

Name of Interviewee: Gustavo Brambila
Name of Interviewer: Steve Velasquez
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Transcript audited by Velasquez on April 1. False starts and repetitive verbalizations ("um") have been removed for overall clarity.

SV: Today is April 12th, 2016, my name is Steve Velasquez and I'm here with Gustavo Brambila in his taste room in Napa in his winery and cellar here in Napa. Good afternoon, how are you doing?

GB: Very well, thank you very much for having me to speak for the background of Napa.

SV: Well thank you very much. So for the record, could you please state your name?

GB: My name is Gustavo Brambila. I am a winery owner for Gustavo Wines here in Napa.

SV: So, can you tell me a little bit about your parent. I know they're from Mexico but can you tell us their names and a little bit about them.

GB: My parents arrived in Mexico, from Mexico [1:00] as Jose Brambila, my father and my mother Maria Brambila from San Clemente, Jalisco.

SV: Both of them are from Jalisco.

GB: Yes.

SV: And when did they arrive?

GB: It's hard to say; pinpoint exactly because my father was part of Bracero Program in the late 40's, he temporarily was in the general area. But I know my mom and I were in Mexico when we were born but didn't have a chance to come into America because my father had not been comfortable bringing us out without a permanent place of residence with a steady job. So I do know [2:00] that we came in to America about 1956.

SV: You and your brother?

GB: My mom, my brothers, and myself.

SV: Okay, in 1956. And what year were you born?

GB: I was born in 1953.

SV: 1953. And you have how many brothers?

GB: Two other brothers.

SV: Two other brothers. 1956, you finally came. Did you come to California and did you come to Napa?

GB: Actually we came through Texas and travelled through Texas, Arizona and then to California. Then came directly into Napa, Oakville here in Napa County.

SV: [3:00] Because that's where your father was working?

GB: That's where my father had a place to work yes.

SV: Had a place to work. Where was he working?

GB: At the time, he was working in the fields as a laborer, planting vineyards, doing vineyard maintenance for work for a company called Bartalucci Vineyards. And he provided him some farm housing for his family, in order to stay on working with the Bartalucci family.

SV: Do you remember that house?

GB: I remember the settings, I remember the housing, I remember the vineyards, how closed they were to the place we lived in, yes. I remember all those little things as they were actually my, also my playground. [4:00]

SV: Right, they were your playground. You and our brothers.

GB: That's right.

SV: And assist your families. Do you remember the Bartalucci family at all? Are they around?

- GB: Yes. They're, I don't believe that the original Bartalucci family that were helpful to my father is still with us, but I do know the... they're his families, or his sons, are still in the valley.
- SV: And so did your father work with them for a long period of time? Or was he working with other
- GB: He worked for them for about four years. Because all along, as we were growing up, as kids we were outgrowing the place that we lived. And so we were small and we could sleep in the [5:00] Dining room and my mom and my dad had the bedroom. So as we were growing up it became a little bit problematic. And so he was looking for something a little more, better in pay so that he could afford a bigger house or a bigger place to stay. So he found a place, he found employment in 1960 at Beaulieu Vineyards, a winery located in Rutherford, California.
- SV: In 1960? And he worked there for a long, for several years didn't he?
- GB: That's right he was very, very sorry for having to make that, you know, career change [6:00] because he felt the Barlucci's had done so much for him and helping him obtain his first full time job and also provide housing for his family. So he felt really terrible about that. But it was mutual, and he worked at Beaulieu Vineyards and was happy there for 33 years.
- SV: Wow. Now when you guys came to Jalisco, were there other, did you guys have other family members that were here working within that area that you know of?
- GB: Direct family members we do not have but my father had cousins. My father had cousins that he came up, late 40s [7:00] as part of the bracero program. So, he had a cousin. And he also had a brother, I forgot, yeah. So he also had a brother that was in Santa Maria in California doing lettuce, strawberries and artichokes and so forth garlic, they were the only members of the family in Napa.
- SV: So, what was growing up in Napa then as a little kid, you're here about 3 or 4 years old, right?
- GB: Yes I came up when I was 3 or 4 years old.
- SV: And then, so what was grade school like? Where did you go to school for instance?
- GB: Ha ha. That's [8:00] a very good question, because my folks came from Mexico not knowing the culture surrounding the valley or America. I was I was caught

playing and asking for a neighbor friend to come out and play with me and she asks why aren't you in school. And I said I don't know so I went home, she said you should, well your friend is in school, which you should be in school. I went back home and I asked my mom that I am supposed to be in school because our neighbor said that we're all to be in school. My parents did not know how to examine that and [9:00] by the time they realized the requirements or the law of kids of school age were to be in school. They took me to the Elementary school to the principal's office. They told him -he didn't have an interpreter but my father was trying his best to understand English- that it was too late to enroll in school because the classes had already started and that they needed a doctor to immunize me from -- these requirements, pre-requirements, to get into school and so I missed a whole year. And was able to attend school the following year.

SV: Do you remember [10:00] what that school, the name of that school?

GB: The name of the school was the St. Helena elementary school.

SV: Santa Helena?

GB: Santa Helena.

SV: So your brothers also enrolled? Or were they too small?

GB: They were too small. But by the time I was in second grade, they were school age that they were able to ease into the school. And just pick up like where the other school kids started. So it was an easy process for them.

SV: Mm-hm. Do you remember -Speaking of your parents, Learning English and you being thrust in here- Do you remember at all how you started to learn English? Were you thrust in there? Was there a teacher? [11:00] What about your parents?

GB: Yes, learning English was a little difficult for me but I also -- that's why I wanted to make friends around our home so our neighbors. Through our neighbors, our neighbor kids I was able to make friends with them and play with them and they didn't know Spanish so they all spoke English and I was able to pick up meanings of certain words based on certain actions of certain words or certain actions of certain games and so those actions of games gave me a better definition of Words that I replay back in my memories. But my parents were [12:00] a little too busy to kind of learn English and so by the time I understood English and was able to speak English and able to write English they took me around everywhere they

needed to be to interpret English to Spanish for them. So each time my mom needed a doctor, I was pulled out of school to go interpret. Each time my father needed to go to a doctor, I was pulled out of school to go interpret.

SV: What did your mom do?

GB: My mom primarily at the very beginning was just a housewife.

