

MARY ANN HARDMAN
Persimmon Vineyards - Clayton, GA

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Interviewer: John T. Edge, Southern Foodways Alliance
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[Begin Mary Ann Hardman Interview]

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JE: So please tell me your name? Today is August 27, 2008 I believe and I'm sitting here with Mary Anne Hardman and Miss Hardman if you'd please tell me your full name and your date of birth?

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MH: I'm Mary Ann Hardman, AKA Mary Ann Hard Woman; I was born January 20, 1968. I'm 40--whew-hoo.

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JE: And help me--we're at--we're at Persimmon Creek Vineyards, but help me locate this place. Where--where are we in terms of topography and geography?

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MH: We're in the Northeast Georgia Mountains; we're 45 minutes from Highlands if you go the shortcut and we're at 2,100-foot elevation, so we're in sandy, loamy, alluvial dirt and we're in Rabun County, Georgia; Clayton, Georgia in a little bitty town known as Persimmon. Well it's not really a town; it's just a little suburb like you've got Atlanta, you've got Decatur, Alpharetta, but Persimmon is a part of Clayton, Georgia--not Clayton County but Clayton, Georgia.

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JE: And driving through it looks like Persimmon was once a--a self-contained place, that there's a schoolhouse and--?

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MH: Right it was and it still is; I mean it's known as the little community of Persimmon, so and there's you know the schoolhouse is actually now sort of like a town hall gathering spot where they have meetings like for the political candidates that are voting--you know that are running for candidacy in our county; they'll have gatherings there. They'll have a Halloween festival for the community there; I mean it's just a little--I guess it's sort of like an old church hall but non-denominational. And people will gather there; they--they do a clean-up, trash pickup you know once a year and they gather there, so it's sort of a--a benchmark, because Persimmon is bigger than people realize. It's just not Persimmon Road and Persimmon Creek Road; you've got Milly Keener and then you've got Betty's Creek and Patterson Gap and all that--that sort of meander off these roads, so--.

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JE: I saw Slop Bucket Road on the way in.

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MH: Oh yeah; if I were going to steal a sign that would be the one to steal. If I were a stealing chick which [*Laughs*]-if I--if you see me in the Post Office Most Wanted that's because I stole that sign. [*Laughs*]

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JE: And this area you're on how many acres?

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MH: 110; we have 110 acres. We have 20 that are planted in vines and we started in 1999 and we bought 10 acres. And Sonny, my husband, who is a physician--his name is--his real name is William Hardman, but his father is William Hardman also, so he's called Sonny. But Sonny planted 10 of those acres; we owned 10 and so he planted six of them in vines. And those--

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JE: And what were those first six?

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MH: The four that we have--merlot, cabernet franc, riesling and seyval blanc; uh-hm.

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JE: And in developing--well let's start talking a little bit more about the land. So prior to planting this in grapes what was raised here and--and who raised it?

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MH: Well historically you know if you want to talk about what this was a long time ago, this was the tromping grounds of the Cherokee and you know my twins have really some cool little arrowheads that they've found out there, and so they've got a great flint one and that is so neat. You can go through the vineyard because that soil of course--of course has been tilled up and you know what was old has probably been brought to light that hasn't been in a while.

But the Cherokees ran through here and you know at that point in time what I love about the Cherokee Indians is that they see land as everyone's. And that's one reason I have to say and this is an aside, one very special part about Rabun County is when you're out there in our fields

and you look around the surrounding mountains, guess what you see? You see 39-percent of the land being privately held and another 61-percent being owned by Georgia Power and the National Forestry Service. So when you look up at those mountains there's no development in them; the ones that we're in the valley of. And that's really wonderful because you think about preserving that and that's really how I guess the Indians would have wanted it, because they saw it all as--you know instead of building fences and putting up gates it was all their own and they cherished it and they only killed what they needed to eat and to live and they took from the land. So that's really the heritage here, but after that of course you know truly as bootlegging, people farmed here and Rabun County is a part of Appalachia; truly is, and people forget that.

You know you've got like Lake [Seed], Lake Rabun, Lake Burton that you know the--the *New York Times* writes about this area and they call those lakes the Hamptons of Atlanta. You've got Sam Nunn having a house there; maybe Julia Roberts does--I don't know; it was a rumor. But very, very wealthy people on those lakes who--who--it's a tremendous dichotomy between those people and the locals who are here.

