

Name of the interviewee: Everardo Robledo
Date of the interview: October 22, 2011
Name of the interviewer: Steve Velázquez

Transcript audited by Velasquez on Aug. 24, 2020. False starts and repetitive verbalizations ("um") have been removed for overall clarity.

Steve: All right. It is October 22nd, 2011. I'm Steve Velasquez. I'm here as part of the Latino wine makers project. And I am here with Everardo Robledo. Good morning! Or good afternoon, I should say. For the record, could you please state your name?

Everardo: Everardo Robledo.

Steve: Okay. And where were you born?

Everardo: I was born in Zamora, Michoacán, December 15, 1975.

Steve: 1975. And are you the oldest or the youngest?

Everardo: I'm the third born.

Steve: You're the third born.

Everardo: Yes. I have one older sister, Lorena Robledo. And then my brother – actually my sister's Lorena Herrera. And my brother Ray Jr. Robledo, and then myself. And then it's Vanessa Robledo and Jenaro Robledo [1:00] and then Francisco and Ruiz Robledo. They're twins. And it's – what else? Larry -Lazaro Robledo and Emiliano Robledo is the youngest. So yeah, seven boys and two girls. Two girls.

Steve: And your parents names are?

Everardo: Reynaldo Robledo's my father and Maria Robledo's my mother.

Steve: Okay. And they were also from Mexico. Is that correct?

Everardo: Yes. They were born near Zamora, Michoacán, Mexico.

Steve: Both of them?

Everardo: Both of them, yes.

Steve: Okay. And they came to the United States when?

Everardo: My father came in 1968 at the age of 16, with my great grandpa and his father. But my great grandpa's the one that fixed his papers over in Mexico City [2:00] and then that's how he was able to come down and work.

Steve: And did they come straight to Napa as that's where we are? Or to California and then eventually came to Napa?

Everardo: No, they came straight to Napa over at the Christian Brothers. That's where he started working.

Steve: Both your great grandfather and father, they all started there at the Christian Brothers?

Everardo: Yes. Yes, they all worked there at and then they worked, seasonal agricultural work. They also picked apples and oranges and you know they picked anything in agriculture.

Steve: Anything in agriculture. That's kind of where the seed to the Robledo winery started was that?

Everardo: Yes. Yes.

Steve: Do you know how [3:00] they came to get started in wine? Was it - -did they have another family member that was working here? Or did they just hear about it or?

Everardo: I think there's a lot of opportunity and it was an industry that was growing, so they, my grandpa always would come seasonally. And my dad just ended up staying here and marrying my mother in 19 – when was it? When he was 19. So, then he brought her over here and had most of his kids here in Sonoma.

Steve: And so, were you the last one born in Mexico?

Everardo: Yeah. I was the last one born. My older sister was born in Mexico and then my brother Ray was born in Healdsburg, here in California, and then I was born in Zamora, Michoacán, Mexico.

Steve: Okay. And so that was 19 – I'm sorry. [4:00] Your father came in 1968, right?

Everardo: Yeah. 1968, at the age of 16.

Steve: And they got married in 19 –

Everardo: I think 1970. 1970, I believe.

Steve: Now, how did your – let's talk a little bit more about your father. How did your father get started with the wine business apart from picking grapes or [unclear]

Everardo: He put a lot of interest in the work and he got promoted to like a supervisor. So, I think that's when he realized that he wanted to have his own vineyard someday. So it finally happened in '84, when he bought his first vineyard over in Napa, 13 acres. And I think that's when it all began. [5:00] We as kids worked on the fields after schools and on the weekends. So, I think he saw an opportunity and just went for it. And we all participated in that growth, all my family. My siblings, my brothers and sisters worked out in the vineyard too when we were little kids. [other voices come in] And I think that's when he saw that opportunity.

Steve: Right, right. And 1984 was he still working with specific wineries?

Everardo: Yeah, he was still – he worked as a vineyard manager for a few different vineyards.

Steve: Okay, so did he own a vineyard then? Was he like the?

Everardo: He was a vineyard manager for other companies –

Steve: So, he started that himself?

Everardo: Well, he was a vineyard manager [6:00] for other companies and then he started Robledo Vineyard management in 1992.

Steve: Okay, 1992.

