also you can watch the storms coming from the south and southwest and then just right up that valley, the mountains act as somewhat of a barrier. You see the storms just coming right up there. And they don't come up and affect us. So, we have less rainfall. No dew and we've been spared. Spring frost because of the relative altitude and sometimes 20 degrees cooler than water and the spring morning then a mile down the road. That's, 1000 feet below.

**Fred Reno**

That's what they called terroir. Which is what it's all about. In this particular case, talking about the sales and marketing component of Ankida Ridge I see you have a little group called the Commonwealth Collective. If I'm right, it's Stinson, Ankida Ridge, Veritas, and Early Mountain, correct? Where did that idea spring from? And what was the catalyst behind that?

**Christine**

I think it was our daughter Tamara. She has been in the wine industry for 20 years in distribution in Atlanta. She was very passionate about Virginia wine, not just because her family had a vineyard and winery. She wanted to help promote Virginia wines to the southeast markets. She wanted to have a portfolio of wines, rather than just a single vineyard, just Ankida Ridge. So, it was her idea to create a portfolio of small family vineyards.

**Fred Reno**

What have been the challenges to making that work in today's distribution world? What has been the challenges other than the distribution system is completely broken?

**Dennis**

Yeah. Other than that,

**Nathan**

I think one of the biggest challenges in general is convincing people outside of this region that Virginia is producing quality wine.

**Dennis**

I think that is it. The conception in many people's minds, that Virginia couldn't possibly grow grapes that would produce quality wine is an impossible thought to even get their head around.

**Nathan**

It's hard. If you can convince a restaurant buyer, or convince the shop owner, right, there's still a little bit timid because you know, it's the end consumer that's not getting exposed to the wine. When you go out and can meet with buyers in the market, you're not meeting with the person who ultimately is going to put the wine in their mouth. And that's who needs the education right now.

**Christine**

You have to hand sell wine, the restaurants or wine shops have to hand sell Virginia wines, because the general populace outside the region can't believe that Virginia can make quality wine, especially Pinot Noir. Once they taste it, then that's a whole other story.

**Fred Reno**

I'm doing my best to change that. That is my passion to find a way to break through that and change that. Get that message out there. And if I can, not that this is about me, but if I can move this ball just down the field a little bit more, that would be wonderful. That would be just wonderful to see because the quality is here. My wife and I drink two things on a regular basis at home every night, either Virginia wine or "Cru" Beaujolais, those are the two things that are the go-to. I can't tell you the last time I had a bottle of California Wine may be one of the projects I developed for Jackson Family Wines. Its, all Virginia, and" Cru" Beaujolais.

**Christine**

I think another thing is the state of the industry here in Virginia. There's such a sense of camaraderie, and collegiality amongst all the vineyards, and the vineyard owners and the winemakers. It's almost a sense of family. We're helping one another, supporting one another. There's no sense of competition. And I think that has helped create an inertia behind the movement of Virginia wine moving forward, that sense of helping one another and supporting one another and not competing with each other.

**Fred Reno**

I know that you have a bit of a smaller operation than some of your competitors here in Virginia. However, I'm curious as to what impact negative or positive you've seen from COVID to your business.

**Christine**

Essentially initially, it shut everything down. And we're all trying to figure out how we're going to get through this once we got phase one going, we could start thinking about how we're going to open up. But there were challenges when you're in a small facility like this, and you have to maintain the six-foot distance and social distancing. It really limits your indoor seating. So, we're trying to maximize our outdoor seating, expand outdoors, which is fine for the Fall. But now Winter is coming along, we're going to have several months where it's going to be an issue. But we find overall now that people are just coming out.

**Dennis**

They want to do something

**Christine**

We are so busy. It's just like, at first, everybody was timid and afraid. And it was very gradual. But they got to trust things after a while, that it is going to be okay. Everybody wears masks, we require that when people come in, and they go to their seats. That's how most vineyards are. But for the most part..

**Nathan**

Yeah, for the most part. The beauty of being in the agritourism business is, you know, most of these businesses, these wineries have outdoor space. And most of these farm wineries are actually on some sort of farm and they have space and they set up farm tables and umbrellas and people can come out and they can feel safe. And we can offer that to people. People really value that at this point. In nice weather people just want to get out of their house and we can provide them a place to go which is great for everybody.

**Fred Reno**

Let me circle back to a question I have. The branding in the name How did this all develop? What was the moment you said that's going to be our brand name?

**Christine**

Oh, actually the name I fell in love with the word Ankida way before we ever thought of having a vineyard, I was reading a book in the 90s on ancient Sumeria by Dr. Zacharias Sitchin. And the final page of the book was a poem and it's all written in Sumerian. And underneath each Sumerian word, in parentheses was the meaning of that word. And in that poem was Ankida, the meaning of it, where heaven and earth join, that just captured my imagination. I really embraced that philosophy of the interconnectedness of everything. We knew we were looking for mountain property, we were looking for it but hadn't found it. But I knew that when we found our mountain property, maybe we can name it Ankida. And then we found this property. And when we planted the vineyard up on the ridge, let's see, Ankida Ridge, of course. And there was one story when the first spring we were here for the first warm summer, day, evening night overnight, and we put an old hammock between an old mulberry tree and, and a walnut tree down there in the front. The property had been vacant for almost a year. So, there were high grasses, it was undisturbed, and the fireflies were out. It was Memorial Day weekend. Dennis and I just sat there in the hammock swinging back and forth. And the fireflies were sort of like the ladybugs now. The fireflies were in the grasses and then in the air, and then they were in the trees, of course we are backed up to the National Forest. So, there's no light pollution. And we looked up and the stars are incredible. But you couldn't tell where the fireflies ended, and the stars began. It was this magical moment of being transfixed by that, that interconnectedness of the Fireflies and the stars and everything. It was a magical moment. And that really reinforced the concept of the meaning of Ankida, where heaven and earth join. The Interconnectedness of everything. Those fireflies.

**Fred Reno**

That sounds very idyllic. You know, folks, this has been a real treat. I was very excited to come up here today to meet you all. And I can see it's a family affair. which is good. It's really healthy and really nice. There's authenticity to this. And the story I've heard here today just seems like

there's a lot of serendipitous moments that have happened as this came together. In such a beautiful way, it's like you're blessed.

**Dennis**

Yes, we count those blessings every day, quite frankly.

**Fred Reno**

Okay, well, I know you're going have to go to Nathan. So, I will sign off and thank you once again.

**Christine**

Thank you.