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And you know my own mother-in-law grew up on Tallulah River Road in a house with no electricity. Her mother died when she was nine and you think about that; that was just one generation ago--one generation and you have such a change. But there's still--

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JE: And what was her name?

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MH: Her name was--well back then her name was Vester--V-e-s-t-e-r--but she had it legally changed to Vesta, which is pretty but you know Vester is--is a harsh-sounding you know your tongue on the R but Vesta is a beautiful name. But her father worked for the Civilian Conservation Corps, the CCC, so you know that really harkens back. We're so you know--I'm 40; I'm not in touch with those times. They didn't have Whole Foods, they didn't have Publix, they didn't have Kroger and it was each man and--but there probably was a greater friendship and kinship among people because they had to help one another out, but--.

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JE: And this was--corn was grown here--was the predominant--?

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MH: Corn--corn and you know that was the main thing was corn and livestock, so what Persimmon was known for was their quality of their bootlegging during Prohibition. Persimmon was the hot bed of bootlegging. And actually I think this is sort of even--this is sort of like really harkens like that Mayberry sort of Andy Griffith thing is--is that when the revenuers would come through these little old ladies would be sitting on their houses which are sort of like row--like millhouses if you--there's a couple on Germany Road that sort of harken that but they'd be sitting on that and they'd see the revenuer car go by. And it was sort of like the Paul Revere thing; *oh the revenuers are coming by*. And so it would be passed from house to house to house verbally and then it would finally get to the person who needed to know it. **[Laughs]** But the revenuers would come up here and they would smash the stills and stuff but that was how the people tried to make a living because there's not industry here. There's not you know--there's not Clorox Bleach being made up here; there's--there's very little industry here as far as--if you

can consider like Atlanta and--and I mean I still have to go to Gainesville to get the cartridges for my ink printer here. There's Wal-Mart and Home Depot which have come in and people can debate that and what it does for local businesses and I think there's a time and a place for everything but it's very hard. If you want anything esoteric up here you just can't get it; this is really different.

This is a slower pace of life. But I have to tell you that the people--this is an aside but I'll tell you this. Horace you know wrote during 50BC or maybe it was 30BC--let's just say 30BC; I think it's correct--Horace around the time of *Ovid* and all those people, but Horace was you know a city dude. His father was a Friedman and you know Horace kind of grew up in the sticks. He didn't have a lot and he had this great patron who gave him a farm and the name of his farm--he named it Sabine Farm. And Horace wrote about how much he loved his farm and didn't want to go back to Rome. And you think about that in 30BC when they didn't even have electricity. And then the cars, the traffic jams--whatever and here he is in his rural Sabine farm, 30BC and he writes about how much he is more connected to the earth and people and how much he loves it and doesn't want to leave that to go to the city to deal with his grand patron because he feels connected to people. And that's what I see here more so because people are closer to the earth, closer to I don't know--it's--it's people; you're not just passing them and trying to get past them.

Let's just say that and get out of my way, so there's--my--personally I think that people here are a little bit more connected and my friendships here have a deeper level than I would say that my--my--. Horace wrote *The Country Mouse and the Town Mouse*, okay. You know that story? So you know my friendships here have a deeper level because you need it more; you need

somebody to be connected with. So that's really going back to the revenueurs and how they had to help one another and that was survival, because you know you think about bootlegging and Prohibition and what you know that meant and this was people trying to eek a living out of wilderness.

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JE: And you mentioned when we were walking around the property, today we went down by your springhouse and there was an--there was an abandoned still and you--you told me of one particular person that raised corn here and tell me about her.

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MH: Well her name was Delia and she is--

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JE: Do you know her last name?

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MH: Well it probably was Kelby 'cause she's related to the Kelby(s) across the road and maybe Delia is not her real name. It was in a book; it's sort of like--she's probably still alive today you know maybe late 80s kind of thing but she was--she was asked to leave Persimmon because of her bootlegging prowess but the thing about her that's very remarkable is--is that you know if you think about today and we can just go to Whole Foods and pull stuff off the shelf and that's so easy. And what she did was she had to create her own living. And here she was a single mother of I don't know how many children, and she grew her own corn, and then she made it into

corn liquor which she in turn drove to Atlanta and sold. And so you know what a chick-- courageous, heroic and iconoclastic and classy. My acronym.