Everardo: And then in '94, he just went to work for himself.

Steve: For himself.

Everardo: Yes.

Steve: I'm gonna pause it. All right. So, do you know where he was working and what different wineries?

Everardo: Yeah. He was working for Curtis Ranches and he also worked for Sonoma Contraire, St. Supery, so a few different wineries.

Steve: And so you were also there.

Everardo: Yeah. Actually, yeah, I did work at the age of 16, [7:00] I did work as a sampler. I would go out during close to harvest and I would get samples.

Steve: And that would be –

Everardo: That would be –

Steve: October?

Everardo: That would be in the summer.

Steve: Oh, okay.

Everardo: That was my summer job. I would start in August and take samples of the berries and I would bring them in and process them in the winery there and make sure that the sugars were getting close. See how the progression was coming along so that it would be ready to pick so we could get an idea when we wanted it to pick.

Steve: Okay and so you were picking, you were sampling from each row, from couple of rows?

Everardo: Yeah, I'd go a certain section of the vineyard and I would just zigzag through the rows and get a few berries, [8:00] two three berries from each of the clusters. I'd put in a bag and then we would smash it and run a few tests on to check the sugar content to see if it was ready to pick.

Steve: And that was under vineyard management or was that winery?

Everardo: No, it was in the vineyard. It's a little of both because yeah.

Steve: Okay, so. It was a little bit of vineyard management and winery work. It wasn't really, there wasn't that split.

Everardo: No, because it would be out in the vineyard. So, I was out in the vineyard. And I'd get samples to see when it was close to pick. So, yea...

Steve: And so you were 16. How many years did you do that?

Everardo: About two years. And I still do it off and on. I do it every year.

Steve: Oh yeah, you said that. And did you do anything – was that primarily [9:00] what you did during the summer or did you do other?

Everardo: No, it was pretty much what I did I would do that and just do things out in the vineyard.

Steve: And during the year, during the harvest and the fall, were you involved in that at all?

Everardo: Yeah. The harvest, yeah. I would haul grapes or do whatever I needed to do. Sorry.

Steve: So, did you have a favorite job that you did in the?

Everardo: Probably riding the ATV.

Steve: The ATV, which is the?

Everardo: Like the motorcycle.

[CROSS-TALK]

Everardo: Yeah. So, I would do that and just go all over the vineyard. And that was pretty fun to me at the time until I flipped over.

Steve: oh yeah, I can imagine that probably –

Everardo: But it was fun. It was fun.

Steve: And did you do – were [10:00] your brothers, were they doing the same?

Everardo: Yeah, my older brother Ray would do the same.

Steve: The same. Sampling and – a

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- Everardo: Yeah, he would do work out in the vineyard too. Yeah.
- Steve: And then pick – everybody. Everybody [phone interruption] helping with all, with the harvest.
- Everardo: Yeah.
- Steve: So, this was in high school. Did you have an idea that you'd be doing this or did you?
- Everardo: You know I didn't think in high school until I got out of high school. Since my dad had started the farm labor, the management company, I'm the one that got the certificate. So, I became a farm labor contractor [11:00] at the real young age of I think 20 or 21, I was a farm labor contractor. So yeah. I started doing that right out of high school. And I still went to the JC and the college over in Napa. And I took a few classes there. But after awhile, it was a little too much for me because I would work early, and I would get out late. And I'd go to school, night school and wake up early again. So, I decided to not take as many classes. So, I still took classes there.
- Steve: Oh, that is a lot of work. Could you describe a little bit about labor contractor? Were you getting new contracts or?
- Everardo: Yeah. If someone wanted to develop a vineyard for themselves, if they had a ten-acre parcel, we would go in there and if it had, if it [1:00] needed clearing, we would go in there and prepare the land for the vineyard. And we would just get a D8 and rip it so that the soil was workable.
- And then we, I would go in there and I would lay out the way the roads were gonna be. And then I would install the irrigation, put the stakes, plant, decide what we wanted to plant in the vineyard depending on what the location of it was and what the soil profile was to find out what root stock we would put in there, what clone. So, a lot of different things that I learned about from my dad and other people, and working with other people too to install the vineyard.
- Steve: Who are some of the other – besides your father – are some of the other big influences in how you were gaining a job at that point?
- Everardo: Umm [13:00] there's a lot of people that I think I got inspired by. I think the Sangiacomos are pretty big here in Sonoma. I think they
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were a big inspiration for us. Angelo Sangiacomo, he would help my dad out with smudge pots: those are the things that we would put out in the vineyard for when it would freeze. And he helped him out a lot with that. And a lot of other people. Steve Hill was also here in Sonoma, but yeah. A few people that I worked with.