SV: Did she end up working in the wine industry as well or did she do-

GB: No, she did not end up working. And she ended up doing odd jobs like housekeeping [13:00] jobs, other like the Bartalucci's housekeeping jobs, some other houses around, within walking distance. No, she was just embarrassed not knowing how to speak, speak English. She felt that, losing the Spanish would lose the family continuity and my father was the one that was risking that continuity and it was a tug of war between the two of them. And I noticed that my father needed to understand and speak English badly because his work. [14:00]

SV: And your mom wanted to hold onto the tradition?

GB: Yes.

SV: Yeah. Speaking of tradition, do you remember as a little kid, sort of learning what "America" was all about? Do you remember like, 4TH of July celebrations or if by thinking what's going on? Or sort of just questioning... is this what to be American is supposed to be like? You were a little kid so I-

GB: Yeah, even though I was in school, in grade school I guess my knowledge of American history wasn't very strong and 4TH of July came around every season we know, my parents knew [15:00] that there was a parade. And sometimes the parade featured horses and caballeros, and to them that was what they viewed, or they would attend parades in Mexico. Because they also had cars and they had horses and cattle. So it reminded them of home. But for me as they took their kids with them that wasn't part of history. It wasn't... wasn't part of his 4TH of July. It was another date for us, for me. I didn't really, I wasn't really great at a grade level at the time to pick up the... these [16:00] historical dates.

SV: So speaking of going to parades and this was the parades in St. Helena?

GB: These are parades that yeah, in Napa County parades were in Calistoga.

SV: In Calistoga. So were there other Mexican families in the school? I mean, was that... people have told me that sometimes there were no other families there were only three families. Do you recall other families and who they were?

GB: In our elementary school, in St. Helena, I felt like I was in fear every day attending [17:00] classes, because I didn't, you know, feel like I belonged and I didn't feel being ridiculed because I was trying to, my class teachers were quietly asking -- supporting me to speak out in English and once in a while I would stumble and every once in a while I would get some ridiculing laughs behind me. So that kinda hurt ,so that kinda brought me back down to it's not to You know, not to try anymore. But, yes. There was other family members that I recall in the classrooms, who were in the same situation that I was in. But they [18:00] seem to be, I don't know. They didn't seem to be Able to apply themselves as myself. Maybe it was just a growing phase for that explanation.

SV: Do you remember, were there Mexican American teachers in the school?

GB: No. For example, the kids, the families that I was with, there was a family called Luna and there was a family called Cerda. There was a family by the name of Torres and there was a family named Hurtado. [19:00] There was a family named Escorino. But that's all that I can recall that early age, and it wasn't until I got older and higher grades that I remember more families but there were perhaps one teacher that was Hispanic that was helpful, supportive and yeah I remember him very well because he saw the fear in us, and he saw [20:00] the apprehension in us and he saw the feeling of feeling out of place in us he would, you know, just calm us down each time he did that to us, he would go back to his regular duties and I felt that, you know, we didn't have anywhere else to go to.

SV: Do you recall his name?

GB: No, you know, I don't remember his name exactly.

SV: Okay. So you mentioned the parades in the city. Did the Mexican community get together at all that you remember, in those early years of grade school, high school?

GB: The community was small one [21:00] when we came here. I think there was only originally, my five family members that my folks were a part of a network system, where they were able to meet at each other's residences for a barbecue or

for social -- and but that was pretty much how the social network existed back then. We didn't have a lot of mobility, mostly within walking distance, you know everyone seems to be, seems to have some kind of fear of driving very long distances and not only that, not very many of the families [22:00] actually did own cars or vehicles that were dependable enough that is to.

SV: So that's interesting. So did back in I guess at this point it would have been the 60s you were in grade school, 60's 70's high school I was trying to get a sense of the community life here. Do you remember, were there grocery stores? Were soccer leagues big back then? Or I know some families were in baseball leagues. Sort of, they would they play other work teams type of thing. Do you remember any of that growing up?

GB: [23:00] I do remember that, I remember my father taking us to a soccer game in St. Helena but it was unorganized. It was just kinda like everyone knew every Sunday there would be some game and that was like the only athletic program available to -- that was not form- it wasn't a formal, it was just a voluntary network. All they did was show up and have fun [24:00] and enjoy themselves. But, baseball, no, there wasn't a Latino league, there was a Latino base, I mean prominent games or there wasn't any football. And not during a, not during my stay in St Helena during that period of time. I do remember that one of the individuals, well actually, my brother's classmate noticed that there weren't. Everybody had this desire to play soccer. He wanted -- an established soccer league and -- He wanted it [25:00] so that the school system could adopt it. And for some reason, it didn't get off the ground because the only people willing to play or participate would be the Latino families, and no other families would be participants. So it didn't go very far and that was the only real effort into introduction to soccer in the St. Helena school system, all the Santa Elena neighborhoods surrounding them.

SV: That's interesting. That's usually what they always say when something new happens.

GB: Yeah.

SV: Nobody's interested, even though, [26:00] people are interested. So did your father play soccer, do you remember?

GB: You know, I don't. I've never watched him play. But I do remember my grandmother, his mother, she visited one time. I don't know how the subject matter came up. I think I must have myself, I was playing baseball and I was, I twisted my ankle and I think she saw me limp a little bit around the house and my father was just a little bit upset that I got injured. And she says, you know you can't be playing like that. Your father used to be a very good soccer player and he

broke his ankle playing soccer. [27:00] He landed in a gopher hole. He twisted his ankle really bad, and she said that her husband was really upset because that took away his ability to help the family earn help the family in, in the work.

SV: Mm-hm yeah that's a very common story yeah. So they' were afraid that you wouldn't be able to help the family?

GB: Yeah.

SV: Sprain your ankle playing baseball.

GB: That's right.

SV: Speaking of baseball, how did you get involved in baseball? How did that happen in your life?

GB: We, my brothers and I we [28:00] played baseball because we saw on TV this game and it was a game that was outdoor. It was a game that was required longer daylight to play and we were looking for something to learn English with and so we played baseball around -- we had a open field, open vineyard field that was being uprooted and they never planted it, and that became our baseball diamond. And we invited all our [29:00] neighbors from the same town in Rutherford and that was mostly Latinos Mexicanos and it was that was my first introduction to playing in a kind of semi-organized.