But--but she was--and I admire that in a woman because it is so much harder; she was eek(ing) a livelihood for herself and her children and she--you know probably a lot of her maybe become legends sort of like what is Paul Revere and what's not but she was very attractive. She was a beautiful woman and she could outrun the revenuers and--and people just thought she made great. I don't know if it was just like--maybe she's sick--stopped bootlegging; I don't know. Maybe she was the Marilyn Monroe of bootlegging. But she honestly she--she was respected not just because she was but what she did and could do and so--but she was driven by eek(ing) out a livelihood for herself and her kids. So she grew corn; she made--she made corn--she made bootleg and she made hot corn liquor and she took it to Atlanta in her car during Prohibition and finally she was arrested so many times that the police asked her to leave and she did.

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JE: And now you and your husband are raising grapes and making wine and driving it to Atlanta?

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MH: Right; and we're bonded. [Laughs] All of that paperwork filled out and you know officially bonded by the BATF, but just that idea of what we were and what was here and you know turning the land into something that can be drunk amongst family and friends. I'm sure bootlegging and--and you know corn liquor, the alcohol content certainly is high and it's the buzz and the drunk that people wanted back then because life was hard. But, I mean it's the

Bacchus, it's what--what Rubin has painted that sort of thing but if you--if you think about what we're doing here we're trying to just do what she did really and do it legally and also to lend you know--you know what my job is, the number one thing here Mr. Edge?

It's that my job is when the day is done and when I drive up here and I look at that fence is to make this land sing. And the song is to whoever will listen but it's to make this land sing; that's my job. And so she made it sing during her time out of self-preservation and I guess I'm blessed that I don't have to worry about who is going to feed my kids. But my job is to take this land and make people know about it through the elegance of our wine which I hope people will like. But that's it and you know dirt--she obviously loved her dirt and you know dirt is all over the world but they're not making anymore of it, that's for sure--except in--.

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JE: What about those worms?

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MH: Yeah; [*Laughs*] Except in Dubai, where they're doing the island you know. But--but it's the whole love of the earth and--and you know when you're all concreted up and you're asphalted and you can't see it, but when you can walk out and you can scoop up dirt and you can understand that wine is one of the few things that can--and wine is agricultural and people forget that.

They--they--as long as I've been doing this which has been a very, very short time but in restaurants and amongst people you walk in and you see glasses and it's not like the squash, it's

not like the asparagus; it's not something you can actually touch. It's cold and glass is cold but you know real wine when it's estate-grown and bottled does not grow on the vine, labeled, capsule(d), and corked and so people forget that. And I tell people all the time; whenever you walk into a bottle shop and you see bottles but really you should see a vineyard; you should see earth. There is--and I used to see bottles all the time when I walked in bottle shops until we got so into this but now when I walk into a bottle shop and I see, say, you know, oh I don't know, that or the you know—Cline bottle or like we're talking about Land and Reed and the Crocker and Starr, and all that; that's a place and it's their dirt and all those are places. And somehow the bottle being so cold and manmade thing takes away from that.

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JE: Let's talk about how the vineyard began here and the year your husband's, Sonny's first attempt. What--what happened?

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MH: Okay; this is the whole deal. It's 1999 and Sonny found the property and you know it wasn't--you have to remember that my husband is a pathologist. He's a germadi-pathologist which is a fancy word for pathologist with the--with a skin subspecialty. So Sonny went to get--to Emory for 12 years, passed college to do what he does, but that really doesn't matter, but what does matter is that if you think about that time and you know like we're so much a reflection of our education and Emory and all that much years of schooling, scientific method, so his mind, unlike mine, is very much guided by reason. *[Laughs]* And so I'm the creative one.

But you know when he came upon this plot which he was guided by you know where are you from? His mother was from here, so that's where you start looking but he didn't know about this area. A real estate agent--he didn't know that the valley opened up here and you see this beautiful valley with the mountains behind it. He didn't know about it; he had an Aunt Buell and Uncle Ferd which Buell and Ferd, he used to wonder which one was her and which one was him, but I mean on Tallulah River Road, which is three miles from here. But he didn't know about this area but really to plant the vineyard what did he do?

