

A Reception Celebrating the Publication of *The Brady Book: Selections from Roy Brady's Unpublished Writings on Wine*

Sunday, October 3, NVWL members and those of the Sonoma Wine Library, the Wine Librarians Association and those directly involved with the making of *The Brady Book* had the good fortune to gather at Stony Hill Vineyard on a flawless fall afternoon. A group of almost fifty drew together beneath the shade of twin plane trees on a handsome stone terrace to celebrate the publication of a remarkable work. There were wines, hors d'oeuvres, and views of far-off St. Helena to the left and ten year old Chardonnay giving way to 50 year-old White Riesling vineyards up to the right. Once the crowd quieted, Julie Dickson introduced Bo Simons, director of the Sonoma County Wine Library and president of the Wine Librarians Association. Bo has been involved with the Wine Librarians Association since its inception over five years ago. This organization for wine librarians and collectors of wine books, dedicated to preserving the history of wine, is the beneficiary of proceeds from sales of *The Brady Book*.

Bo introduced publisher, Gail Unzelman, who said she jumped on the Brady book project the moment she had the chance. Gail is editor and publisher of the wine readers' quarterly, *Wayward Tendrils*. In 1990 she started Nomis

Press to publish bibliographies of wine and gastronomy [Nomis is Simon (think André) spelled backwards]. Gail later took on various wine history projects, with Ernest Peninou of Sonoma Valley Historical Society, and the California Wine Association. She has been a collector of books on wine for many years; her husband Ron is a collector of wine. Gail noted that while the wine is eventually drunk, she still has her first book.

According to Gail, Roy Brady often visited Stony Hill, making it a felicitous site for this occasion. Roy's collection of 2,000 books (and 1,500 other publications), which had completely overrun his house by the 1960's, was acquired by UC Fresno in 1968; his meticulously indexed collection of 50,000 wine labels and wine lists went to the UC Davis



Shields Library after Roy's death in 1998. It was the sprawling mass of papers beyond these collections that compelled further attention. Manuscripts, letters, densely written loose-leaf notebooks of wine notes eventually were wrestled into a typescript three inches thick by Tom Pinney. Gail, Tom and others finally reduced this stack to a manageable size. Sixty selections from the 1950's to the 1990's, international, but especially California, were finally chosen for *The Brady Book*. The actual printing was done by Ed Ferris in Covelo (Ed was taught by Jim Robertson of Yolla Bolly Press). The limited edition of 250 hand-numbered copies is printed in a two color format with two dozen illustrations, fourteen of them carefully added full-color reproductions of wine labels. As Julie Dickson says of the book, '...the look and typeface say "Jim Beard" to me.'

Gail introduced the underwriter of the *The Brady Book* edition, Darrell Corti of Corti Brothers [Markets], Inc., Sacramento. Darrell has been a mentor to Gail and Ron for years, a walking encyclopedia of wine and food since 1947, according to Gail, who thinks he merits "sainthood". Darrell first visited Stony Hill with Fred and Eleanor McCrea, and then

again with Eleanor, so he was especially glad to be there with Peter and Willinda for *The Brady Book*.

Darrell first met Roy Brady at a tasting at an LA County Fair. While they were seated, Roy began doodling. He didn't think Darrell would be much interested; the doodles were mathematical equations (Roy worked in the aerospace industry and also taught mathematics). Darrell wasn't interested so they talked wine instead and became fast friends. Darrell found Roy to be taciturn--an observer who listened and didn't say much although he had many interests--but Darrell admired his integrity and came to enjoy Roy's asperity. Roy was an absorber of things; he enjoyed eating well; drinking well. He had had polio earlier in his life which meant no stairs later on. Travel had become fatiguing for him, but he had been a great traveler, going from Southern California to Northern California just to find out something out about wine in 1951 when 'Who was here then?' Darrell asked. 'Martini, Tchelistcheff, Stewart? In 1962 in the Napa Valley there were 12 wineries. You knew it was a quarter of six because the train ran that way with the box cars'. And Roy was in Cucamonga in the 1950's, an important part of California wine history (Ficklin Port may have the only label derived from the tag on a grapevine). Roy was very specific about what he liked. Darrell said he liked flavorful wines, honest ones. Tannin was not especially important to Roy; he never liked wood to overshadow the wine. Darrell



says there are lots more papers and he hopes any next project will have even more rather than less 'Roy'.

Gail then introduced Thomas Pinney, editor and professor emeritus of English at Pomona College, and author of *A History of Wine in America, from the beginnings to Prohibition*. Tom was familiar with Roy as a writer, but had little knowledge of him personally. Roy wrote for many publications, not particularly prominent ones at the time--local newspapers in the San Fernando Valley, *Architectural Digest*, *Gourmet*, *Wine News* which he edited. Roy was modest; he didn't legislate in his writings. He stands out for Tom because of the completeness of the wine-related activities he involved himself in. As a student of wine, as Roy always called himself, Tom finds him unmatched in the variety, on his own terms, as an enthusiast of wine (never a professional). Roy collected labels, lists, books and wines, wrote, judged, drank; dug his own wine cellar and went through 25,000 bottles of his own and tasted at least 20,000 more in his lifetime. He did

say he'd never drunk a magnum on his own. Roy always kept a loose-leaf notebook in which he wrote in ink with a clear hand about every wine he tasted. He thought old wines were usually overrated. He loathed experts, thought they were sure to be fraudulent. 'If you have nothing intelligent to say after tasting a wine, don't say anything,' he advised.

Julie then asked Eliot Mackey of the Wine Appreciation Guild to bring everyone up to date on *Napa Wine, A History from Mission Days to Present* sponsored by the Napa Valley Wine Library. It has been ten years since the book first came out. Copies, except in Australia, are difficult to find. Its author, Charles Sullivan, has just rewritten the final chapter of the first edition and, because of subsequent events, is now compiling a brand new final chapter for the second edition. Charles expects to be finished with the writing in December. Eliot forecasts two to three months of editing and fact-checking (usually not a problem with Charles), with publication in May.

Eliot had been able to unearth one copy of the limited leather-bound edition of *Napa Wine*. This was presented to Peter McCrea by Julie as a thank you for Willinda and Peter's fine hospitality. Peter was very glad to get such a grand replacement for his clothbound edition which he lent out and hasn't seen since. Sweet meats, the remaining Stony Hill wines and those selected from NVWL's own wine library, amassed over its years of tastings and seminars, amiably concluded the day.