SV: So how old were you at this point, was it like 10?

GB: I was probably at 10, 10 Years old.

SV: Yeah. Brothers and all other kids from this area.

GB: That's right.

SV: So that was like the informal. Did the school have a baseball team? Or baseball-

GB: No, we, It wasn't until 69[19]. No excuse me, '67, '68 that high school was the [30:00] only, that was the school that offered the games. Other elementary schools used to play baseball as intramural. But our school didn't have the intramural program. But then, I went to junior high where they did have intramural baseball. So, that was my introduction to baseball. They're a little more competitive...you know, for me, it was more competitive, but until I got into and high school were it got it more formalized.

SV: So junior high is really where put up interest in baseball.

GB: Yes.

SV: What about the churches? Are there any sports leagues that you remember?

GB: No, they probably had, [31:00] they, those were foreign individuals common transportation system to get them there and back and but we didn't have, my family didn't have that. I didn't have that, so we didn't, my brothers and I we didn't participate in any of those at all, so. But we, before we got into high school, we had a neighbor adult who watched us play on our backyard. And so he somehow, I don't remember how this happened, but all of a sudden we were playing and all of a sudden we had this one. His son [32:00], walk up to our field and asked if he could play. So that was, we said sure. We, little did we know that his father was a little league coach? So he asked us if we would be interested and I asked my parents if we could play little league, and they said no. So finally, I told -- relay that information. And about two weeks later, he shows up at the front door and asked to speak with my mother and my father. And my father said no. My mother says they don't have a ride and he says well, I will give them rides. So my mother convinced my [33:00] father that it would be okay to play on his team, and and so we were able to play little league in St. Helena under his, under my parents' condition that that was all that we were going to do. And then just go play and then come back, and play and come back.

SV: So two questions, which of your brothers were playing with you? And then do you remember the coach's name?

GB: Yes, actually my brother would have been Hector Brambila. He would playing. He's a year younger than I am, and he was playing for a competitive team on San Elena called the Giants. His coach was Mr. Delbandio? [inaudible] and I played for a team [34:00] called the Eagles, and my coach was Mr. Perez.

SV: So that was a coach.

GB: Yeah. So his assistant coach was Mr. Pina.

SV: Pina. Pina and Perez. Do you remember if they were working on the wine industry also?

GB: Actually, they were. They were. Mr. Perez was a... he was the general manager at St. Helena Co-op. Mr. Pina he had a his family owned vineyard, and his family owned a vineyard and management company called Pinas Vineyard Management Company.

SV: So do you know if they're still around?

GB: Yes. Yes.

SV: The Pinas in management, and the Perez as the GM Co-op. [35:00] Interesting. And so they had sons that you played with also.

GB: Yes.

SV: So then you played in junior or high or you played in high school right, and then you got a scholarship to play baseball, is that, or no. You got a scholarship to play basketball.

GB: No.

SV: Was it for baseball?

GB: It was for baseball, yeah. It was for baseball. I played high school baseball, and the -- you know, we were, -- I wasn't formally trained to play baseball. Compared to my other, you know, members of the team I must [36:00] have had like three, four years of baseball experience, versus their 10 or 12 years experience. But, so to me it was just learning how to adjust. So all this time was just a period of adjustments to playing under the rules. So it's always adjustments at -- to the rules. I was able to play and do very well. I don't know. I just had almost seemed like I had a place for it. [37:00] It just came natural.

SV: And so then you went off to, was it Washington, or Oregon?

GB: Oregon, yeah. So I received a scholarship my senior year to go to Oregon and I did intend to play but it just happened to be in 1971 that last, the fall season of would've been '71, '72, the worst weather or rainy season in Oregon that time recorded history and I didn't see where they were able going to be playing baseball. And I've decided at that time that, I just didn't want to wait [38:00] to play and If I was going to play, then I would go somewhere else where it's sunny. So I turned in my scholarship and came back to Napa Valley.

SV: Okay. With the intent of-

GB: Playing baseball, yeah.

SV: Playing baseball. So what happened when you came back?

GB: Yes, when I came back I was in transition between Universities or State schools and so I needed to catch up to the beginning of their calendar seasons. So I attended Napa College here, the local junior college, for a quarter, the rest of that year, so through the 72 season [39:00]. So I was able to play ball and that 72 Season, and that time I went to Oregon to major as a history, in history. I came back thinking that was what I wanted to do but for some reason I switched gears and decided that I needed to look at my, -- I needed to get a clear indication of

what I was going to do 5 years from then and so looking at the way the job market was at the time, the best people to offer you a job would be the people who you had networked with and so those were the individuals you could go to for some kind [40:00] of an in into a job. And so I was strong in wines or vineyards. But not very strong in history or any of that, because I didn't know anybody, I didn't know a history person working as a history teacher.

SV: That' interesting. I want to come back to that but -- just to get a sense, stepping back a little bit. When you were going off to college, do you remember the discussion you had with your parents? Because I suspect they probably didn't want you to go far away.

GB: You are right they did not want me to leave the area. But as I was playing ball for the high school, [41:00] my father worked across the street where we lived. And so there was a co-worker of his who actually followed baseball and he lived in the same town that we lived in Rutherford actually, his son, turned out to be a good friend of mine. That he followed the local high school team and he would talk to my father about did you, did your son tell you about his day yesterday on the baseball team? Of course, I never told my father any of this because I knew it would anger him. But his coworker would, I guess, explain to him or, Give him all the information, [42:00] all the details about what I did, and how significant that was and how important that was. He was really proud of me. He was like, this guy, he is a very good ball player. You have a very good son, he is a very good ball player. Then my father didn't buy into that. So when it came time to leave, -- this indirect information from his co-worker, he kept hearing from other places as well. So, from other friends of his. It wasn't only his co worker but it was somebody else that knew of me from the high school. Could have been some of his family, some of his friends from his social network, that he kind of was okay with it. Then he [43:00] found out I had this scholarship to go to Oregon that was not to play baseball, but to get yourself educated that was what he actually was working for. But still, that was a hard thing for him to do, because he still wanted a family member to help in the finances so that meant to work. You were working age you could help bring back a -- very good wages to have a better, for the family to have better living conditions and so that account hurt him. But at the same time, it caught him off guard. He didn't have any money to give me to send me and so he had to borrow [44:00] a little bit from a friend of his to help me get to Oregon. And so that friend of his was his man, it was Carlos Renteria and so he felt bad asking for a loan, because he never did that.