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First off, UGA came out--soil studies and then we did temperature studies and I was not part of that. Brigham and Hamilton--10 years old right now; you can do the math; I was a little distracted. So but once those came in and actually I told Sonny, I said you know we--you know we have to buy those 10 acres because Brigham and Hamilton love it so much. We were sort of attached to the land but when you plant a vineyard you just don't say oh I want to grow vinifera, I want to grow wine grapes; you don't do that. You have to match your soil and your climate. You know I love Fox Gloves just as much as anybody and you know when I planted my Fox Gloves out there I just went out there and just found them somewhere good, kind of shady, but wine is different. It's different. You have to match your soil and your--and your varietal because you want ripe grapes and if you can't get ripe grapes then you ain't got good wine. It's not anything that happens after it's picked; you've got to have the good grapes.

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So--so Sonny you know figured out what four varietals because you have to think about it this way; why--why start planting 20 grapes to figure out what grows well? Why do that? Why not just study and figure out what climate you have and then narrow down those grapes that you think might grow well and see what they do rather than just saying oh I'm going to plant 20

different types and see what happens because then you've got the expense and it's just much more rational. If I were going to make jellies, I think I'd start with--if I were Mrs. Welch 20 years ago I think I would have started with two varietals and then maybe--maybe apple and grape and then maybe I'd branch out to boysenberry later. But you have to start with your four core and that's what we've done and I really don't want to go anymore. But you choose four and you try to do them well and we're still trying to do them well. Just like we're people and we're still trying to become the best we can and that's what those grapes are doing. So we've done the best we could in choosing the grapes for the site.

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JE: And you started out with 10 acres and four varietals?

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MH: And now we have 110 with 20--20 grapes--acres of grape but 16 in production, so some of those will kick in--in the upcoming years but we're always--you know the great regions of the world in wine didn't happen overnight--Italy, France, how long have they been doing that and how long ago was it just in Oregon that they said that you can't do that with respect to Pinot Noir; you can't do that?

And so you know how many people--do you know--but the first time I went to go sample our wines that the guy refused to taste them. He refused to taste it. He was from Manhattan but had roots deep in the South and he refused to taste it.

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JE: You took these wines to a shop or--?

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MH: Took them to a very, [*Laughs*]--a very, very high-end place, my first sales call ever; he refused to taste them because they were from Georgia. And--

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JE: So where were you; where did you take them?

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MH: At--I was at the Ritz Carlton in Greensboro; that was my first sales call ever--ever.

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JE: I don't think that's anything to whisper. I think it's something to say. It--it reflects both your interest and determination and the--the difficulties you faced.

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MH: Yeah; well but--but let me say this even more so as an aside. I learned a tremendous--tremendously from that sales call, because I didn't have a clue number one what I was doing.

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JE: What year was this? This was--?

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MH: This was probably 2003; so you know I go down there and you know this is just--I've never sold wine before. I'm a former kindergarten teacher and had a calligraphy business and I just decided well we've got some wine. Where should we sell it?

You know I believed it was the best--just like my children you know. If my children are going to go to college do I want them to go to third tier or one? If they can go to one I'm going to send them to one; go there--shoot high. Don't aim low; shoot high. But so that's what I did; I shot high. And so I go down there and get all dressed up you know and just drive down there and what do you do? You pull out your Reidel and your Speigalau glasses that you sweated and you know these are the right glasses for this or not? And then the guy looks at you and says I'm not going to taste this. And then you look at him and you say well you know why don't you smell it? Smell that Riesling, smell that Seyval because we didn't have red in the bottle yet; just smell it because then you can kind of tell; and then you know smells it and I said well you know you've already smelled it and you know smelling and taste are so close sense, you might as well just go ahead and taste it. So then the guy tastes it and you know he's like well he didn't die. So and he tasted the Seyval and he didn't die. And then you know I leave and he doesn't order any and of course I'm like well gosh, I failed. But then I go home and I get out my nicest stationery because gratitude is important. Does it matter if he brought your wine or not right then; it's--the sales call is not over at that moment. You sit down and you write him a note. Dear so and so; thank you so much for your time today. I'm so honored that--blah, blah, blah.

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And so of course I get out my finest stationery, handwrite it and mail it to him and you know I never hear another word back from him. Three months later he calls my husband's office. But I have to say this; one of the restaurants down at the Ritz Carlton Greensboro is named

Georgia's and my whole point to him was--is that how can you have a restaurant—your flagship restaurant and be named Georgia's and you have meatloaf on the menu and you have traditional Southern fare and you are serving wines from Loire. And you're serving you know Italian and whatnot; why don't you have something of your place here--your dirt that is vinous--v-i-n-o-u-s, not the planet. But you know that's what--that's what I told him; that was my whole thing is that what grows together goes together. If you're going to have local Southern foods then why not offer some beverage that is quality and that is good from your place? And so I pressed that with him and you know I wasn't overly assertive but that's been my whole argument all along since 2003. And I don't know; it just landed.