Steve: And so at the age of 20 to 21, you're doing this and when did [14:00] you guys decide to say hey, let's just make our own wine. How did that come about? Who did the?

Everardo: Well, in 1992, my dad made, I think, about 100 cases of Pinot Noir from the Carneros Vineyard over in Napa. And that was our first vintage in 1992. And I think that's when my dad saw the opportunity in it because he now had grapes. So in '97, he made about 300 cases, I believe it was of chardonnay and pinot. And right now, we're at anywhere from 15 to 20 thousand cases a year. But yeah, it was in 1992. And I still have a bottle of that in the tasting room. I framed it because I had two [15:00] and I think I must have drank the other one. And now I only have one, so I decided to frame it. So it's in there.

Steve: And so, was that when your father, your father bought the first parcel of land in what year?

Everardo: '84.

Steve: In '84.

Everardo: Yeah, so it wasn't until eight years later when he decided to make wine.

Steve: And was that on the first parcel or second parcel? Did you have to use both?

Everardo: That was from the first vineyard.

Steve: First vineyard, okay. And you guys still have the first vineyard?

Everardo: Yes.

Steve: How did he go about making the wine. I mean, did he have contract somebody to do it or all himself with you?

Everardo: No, he [16:00] had a friend that made the wine for him. And then in '97 my brother-in-law Rolando, he started making our wine.

Steve: And what year was that?

Everardo: '97.

Steve: '97. And he, is he still the winemaker?

Everardo: No. we have another consultant wine maker, Julian Gonzalez, that we use.

Steve: What, when you're looking at the field – going back to vineyard management for a second, looking at the fields, what are some things you're looking for to do and to avoid in terms of clearing the land and planting?

Everardo: Well, you've gotta first of all make sure that you have good water, good soil to be able to plant and to plant the right varieties in there. So, you don't make that mistake of planting the wrong variety in the wrong soil or climate. So yeah.

Steve: So that's what? Now, do you still have the management company? Are you still involved with that?

Everardo: Yeah, we still have the vineyard management company. And we're still are managing our vineyards and other peoples' vineyards. So ,we started with 13 acres; now we're up to about 400 acres.

Male Speaker: 450.

Everardo: 450.

Steve: 450. Who, can you name some of the people you work for or work with? [18:00] Is that? [many voices in background]

Everardo: We work – Jenaro actually did deals with the vineyard management company. I used to do that. But year, we have Jerry Farms [?], Van Schard [?] , Richard Sullivan, to name a few.

Steve: So you do 450 acres, how big are your crews?

Everardo: We have about 30-40 guys year-round.

Steve: Year-round!