SV: So how did he know? Did he work with Carlos? Or was he just a neighbor or...

GB: Carlos was always a neighbor that lived in the same town that we did, and he found out about Carlos through friends of friends, who would work in the vineyards around his, where he lived and they would go into town. Because, we lived mostly in town and [45:00] Carlos lived mostly in the rural part of that town.

And, so, but Carlos had a lot of Spanish laborers and they would come into town with us, the general store was, and he would recognize some of those people and they would recognize him at the same time. So, they were able to establish a network, as well. And a lot of times, they would be invited to Carlos' house for an afternoon, Saturday afternoon, and that's how I think that's how that relationship started.

SV: So then you came back, and then what was the discussion with your parents at that point? [46:00]

GB: Yeah, so my father, that discussion was a little bit... and that's, that's I don't want to disappoint him but I think one that, one of appreciation where he didn't realize that the climate conditions in Oregon were so different than from around this area. And so, he was able to allow me to continue but at the same time, on the weekends for free time, I would be able to continue in helping the family, you know, get ahead.

SV: And so how did you do that? Did You have odd jobs did he set you up with jobs? How did that work?

GB: Yeah. For many times, [47:00] he was a handy person for, or a maintenance person for Bullion Vineyards that kind of led into other members of the you know, co-workers to take notice and they would hire him privately to do same kind of work, odd jobs, for at their homes and during when he would receive these outside jobs. He would take me along with him and so I learned a little bit how to paint, how to scrape, how to do garden work, how to do plumbing, how to repair a lot of things. So [48:00], that's how I got trained and then I wanted to go to do something you know on the side because I wanted to save us some money in order us to go to school. So, I decided to start up, start my own yard jobs I got on my bike and went to local homes and asked if they needed any help mowing lawns or any help with yard work or painting or cleaning and I was able to find three, three places that [49:00] allowed me to come in and be that person and so I became basically their gardener for I don't know, for a long time and that was I helped, you know that was kind of like an income for the family and I was able to use some of that to buy other things and eventually that business grew into five more, so at the end, I had eight jobs that were mine and then I had my brother, other two brothers help me. So each one of us would take, out of the eight, each one of us would take two and we were able to do those on a Saturdays and I was able to do the other two [50:00] on Sunday.

SV: And so you did that for a while?

GB: Yes.

SV: Well so this is now probably mid 70's? Right?

GB: Right.

SV: Late to mid-70's and then what happened? I mean you're working these odd jobs doing yard work, starting a mini-business or full-fledged business.

GB: Yes. Then I got to the end of '72, early '73, where my classes were almost caught up, because when I applied to, when I decided to go to school, I was trying to get away from a lot of my high school friends. I thought, okay There were going their directions and I didn't want to go in that same direction, I didn't want to follow them, I wanted to be [51:00] the one pestering them even though they were my friends that I wanted to go at different direction, so I could start all over again to build up whole new friends and So I decided on Davis and when I found out that Davis was a quarter system and Napa College was a semester system I had to wait to catch up and so finally in the fall of '73. I was able to make the transition, the transfer to Davis.

SV: The fall of '73.

GB: Yeah.

SV: And why did you settle on Davis?

GB: I thought because of the jobs that I had it was close. I could drive within the weekend and not disrupt anything that I [52:00] had started for my parents and it was, to me, it was just a natural distance and I decided to go there because I thought I could go into food science. Growing up, my mother was a good cook. But my mother used some things that I, for some reason, was not too crazy about it. And I so I took a few courses in food science at Davis. I was glad I choose Davis because, as I said, it was just the distance. I could go to classes five days a week and then on Saturday I can come back and do my jobs and [53:00] it was a school nobody knew about and so I thought I could, that's what I wanted to do. But unfortunately another friend of mine, his name is Jose Hurtado. Joe Hurtado was he just followed in my footsteps everywhere I would go, he would go and I was so surprised that he chose Davis. I thought. I said wow. I said, okay fine. So we became roommates, and then but he had the same interests as mine were on the weekends, because he was leaving as well his family and they needed, he needed [54:00] to be back on the weekends to help them as well. So we had the same kind of, I don't know, not formulas, but it was just the way things worked out.

SV: You had the same plan. So, you guys were roommates. I suppose you went to the same high school he did?

GB: Yes.

SV: Yeah, okay. What was he majoring in then? Do you remember?

GB: Yeah, he majored in psychology.

SV: Psychology. Okay. So your doing food science and then?

GB: Yeah so I did food science [55:00] but there was a that was a moment in my, when I was 14 years old and I had totally forgot about it when I got into Davis that I made a promise to my mother that I was going to find out about a bottle of juice that my father had taken to the house for me to taste. It was grape juice that he had crushed that same day. It was Muscat grapes that had been crushed into Muscat juice without the skins. And so he had me taste it and I thought it was the best you know sweetest tasting grape juice I ever tasted. Because up to that point I didn't like grapes. So I put the bottle, put the cap back on the bottle and put it back in the refrigerator. [56:00] So about two weeks later, my mother had, she screamed and I got up and her refrigerator would had blown wide open and everything in it was broken. So that bottle exploded in the refrigerator. Because it didn't have a way to, because it started to ferment in the bottom. It didn't have a way for the pressure escape I told my mother I don't know what happened here but I'll find out and I'll let you know. So I totally forgot about that incident when I was at Davis, because I was taking these food science courses. I decided to diversify my classes and to include [57:00] wine making, enology as well because my major was fermentation science. So it included the science of fermentable beverages. And so that's how I got into that program.

SV: So like splitting grape juice.

GB: Yeah.

SV: And then you remember taking that class or as you registering for classes? Or this just came back to.

GB: I remember that I wanted to take these food science courses so I wanted to try out and play baseball for the Davis team and so when I had taken some of the courses in [58:00] the wine-making department there, I did not know that their courses were, they always ran concurrent. So if you they only offered those courses once a year, and if you do not take those courses in the sequence, the prerequisites, you could not take that class until the following year. And so that pretty much shut out any interest that I had in playing for Davis.