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JE: Is there a way to typify the response you get?

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MH: Well most people are like they can't argue with that because I'll tell you this. You go to Italy which I've never been to Italy but my son and my husband have. They--you can't find anybody else's wine there; that's all they drink. They have tremendous heritage there and pride in their heritage. You go to France and you can't--the good French wines, I mean of course we get Margot and all this but you know so much of that never makes it here. The--the German Rieslings that are the finest they never make it out of their country because those people drink it and they have pride.

They have--I guess it's ethno-centrism; they are so proud of what they have and they support that. So that's my whole thing is--is that look at this; this is good. I mean you know

you've had the seyval; it's a good wine. Why not--why are you serving that dish with a wine from the Loire Valley or a sauvignon blanc from Burgundy or a--you know whatever--the carbon footprint from Australia or New Zealand. And I love Israeli Rieslings, I mean great--I'm tickled but the world of wine is flat. But how can you consider yourself to be a wine connoisseur and this would be my thing--how can you consider yourself to be a wine connoisseur but you've never tasted your own dirt?

If you--if you're from Georgia and you say I've never had a Georgia wine then I say to you, go and taste your dirt. Try it; and don't just taste one. Taste--go to others because wine is like movies. Just because you know maybe I thought that oh I don't know--*Silence of the Lambs*--maybe you like it and I don't but you know it's one of those things; wine is like that--it's subjective. Taste your place.

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JE: One thing that seems to--in talking to people making vinifera grapes--growing vinifera grapes in the South there seems to be this casting about for what's the right grape to grow in certain climes. And--and tell me about y'all's efforts to figure that out.

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MH: Well you know this is cold climate here and Rabun County you know a lot of people--you know I've been to London and the London International Wine and Spirits Fair; I was the first person from Georgia ever to tour there. I mean I was there, a Georgia chick, and the people are like going we thought you were from Russia. You don't have that Russian accent because

actually Georgia, as in Russia is one of the--is--is really old in wine; that's huge. I mean it's probably around there is where you know vinifera originated.

So you know I have that and that was a great experience to have. But people associate outside of Georgia and outside of the country they associate Georgia with Savannah and--and all the humidity and whatnot. And we do have humidity here; it is not California but you think about this is cold climate. We are always 10-degrees colder than Atlanta, 15-degrees at least if you're in Wal-Mart parking lot with the wonderful, wonderful heat absorption of the asphalt there.

But you know we're all--you know this is cold climate; it's 2,100 feet elevation. My last frost date last year--May 15th, slight teensy weensy frost and--and to the seival--it didn't do anything--no damage. But so what do you do? It's just like when you are going to plant anything you know like lupines or lupines from Texas, they don't grow well here. I've tried to grow them but I can't grow them because they just like that Texas stuff. You have to match your grapes and you also have to have the hope of ripening.

So that's what we've done and my husband matched what he thought would ripen here into our climate. So you know it wasn't like oh you know I really, really love pinot noir; you--you know I love Fox Gloves and I grow them. But you can't say that with grapes. You have to match--you know I might love to drink oh I don't know--some Italian varietal that's a warm climate Mediterranean style grape. I might love that grape and I might love sangiovese. I just don't think we could ever get it to ripen here because it's Mediterranean but it does great where it is in the heat but for us here I don't know if it would ripen. So you have to match and certainly

cabernet franc, what a great grape known as the grape that saved the vintage in Bordeaux because it's an early--early ripener, late budder, so that's what we need. And Mother Nature, chief chick in charge, you know we got to--you have to respect that. You just done come in and say well I like this; this is what I want to do. You have to respect what is there and who was there first? It was Mother Nature.

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JE: And in trying to figure that out did you work with or consult with, turn to other winemakers, other grape growers whether in Georgia or beyond?

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MH: Well you know the thing was is that Sonny turned to the University of Georgia and so much of the research was you know, *vitis rotunda folia*-based, meaning muscadine and you know the native grapes of--of Georgia which it should be because that's native. Honestly it should be. But it's different because those things are native to here. But so Sonny really self-taught himself; I mean those people from UGA, Phil Brannan, that group and Phil is a plant pathologist at UGA but he's had to educate himself about *vinifera* and the things, the plagues of you know certainly the--the powdery mildew and--and things like that we have to deal with.