- Everardo: Yeah, and during the summer, we hire up to 100 guys to pick the grapes. Yeah, so.
- Steve: So in the summer, well you're picking whites in September harvesting?
- Everardo: Yeah, September-October. First, we start with – we sell a lot of our grapes for the sparkling market. So, we start in maybe the middle of September. And then finish towards the first week of October... with that.
- Steve: Now, the tasting room is here and the celebration. Is this the winery, the vineyard behind here, this is not the first parcel of land?
- Everardo: No. This was maybe the third...third parcel.
- Steve: And on the first parcel, are there any buildings on it or is it just?
- Everardo: Yeah. There's a house. That's where my parents live.
- Steve: Oh, that's where your parents live. Okay. And they built that in?
- Female Speaker: Compermiso
- Everardo: Si. [loud interruption] [20:00]
- Steve: And so your parents built that house on the first parcel in?
- Everardo: In '97. [loud interruption]
- Steve: In '97. And so, what is your role now with the Robledo winery? What is your main job?
- Everardo: Well, I'm the CEO so I do a little of everything. I make sure the business is running the way it should be. And I go out and see if I can get more business. And just strategize on how to make the business survive in these hard-economical times.
- Steve: Hard times, yeah.
- Everardo: So, we have to diversify, do a lot of different things. I have to sell [21:00] some wine in bulk, you know do a lot more custom work. So, I got to see what kinda business I can get.
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- Steve: Custom work, by – what do you mean by custom work?
- Everardo: Like if someone wants to make their own wine, we make it for them. We have the capability of bottling wine under their own label. We just, I just installed a bottling line this year. I've been wanting to get one since '97 and it finally happened this year.
- Steve: So, this year.
- Everardo: So, I finally got a bottling line, so we're able to do everything in-house under one roof.
- Steve: Under one roof. And all your 400 acres is used up here; do you have to get more fruit?
- Everardo: No, we sell most of it. We sell about maybe 70, about 70 percent [22:00] to other wineries like Kendall Jackson, Gloria Ferrer, I've sold some to Schramsberg over in Napa, Domaine Carneros, Rack & Riddle, BR Cohen, V. Sattui. So, a lot of different wineries. And that's what I do. I go out and I meet people and I sell them some grapes. So that's what I do.
- Steve: And are they sort of repeat customers?
- Everardo: Some of them are, yeah. Some of them are just one year or every – whenever they need some. But most of them, we've worked with them for awhile. Been a big supporter for us.
- Steve: Can you describe what it is about the fruit, the grapes that keeps?
- Everardo: You know we're farmers so we know how to grow them and how to balance them. This year was kinda tough for a lot of people [23:00] because the weather. So, it was a very challenging year. So, a lot of people lost their fruit because of the rain. You know it's mainly the experience that we have to try to grow the best fruit out there so we can make good wine.
- Steve: Sure. Sure, is there something about the character of the grape that they have said that they like?
- Everardo: The location. If we have pinot in a cool area, chardonnay in a cool area, then they like that. I think it's a just that we have the experience to put out a good product and it's picked real clean. And they like the way the fruit is. So yeah.
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- Steve: Now are you, have any interest [24:00] in buying, trying to find land? I know it's expensive.
- Everardo: Yeah, we're always looking for opportunities to lease or buy. But we're always looking. We're constantly want to grow because we feel we can do a good job at it so we try to increase every year a little bit.
- Steve: What are some of the things that your father has taught you that you use in your job today?
- Everardo: Just hard work ethic. A little of everything. Just knowing how to negotiate, knowing how to work and just keep working at it. Try to make the business better. A little of everything.
- Steve: A little of everything. And I noticed your mother was out there on the, in the cook line, [25:00] in the food line serving up some food. Is that a big part of the Robledo experience?
- Everardo: Yeah. She's executive cook here. She's the one that cooks for, cooked when we were kids all the time so she got good at it. She gets a lot of requests for her to cook here, so that's what she's doing.
- Steve: That's what she's doing.
- Everardo: She's made some ceviche and salsa, so she's a good cook. And she enjoys it; she likes it.
- Steve: So that's her role in the whole Robledo experience?
- Everardo: Yes.
- Steve: So, some of your other brothers and sisters, are they also in the wine business?
- Everardo: Yeah, most of them. My older sister has her own winery over in Napa. It's called Mi Sueno, with her husband Rolando. And my brother Ray has his own olive tree business. [26:00] He sells olive trees and makes olive oil here in Sonoma.
- Steve: And what – does he have a label? You say he sells trees.
- Everardo: No, he's – he just sells trees, installs big trees, little trees. And then my sister Vanessa owns, is partners in a winery over in Napa
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called Black Coyote. She's in the wine business. And pretty much all the rest of the younger kids work here. We have a few businesses. We have, as I said, Robledo Vineyard Management and we have Robledo Family Winery. And within the winery, we work out in the cellar, so my brother works there and in the tasting room here.

Steve: And in the cellar, so he's doing what in the cellar?

Everardo: He's doing a lot of the wine making there. [27:00] Whatever needs to be done to the wines, we do it there.

Steve: Uh-hum. Well, I know you have to get back, so I just want to thank you for your time here and hopefully be able to catch up later at another visit.

Everardo: Okay, sounds good. Thank you for the interview. [27:24]

[End of Audio]

Duration: 28 minutes