SV: Wow. So then you had to stick with the books

GB: I had to stay with... exactly.

SV: So this was '74 now?

GB: That was '74. At the end of '73. Because that's why I wanted to go play baseball there and that's when I found out about those [59:00] courses. I had to take some courses, but you need some pre-requisite to get into those courses. In the wine making courses, so, yeah would have been the fall of '73.

SV: And this was the viticulture?

GB: Yeah.

SV: Viticulture, enology, the viticulture?

GB: Yes, in the fall of '74, you're right.

SV: '74, viticulture.

GB: No, enology.

SV: Enology. So then this was -- you started at the undergraduate major, did you attach yourself to a particular professor that was there for any reason, for whatever reason?

GB: You know I -- I didn't attach myself to any of the professors. I was just in awe of [1:00:00] all these professors and they made each one of those courses very challenging. And each of those courses very difficult for me because there was -- it was a part of me that wanted to succeed in those courses but didn't have the support for those courses and so any other major in Davis, they had support you know, systems. I had my TA's to go to, which I relied on [1:01:00] quite a bit on, because there was one individual who took me under his wing. His name was Dr. Singleton and happened to be that he was about the science of tannins and today, that's why I learned quite a bit from him. So, he tried to explain to me how these molecules - he built molecules for me. So, that was the person that I recall.

SV: The person you were gravitating towards. So you were working in here. Did you have to take any internships or do anything like that for your programs?

GB: No, I didn't have to take any internships, nothing like that [1:02]

SV: So, then you graduated then in '76, then what?

GB: So, I was looking for work, everybody in my class had decided pretty much that they were going to work for a large company. And I wasn't sure if I wanted to follow that trail because I had connections in the Napa Valley and I thought ok, how can I utilize my connections in the valley to get a job? Well, so I tried so I said, ok, I will try to connect with one of my father's coworkers. His name was Mike Grgich he was winemaker [1:03] for Chateau Montelena.

SV: But before he was at BV?

GB: Right before... previously he was at BV. When Robert Mondovi Winery was formed, he went to Robert Mondovi and became his first winemaker then he went to Chateau Montelena. So, we interviewed, and he said at that moment he didn't have anything but he appreciated that I came by and was pretty impressed that I had initiated the interview. So, I left and did some other rounds at Beringer [1:04] then at Souverain. And so, I went back to Davis to get my stuff in order, and it was about 3 days later he calls me back and they were looking for someone-looking for help. And I said I'm kinda in the middle of something right now, can I start in a week and a half. He goes, no I have this position now and if you can't make I will have to give it someone else. So, the next day- I asked him can I be there in two days he said no, could you be there tomorrow. And so I was their [1:05] in one day. So, that was kinda - not rewarding because it happen so fast.

SV: Do you think he was testing you or was it truly did he want you to start right then and there.

GB: No, You know I think he wanted to me to start then and there... I don't know. He wanted... he had seen my father work, and he has seen his work ethic, and he has seen the quality work, how focused he is when he works. He kinda figured out okay, it must be that perhaps I could be the same way. And so, I think when I went to an interview [1:06] he was looking for those traits. And I think that he saw that I shared my father's attitude and so forth and so that's why I think that he offered me the job.

SV: What was the job?

GB: Yeah, so initially the job was to help the cellar staff in ways of cleaning, preparation, and monitoring and a little bit of lab work, you know. So that was the scope of my work and I remember when I got there that most of the [1:07] people who were already working for Chateau Montelena felt threatened by my presence and I didn't know that they had this feeling that they thought that I came to take their job away. And it was about three days before I had the nerve to speak to them and assure them that I wasn't there for that. Yes, I came from the university. Yes, I have a science background. Yes, I understand what you're all doing here. And yes, I understand why you're bottling and why. And this was threatening to them. [1:08] And I just calmed him down I said -I'm not here to take your job away, I'm here for you to teach me how to use this pump to connect hoses to move the wine from point A to point B- because I didn't get trained with any of that at the University.

SV: And so that was three days of sort of uncertainty... and so none of them had gone to Davis?

GB: No, no.

SV: And so this was in the summer of '76?

GB: This is in the spring, early spring of '76.

SV: Early spring of '76. And so... there was this tension in the air and so how long were you working [1:09] in that position.

GB: Well, I worked there through the summer of '77. And I was able to calm my coworkers down because they felt that they had finally found a person that would work as hard as equal, be equal at their level without being, you know, a know it all and I thought that was very relaxing for me because the next thing I know that they had entrusted me in filtering certain, preparing certain wines for bottling the following day.[1:10] So that involved some, some delicate operations that normally would take a year to release or train. I had a very good person to able to have a lot of confidence in me so that made it a lot easier.

SV: Who was that?

GB: His name was Aaron Mosley. And so, it's kind of ironic that he saw how important education was for that particular industry. At the time, the industry was around, but it wasn't a significant industry. It wasn't a very important industry. And so, he'd always told me that I see how valuable your education is so I think I'll like, I think I'm gonna transfer, I think I'm gonna apply to Fresno state, what do you think? [1:11] I said I think you should, I hate to see you go because I still need to learn from you, but, but that didn't happen until about the summer of 1977.

SV: He went off.

GB: Yeah.

SV: And at this point, was Mike still with you guys?

GB: So, Mr. Grgich was still there with us through spring of... yeah spring and early summer of '76. So, he had left Chateau Montelena to go and start plans on his current facility, Grgich Hills.

SV: So, did you work with him directly at all? Or was it all...

GB: Yes, I worked directly with him at the Chateau Montelena,[1:12] he was the one that asked the scientific questions or these the wine chemistry questions. And so, he could understand the state of the wine at that particular time. So, for example, what's the acidity level, or what's the SO2 levels, it's not that those other guys, they were already there, they'd understand it. But they learned it through a process

versus through a science. So, he had a more confidence in my interpretation of were those wines were at that particular time, to convey that information over to him. But at the same time, I would help him do some laboratory analysis in the lab. [1:13]

SV: So you were, you were learning a few things from him-

GB: Yeah. Yes. He was there and the reason why I was, I think, very excited that I had been offered this position is because I had tasted his wines, the winery's wines before building up a nerve to go ask him for an interview. I had already tasted his wines and I thought this, to me they tasted natural the way I would, they were pleasing to me. And they were not, they were just balanced, so I thought, yeah this is the guy I want to learn from.