And people--this is a different climate than California. California is so blessed; it's sort of like you know if you think about--and I know Eldorado is a--is a part of California but if you think about Napa and you--and you read the poem by Edgar Allen Poe called *Eldorado* and he write about just this land of sunshine and complete bliss all the time and that's what California is a lot like. They have intense heat--the sun and that's what you're drinking in wine. And they

don't have so much of the humidity issues that we have to deal with and what is humidity and why do we care? Well guess what; it causes powdery mildew and rot and so when you don't have to worry about those things--guess what? It's a lot easier to grow. But we have to fight rot; we have to--because Rabun County gets a lot of rain.

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JE: So--so if you're having to fight rot if this is--this seems an unnatural thing to do to grow grapes here why--why would you try to even do it?

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MH: Well I don't think it's an unnatural thing to do but you know if you think about France, look at them, I mean look at World War II you know. During World War II they certainly needed the copper sulfate that they sprayed their grapes with and you know how they got it--was that, and Marie Currie's son was a part of this--was that they got the copper pots and pans that weren't confiscated by the resistance to make bullets or whatnot and they ground them up to get the copper sulfate to spray their vines with so they could keep the rot out, the powdery mildew.

So you know they fight that in France. So you know I mean my zucchini and squash have powdery mildew on them and [*Laughs*] they're happy. But it's just more of an effort. It's just--it's--it's I mean vinifera is certainly not native to California and it was actually in Georgia before it was there. So and another really, really cool story about Georgia viticulturally is this, and we haven't broached this, Mr. Edge, but it's really interesting and I don't know if you realize this story or not. But I tell people out in the vineyard when I take them out there, and you know the vinifera is grafted onto the American root stock and they all look like pirates' legs.

And what I tell people is when we go out in the vineyard and I do these tours, because my whole idea is to educate and open people's eyes of an understanding the vineyard in the bottle and not just the liquid is--is that look all these pirate legs because remember I used to teach kindergarten--very visual. Look at all these pirates' legs 'cause that's what they look like; they look like Black Beard out there and then you've got the big knob with the--with the wooden leg and then the graft. And so I say look at that; do you know what that is? And I explain to them about phylloxera and where phylloxera came from and we--it came from courtesy of the United States but guess where it came from in the United States?

It came from a nursery in Augusta, Georgia, and it was imported in France to a little wine shop owner who happened to have a little bitty patch behind his shop that he grew wine grapes. And they tracked it; and this book is a great book from Christy Campbell called *The Botanist and the Vintner*. Great wonderful book, and it sounds like Tylenol PM, reading about Phylloxera and how they-- But it's not; it's an incredible story of history and how--but also you have to consider that--I mean do you think that the French wanted to hear that the cure for their problem with Phylloxera was to graft an American grape to their vitis vinifera? And you know the French refer to American wine as having the flavor of--and I quote--cat's piss, so you know that sort of thing was--was in an era in which science was still--the microscope wasn't there; this is around the time of Louis Pasteur and you know they don't understand. This is still--science was still in that mythology sort of state. So it took years and it was huge when they finally figured out--and it wasn't--it's not Muscadine(s) that are grafted; it's a totally different--I don't know which one it is

but it is an American grape that's grafted onto--and they had to figure out which American grape would match you know the climate in Europe--blah, blah, blah.

00:32:56

JE: It's American root stock right that they used?

00:32:59

MH: It's root stock, yeah, yeah; so but like sauvignon blanc and seyval blanc--what's the difference? Seyval is a hybrid; Sauvignon is a Vinifera. Seyval was together. So you know Sauvignon Blanc who made that Mother Nature, chief chick in charge, God--whatever--Seyval--two dudes, Mr. Seyve and Mr. Villard, but I think that's really interesting when you think about Georgia and your Southern--and our Southern roots here. Well we're to thank for phylloxera but--but you know you think--

00:33:31

JE: But we were also the solution to phylloxera too.

00:33:34

MH: Well were the solution; we were--we were kicking butt. But I think that's a wonderful story but the thing is--is that you can go to our little vineyard in Georgia planted in 1999, 2000, 2004 you know 'cause there are different plantings throughout and even in 2008 a planting, but then you can go out to--to California right now and guess what? They're grafted. You can go to--all over the world and they're all grafted except maybe in Portugal and some areas in Chile you know they have sandy soil that Phylloxera won't grow. But it's all about heritage; it's all the

same and that's really cool. So if you ever buy a bottle of wine that says pre-phyloxera vines on it, it's really neat.