SV: So how did you find out about his wines? Was it through people you're working with or through Davis? How did you pick [1:14] him versus?

GB: No it was through Davis because we when I was there, we had a winemaking, not a winemaking excuse me, we had a wine tasting class once a week at the end of after 5 o'clock and so many times, the wines that we tasted were blind tasting but they were from, I would be responsible for... each one of us was responsible to set the requirements for that week, so I would say, okay I would like to taste Napa Valley Wines under \$30 dollars so each one of us would go out and pick up Napa Valley Wines. And so, when we will blind taste test so I wanted to try the Chateau Montelena so I got my assistant went and found a Chateau Montelena [1:15] well actually it was Zinfandel at the time but that was what I wanted to try. So basically, it was red wine Napa Valley and vintage it vary, it didn't really matter to me. But, so we were assigned every week, a person responsible for setting up the course, or the tastings....directions. And so that's how I had tasted those wines and thought out of all those wines, that was the one that I was actually very palatable, very easy to drink, very easy to understand and appreciate.

SV: His Zinfandel

GB: Yeah.

SV: His Zinfandel. And so probably everybody asks [1:16] you this, but since it's part of the story, what was the atmosphere like at Chateau Montelena in your tenure there? Because the tasting and the Paris thing happened. Was there a buzz in the air in Napa or at the winery that things were changing, that it was important? Did you get a sense of what that was all about?

GB: I think there was a sense of I don't know, it was just like a sense that everybody there... when I knew about the gentleman who came to taste some wines, they knew that he was a British from France. They knew [1:17] that he was there to pick up some wines and to taste against some other, you know, with judges from Europe. So they knew that going in. But I did not know that he had already been there. And so we were, we were downstairs bottling at the time and so we took a break at 12 o'clock for lunch and Beau Barrett was my... you know was also involved in the bottling process -- to make up the bottling crew and so we break for lunch and he [1:18] goes upstairs where he lived, to have lunch. So our half hour's up and we all go back to our stations on the bottling line and but he is not there and so we wait 20, another 10 minutes while Mr. Mosley went in and gets the pump running again and gets the filling machine prepared and brings more corks and brings more capsules. So, that was an additional 10 minutes. And then, within, I don't know, inside a half hour later, I hear this rumbling, I hear this stomping and I hear this yelling from upstairs and we all look at each other and we thought that guys in trouble again and so, [1:19] as it turned out, he came downstairs with is. He came downstairs with Mr. Grgich and announced that they had their wines, Chardonnay from 1973 vintage had won this competition and I didn't know what that was all about until maybe days later and so I learned about it and within a month or so afterwards I started to see excitement around. Because I used to go [1:20] to a donut shop everyday going to work from Napa and everyone was excited and if someone asks, where do you work? I said I work at Chateau Montelena and he goes congratulation. I said wow, yeah. You know, thank you. Everybody was pretty impressed. So about three months later that I'd really, doing my commute, that I noticed certain changes in the Valley, or motions, you know, motions of change in the Valley taking place. So, all of sudden I see my classmates, who were part of the wine industry family. That they're being told to go to school to Davis. They're being told, [1:21] you're going to stay here to inherit the family business and because I would never existed because I went to high school with these kids and they remember my friends as well and I started noticing that next you'll see is a lot of interest a lot of European a company's coming into the Valley starting you know, Champaign houses, of buying vineyards. I start to notice local business, selling to other companies. So, I became almost, it became a good thing for the valley because I thought it was an opportunity for everybody to, like real estate, it's just; you buy and sell, buy and sell, buy and sell. [1:22]

SV: So t[1:18:00] hat's exciting that you were noticing these changes happening sort of right in front of you right?

GB: Yes.

SV: And at work, were they... Were they changing their operation at all or they just do you think they're just continuing?

GB: No, at work they were continuing there the attitude had changed to one of more concern, more serious and it wasn't about, "oh I'm just a cellar rat." All of a sudden, I started seeing [1:23] a change in that attitude. That what they were doing really did matter. So there was more pride in their work.

SV: So since I'm here sort of looking at Latino community. Did you see any changes, then, in your father's work, or your friend's family's work? But was there a community there at Chateau Montelena since it was your first vineyard job? Did you fall in line with those guys who were out working in the field or? [1:24]

GB: I thought that those people that worked in the fields had a, I didn't think that they understood what transpired. I don't think that they knew significance. I didn't know myself the significant. I didn't know how to translate that significance to my father and my parents, I didn't know, because pretty much insulated from that and because my only interest was to go to work and back. So I didn't have any social agendas to go and participate at any parties if there were any parties going around celebrating the event. So I do know that there were many other [1:25] Mexican Latino workers from the field who were a little more who were a little closer to the wine processes that they were informed about it. For example, Placido Domingo [Garcia] who was supervisor in the Chateau Montelena in the vineyard area understood it. So he would be the person who explain or disseminated the information and I think that was effective, but I didn't have any way of measuring the success of it. So no, [1:26] I yeah, I think it took a long time after that because I stayed at Chateau Montelena for till the end of 77, excuse me till the end of 76 harvest and then I left in the spring of '77 to go to Grgich Hills so I think that period was a area where I was not recognizable as a part of the staff there from the Mexican Latino workers. I think only Placido knew of my of my [1:27] background.

SV: Did he know your father?

GB: No.

SV: No. So you were just kind of friendly with him and you crossed paths a lot.

GB: Yeah we worked a few frosts together. Yeah, he was. Exactly.

[CROSSTALK] Warm yourself up after that type of thing.

GB: That's right.

SV: So then you went to Grgich Hills and did what?

GB: So I was offered to go. I was offered to stay with Montelena. But the wine maker who succeeded Mr. Grgich had a different approach to wine making. It was more of a scientific approach rather [1:28] than more about feel approach, more of craft approach. So, that made up my decision really quick to follow, to accept the offer from Mr. Grgich to join him at Grgichs Hill Cellars. So, I left with the blessing of Mr. and Mrs. Barret. That with the condition that if it didn't work out, then they would be the first person that I'd go back for. When I got to the Grgich Hills Cellars we didn't have a building. I pretty much worked with Mr. Grgich on the planning, on the interpretation of blueprints and so each time that we had a question about [1:29] what goes where? And why use this? Or why's that cost so much and so forth? We just look at the blueprints. And I was able to, it was my first exposure to the blueprints, and I got pretty good at it. And so all of a sudden, I almost became like a supervisor on the job site. Where I was able to learn a lot of these craftsmen that were there, electricians, plumbers, carpenters, roofers, I was able to you know help them out in that area a little bit and so it help me understand how to build a winery from [1:30] the ground level up. And so when you come here to our winery people don't see the big tanks and so forth because as a winery, in definition, that's what you should see. You should see all these vessels, all these containers. But we're not a winery because those vessels are opportunities for the winemaker to utilize his options. And those options are sometimes not realized. Some of those options are not defined but they have, those tanks have to exist to make those judgements work. Here at our winery, I don't need all of those because [1:30] I already refined those judgements to what is necessary for us. And we don't call ourselves a winery, we call ourselves producing cellar or producing wine facility. And so I was able to recognize that because we didn't have that many tanks going. I started with Grgich Hills Cellars, and the reason for that is because Mr. Grgich and myself as a team we're always on the same page. We're always known each other's taste habits. He learned my taste habits faster than I realize and I learned his slower because he had... you just had a way.

SV: Years of experience.

GB: Yeah, and so [1:32] we didn't need all those tanks that when we were building that winery so what we did need was more barrels. So I got the chance to research a new industry for the wine industry and that was in smaller containers,

being 60-gallon, 59-gallon vessels to house finished wines, so that they can age in these smaller containers. And so-

SV: The industry was...was like 80 or 90 gallons. That was the industry before right?

GB: Yeah. And so we were a very small winery that had a tremendous amount of barrels for our size. And this[1:33] unheard of, that was disproportionately wrong to have so many barrels. But we had as many barrels as the Robert Mondavi outfit had. That's how Mr. Grgich viewed an operating winery. And so we had these tanks, yes, but they were for other purposes. Not for, not to use in a sense of the term Winery you see tanks. So that's what I learned when I first started at Grgich Hills.

SV: How long was it before you started and the building went up? I forget the year.

GB: Yeah that started in 77. So [1:34] we did a harvest of 77 there, and then I remember the electrician who was working day and night, I mean all night to the previous day to get the equipment ready, because, when you farm, and somebody says that they're ready, you have no choice. The fruit is coming off and you have to be ready and so he was working like until 2:00 in the morning and I remember that I was there helping them, you know, pull wire and chase down pliers, chase down tools from his truck, and so I do remember that. That's how we got our first harvest at Grgich Hills in 1977. [1:35]

SV: Pulling wires until the last minute. Were there facilities that you could have done some of this work in at that point in the valley?

GB: You know, that concept did not exist in 1977. There was a co-op that basically did that kind of work, but that was for their own members. So, there were member, there were growers who couldn't sell their fruit or excess fruit and they would be members of this co-op, who were the ballasts for excess fruit. Were able to take it there and have it crushed. There was not a facility that existed in those years to do that kind of work for us [1:36] but I do remember we did the first year 150 tons.

SV: Wow, wow and so what was the... well, I'll skip that for the moment because it's getting pretty late. So, is there anything else you want to say about working with Mr. Grgich and sort of your time there with aside from you know, some of these interesting concepts you learn at the very beginning. Was there something you else you want to mention about that period?

GB: So I started working there in Mr. Grgich and then what we had accomplished there was a lot of things [1:37] that we didn't, you know, we didn't realize that was set in the stage or set in the standards for modern day in wine making around the world or around in America that should say. Well, even extended into Europe because when the judgement in Paris hit the airwaves it sent a shock to Europe that they didn't understand what was going on in America. So, any information they were receiving from a winery that was deeply French was very curious to them and very authoritative and so they were getting worried at the same time they wanted to improve their way of wine making. I [1:38] noticed that when I was in Grgich in 77, 89 and 1980 because I was able to experiment with a lot of barrel Coopers from France who was trying to get their start in America. In 1980, the French judges who -- Once we had tasted the 1973 chardonnay from Chateau Montelena, and won first place, wanted to re-do the same judging. Not with the same wine, but a different wine that was from the same wine maker. Supposedly Mr. Grgich so, was that person. They took a bottle of 1977 Chardonnay to re-taste in Chicago, and the result was the same. [1:39] So it received first place again, and so I can give myself credit for making that 1977 chardonnay. But I can't give myself the credit that I made the 1973 chardonnay. That one belongs to Mr. Grgich. Because of that re-judge re-taste, Grgich became synonymous to standard to innovation to number one winery in America, and so I was right in the middle of that and I didn't realize it. So all of a sudden all Latino individuals, Mexicans, from around the actual vineyards, [1:40] working in the fields, took notice and that was the only time that I can recall that I truly had made a profound difference in perceptions about Mexican and Latino in the eventual higher profiled wine Industry.

SV: So, you recall at that point, that was the late 70's, 80's or I guess '80's. You recall who was the next person you heard about who was doing the same type of stuff you were doing?

GB: There was a, there's a winemaker over in Sonoma I think that was... had started about the same time I started at [1:41] Grgich Hills and he started out from the cellar, the cellar master and I didn't know this until I met him at a tasting. So, he congratulated me for the hard work that I had done to enable individuals like him to step out, step out and step up. And so he was very grateful and I said and I thought, you know, I told him I'm sorry I didn't realize that you were also starting out in about the same time I had and so I said that's great, that's good news. So, I said keep it going. Keep it up. But that was the only person I knew at that time, in early 70's, mid [1:42] 70's that was actually already involved. No until 19 you know when I was with Mr. Grgich for 23 years and towards the end, I decided to start my own winery in 1996. So, when I started my own winery in 1996, I started in a custom crush with Landmark, no. A winery in St. Helena. So they crushed seven tons for me, and they bottled it for me and in 1999, actually in

1997, I started my own winery here in Napa. So [1:43] many of the Mexicans Latinos from the fields had heard about this and they came to me for assistance, they came to me for a place to hold their wines. That place to store their wines for them and take care of them for them. Because they were growers turned into wine makers or wine producers. They were not legal to make wines. They were only able to crush wines over someone else's license and that happened to be my license. I had mentored a lot of Latino wineries in that period of time between '97 and 1980 and that today working on their own [1:44] and they I'm pretty proud that I had a chance to make a difference... pretty proud that I had a chance to make a difference in someone else's livelihoods and their lives without a lot of fanfare.