00:34:16

But like when I go out to California on the 2nd, Marco Capelli making wine--Angelica Wine -- which is I've never heard of it--I just read an article about it but it's part of the California history. During the 1800s this guy came out with a formula and named it Angelica Wine, sort of like Chianti and it was--it's made from mission grapes and so it has to be aged and barreled for like seven years. And you know it's from the mission grape and you know some of the grapes were planted in 1869 out there, so what incredible thing--heritage there. So he's trying to preserve that and in some ways you know everybody's vineyard that has that graft is--is a historical benchmark to what happened in the 1800s with some little bitty vineyard and--and France that bought vines from little bitty nursery in Augusta.

00:35:08

JE: So tell me where ya'll are today; if we've talked a little bit about the history of Persimmon Creek, today you're at 110-acres, 16 in cultivation--is that--?

00:35:19

MH: Uh-huh.

00:35:19

JE: Yeah; 16 in cultivation and you're making how many different wines?

00:35:24

MH: Okay; so we make 2,000 cases. We grow--we make five different wines. We've vinify Riesling two different ways--ice wine. And it's real--ain't to cryo-extraction and then we grow merlot, cabernet franc and reisling, so but what I tell people mostly is--is that you know I--I really--you have to be connected to your dirt and wine and has incredible terroir transparency if it's made or has the potential of. So what--you know what I see as what we're trying to move forward into in the next five years or so is to be able to capture more of that in our wine is to capture more of that soil and the place, because these are 100-percent varietal. We don't--we don't do anything; these are--these are picked, they are pressed, or crushed and de-stemmed and then they go into fermentation and then they're--go into a barrel of stainless steel.

We don't do reverse osmosis or cone-spinning or what--any of that stuff to raise alcohol level, nothing fake. We don't do chips--no wood chips--nothing. And--and you know because a lot of people in the world as you know since you saw "Mondo Vino" they're you know making wine in the world to get that number from Robert Parker, so all merlot--not all but a lot of the merlots in the world from different areas are beginning to taste alike because they all want that number. And you know the world is being governed by these--these ideas that a merlot should taste this way rather than the taste of that place. So that's what we're trying to do but we're not there yet.

00:37:02

JE: Do you--do you see connectivity between what you're doing in Georgia and what someone else is attempting in North Carolina and another person in Virginia?

00:37:11

MH: Oh yeah.

00:37:12

JE: What--what are the similarities of struggle and accomplishment?

00:37:14

MH: Well let me say this is--is that you know our nation's foremost forefather of wine, Thomas Jefferson wanted and tried to grow *Vinifera* in Virginia and failed because of phylloxera and he certainly grew it when he was living on the Champs Ellyse when he was Minister to France. But you know he couldn't figure out why and he--he actually funded his Italian neighbor's efforts to you know create a wine company that George Washington was part of in Virginia. So I think that the heritage on the Eastern Coast is probably you know even deeper than maybe in California, because Thomas Jefferson and George Washington they were all from here, and they wanted that and they were huge supporters of--and--and John Adams also. They wanted to have wine because what does Jefferson say about wine and you know wanting--he really wanted to get people away from this higher alcohol and to drinking wine and--and because he saw that culture in the European way. And he wasn't a snob because he certainly saw a place for his native grape on his table, the muscadine. He--he had a Muscadine from North Carolina that he loved. But I think we're all related and I think that we can--. You know you can only do so much as one person and too much of the world thinks that only good wine comes from certain areas. And I'm here to say that there is great wine that's coming from Israel; there's some great riesling(s). I've had them at Gramercy Tavern in New York. What a cool grape to be grown in Israel and you think about that farmer and the struggle that he has to even live. But the world of wine is flat. The Japanese are growing *vinifera*. Some of the French chateaus have bought land over there.

Michel Rolland is consulting for Kluge in Virginia and you know all that but we can all say--we don't do any good to ourselves just to say that only good wine comes from certain places. Certain places' roots go deeper.

00:39:19

JE: If you were in a restaurant in the South and you wanted to taste Southern wines where would you go? Who do you think does a good job of this? Who tells that story well?