SV: Yeah I was going to ask. I mean they heard about you as sort of word of mouth right.

GB: Yes.

SV: I guess there's no Mexican newspaper. There's no none of that.

GB: No. There's a gentleman that used... when I was at Grgich, early Grgich. His name was Bulmaro Montes he had worked for Joseph Phelps in the vineyards for many, many, many years. [1:45] He was perhaps one of the, early individuals in the valley, that at the same time, not as early as my family but he had a very good command of vineyard and grape growing. When he delivered fruit for Grgich, then I was there to receive him. All the paperwork and inspections and so on, etc. That he came to me and he says "I remember you very well because I kept an eye on you, I kept watching you, because you were our hope. You were the guy who we wanted to open doors for us" [1:46] and I said and I said "Well I hope I did. I don't try to make it a conscious effort to open doors for anybody. Just say that it's up to you to see what you want, and see how it's possible." At the same time, if someone's already there, if someone's already accomplished it, you should go follow what that person has accomplished, because it is a different way of going about how you or anyone wants to start out. For me it started out being interested in how wine should taste and for him it could be [1:47] similar or it could be something different but he told me that I had set the example for him and everyone else in the valley without knowing it.

SV: So that's great. Did you know him before that?

GB: I just knew him as a driver.

SV: Okay. Okay.

GB: But not as today as a wine maker, he has his own brand. I didn't know that he was doing that.

SV: I had one question, backing up, when you were talking about the tasting, you met the other Mexican-American. Do you remember who that was?

GB: No, I don't remember his name. He was yeah, I don't remember. I wish I could, because I want to get in touch with him.

SV: Yeah, that would be interesting. So many other questions, but we've been here a pretty long time. So probably just wrap it up [1:48] at this point. But I did want to ask you, now you have this facility and you've been in the industry for 40 years. How have you seen it change, in whatever way technology, social aspects, whatever, what do you see as sort of the biggest change in the industry from when you started to now?

GB: There's a few changes, few pivotal moments that have changed the operating sector of the industry. So in terms of business when I started out, everybody was really proud to have ten acres, which is the minimum to build a winery in Napa County and that was a big [1:49] accomplishment in itself and so everything was controllable, everything was in-house control and marketing control, sales control, tasting control, vineyards were under control, crushings were under control, all this areas were in house control. And so I remember that when Beaulieu vineyard was one of the most looked after wineries in the valley because of the wine maker at that time was Andre Tchelistchef and he's known as the godfather wine making from Napa County. So, there's a lot of interest that he had generated for, for the valley that he controlled the vineyards, he controlled the taste. It was just a [1:50] total winery control. When the vineyards, the winery starts to get too big with the cost of escalating and the process of vineyard development or vineyard maintenance but they had to tell some of these parcels off. So that benefited a lot of the other individuals that came in just to buy vineyards. What that allowed to do was all of a sudden advancement in specialized farming that these guys who owned him now became individuals who allowed the Mexicans, the Latinos, to step, just climb the ladder into more important roles. So these more important roles [1:51] were available to them and they became confident and skillful in doing this hard work, that they broke off from these individuals and managed to form their own vineyard companies. So now we have many Latino vineyard management companies. So that these vineyard management companies now,

Latino vineyard management companies, their intent was to sell wine to growers, to wineries. We had a period where wines in the wineries were too high. We had a wine glut. And so these vineyard companies Latino vineyard companies could not sell, and so instead, they saw that what I was doing, making wine on my own, that they would try the same thing. So they sold [1:52] some, made some for themselves. But they didn't have a winemaker. And so they would hire, you know, they would look for me or individuals like me or so that was a start. So that was a good thing and so that parallel, that brought up the vineyard sector up to qualities, to the more competitiveness, where the winery there was still static but it was very competitive. So, all of a sudden this self control vineyard wineries who control this areas are releasing some of these things and at the same time that's not enough. So, when I had my winery in 1997 that I saw that I needed a better and a more fluid outlet to sell wines. I bought a wine shop, a liquor, a wine shop here in the city of Napa [1:53] in order to be able to feature my wines and pour my wines for the consumers, for people who came to visit downtown Napa, that they had a way of tasting my wines. So, I did that in 2005 and I was the only one here in Napa who doing that and so I realized that was a good thing and I brought in the other wineries to help them. So, I brought other wineries to do the same as I was doing. And in 2008, I moved. I have my current tasting room. But it's from 2006 to 2008 [1:54] there was this movement of downtown tasting rooms all over America and so I feel proud that that was my model that helped this industry grow from the county or from hard to reach wineries bringing their wines and more into an urban area. And so that also paved a way for a lot of Latino Mexican wineries to do the same because they did not own wineries, they were partnered with other wineries you know, licenses but did not own wineries. Or they did not have a facility. But this allowed them to sell wines like a real winery. So that [1:55] period that was today we're still seeing a lot of, you know, a lot of movement in that direction but I think that has been one of the most, I don't know, I think profound areas of this industry that nobody thought you would see, it has aloud more customers to taste wines and aloud more customers to be able to access a quality wines, and I think that would not been otherwise. So, I think that it's good for everybody.[1:56]

SV: Well, that's a good note to end on, I think. We covered a lot of ground and I still have a lot of other questions but this gives a nice picture of the Mexican American community. Thank you for the time you spent with me talking about this. Is there anything else you want to say before we finish up?

GB: I want to thank you as well to be able to have, for myself, to have an opportunity to share a lot of these stories that are kind of like not really expressed and realized that the movement in this new industry since 1976, has been a very progressive movement and very, I think, [1:56] fortunate process that allowed the Mexicans Latino entities to exist.

SV: Mainly because of some of your work you've done and your family's movements here. I just want to make sure that's you know, kept in mind as we go through our history [Inaudible]

GB: Thank you.

SV: So thank you very much. Thank you very much.

GB: You're much welcome. [1:51:57]
[END OF AUDIO]