00:39:29

MH: Well I think that--I think we're still burgeoning at that and I--I've really pressed hard into the restaurant trade. I think you know it's--it's been an uphill battle because I mean tremendously you know I--I think [*Sighs*]; I don't know. I--I really don't want to name any names because you know so many restaurants have bought from us but we still--.

00:39:54

JE: Well I guess thinking of it as kind of a--a showcase, like if you travel to--through Charlotte Airport, in the airport there's a wine-tasting bar sponsored by the winemakers there. Is there a place if you were curious about Southern wines--?

00:40:09

MH: Well I--I know that I would say one--one restaurant and it's a very small one that comes to mind is--is really the Blue Bicycle in Dawsonville. He really serves only Georgia wines there. And I think that's a wonderful achievement. But I--I really think that we should challenge our restaurateurs who are written up in national publications who are from Atlanta to make more of an effort to look for more locally grown and sustained wines because my whole thing is--is that

you know how can you disassociate wine from the squash or from you know Anson Mills rice or whatever--it's that--this is all--if anything wine is more of a taste of a place than a lot of agricultural products truly.

But the problem, you know we're our own distributor, so you know when I go down to deliver at the Cloister I fly in a five-seat Cessna--instead of driving six hours I'm blessed to have a friend who flies me down there--Scott Slade, what a great guy. But we go down there and we deliver directly but it's fresh from the farm just like they might buy from Tucker Taylor when he was here or whoever you know right now is growing in his stead. But the thing is--is that I think that it is more of an effort on a restaurateur's part to seek us out and I know that. I know it is. And I know that running a restaurant is a lot of work, number one, because baseline and what people expect when they walk in the door. People expect so much and it is hard to get and deliver consistently every single--every person that walks in the door when you own a restaurant is a litmus test and to the quality of your food. And--but I also think that I--I admire those who have sought me out. I think Chef Dave, at Five Seasons Brewing, that he's called me several times that I haven't had to go to him. And it's not that I'm lazy but we're farmers and we also sell at our gate. We have--have a store, Persimmon Square, the people can come; I can sell retail and wholesale because we're a farm winery and I choose not to have our wines sold through a distributor and I could. But I also feel like that our wine is boutique and I want it sold in niche places you know--Restaurant Eugene, Panos and Paul's, Nava, Chops, Restaurant Eugene, Bacchanalia, all those places have sold our wine and they continue to do. And gratitude is the word. But let me just say that the amount of wine that they're selling from other places, the amount--the boxes are way up to the ceiling compared to ours.

Most of ours is from the gate and I will--no disrespect--I am so grateful and appreciative to those people who have found place in their cellars at their restaurants or whatnot for it but I do believe that the consumer, the person on the street who walks into the restaurant wants it more than it's being represented because I see that here. And the number of people who come to me and say oh this is my favorite restaurant in Alpharetta, this is my favorite restaurant in blah, blah, blah. Go see them; go see them but I'm one person and Claudia is you know--we'll cover the whole State. So you know it's--it's just being responsible. Do you want what's easy? I'll never forget this; this is probably my ultimate in the sense of someone who--who went outside of the box. It was the sommelier down in the Ritz Carlton in Miami called me. I don't remember his name; this was about a year--this was probably last summer. And he called me because he had our wine at the Ritz in Greensboro. He had the Riesling and the seyval down at the pool one day there and he fell in love with it. And our wine is not in Florida because we're governed by the three-their system once we go out of the State and we have to have a distributor and you know--. A distributor looking into Georgia wine is not going to be jumping through some hoops compared to like a California vineyard or vigneron.

So you know he calls me and he says, Mary Ann, I loved your wine; and I want to feature it. We have a wine dinner at the Ritz; it's the one outside of--outside of Miami in the little suburb. I can't remember the name of it, but he called me and he looked out of the box and he didn't have a distributor rep who was coming to him every week to say this was in their portfolio. And you know what--nothing against distributor reps at all; they are earning a living but they're looking at volume and I am looking at a place.

And so you know I don't really--that I sold five cases to whoever or that I sold one case, what I am looking at is--is that I want to continue the relationship with that person because our soul is in that bottle because we grew from our land. And there's a sense of ownership there. So you know and--and I know being a distributor rep is a lot of work; I know that. But wine is a food and I think that we should embrace that--truly in Europe and France it's considered a food; it's not considered as something third. And you know you match your food and your wine and you go to France and drink French.

00:45:14

JE: Thanks Mary Ann.

00:45:17

[End Mary Ann Hardman Interview]