

Aug. 7, 2020

Name of the interviewee: Amelia Ceja
Date of the interview: October 22, 2011
Name of the interviewer: Steve Velasquez
Duration: 97 minutes

Transcript audited by Velasquez on Aug. 7, 2020. False starts and repetitive verbalizations ("um") have been removed for overall clarity.

Steve Velasquez: Okay.

Amelia Ceja: So we have dealt with my father, just give me some of the train of thought.

Steve Velasquez: When we left off we were talking about your father who was working at the winery.

Amelia Ceja: Oh, he was working as a mechanic.

Steve Velasquez: Yeah.

Amelia Ceja: I go back to Napa Valley Vineyard Management Company.

Steve Velasquez: Napa Valley Vineyard Management Company.

Amelia Ceja: In Rutherford.

Steve Velasquez: In Rutherford, and is that company still going?

Amelia Ceja: No. It's sort of interesting because you know who was at the time the manager? He is now the most famous grape grower in the United States, Andy Beckstoffer.

Steve Velasquez: Andy Bec- oh, wow.

Amelia Ceja: So see how we [soul to the wind, ?] and my sister and brother-in-law, when [1:00] Andy started his own vineyard management company, both my sister and brother-in-law went to work with him. It's fascinating, and now as you know he's the largest grower

with the most famous vineyards, family owned anywhere in the United States.

Steve Velasquez: So, it would be your sister and –

Amelia Ceja: My sister still works there, and my brother-in-law still works there. They would be someone really cool because they're actually a woman who is a viticulturist. It's very, very cool, and powerful too. It's actually in the family. I mean to have a woman President of a winery and one who is viticulture.

Steve Velasquez: That is really, I will definitely have followup with her.

Amelia Ceja: Yeah, yeah, I think you really need to because not only that, is what our parents have done in a very short time is really monumental because they were never able to go to school, but they focused on education [2:00] on us, and now like my nieces, my sister's daughter, she's now one of the most respected OB/GYN, and see how it happened. Vineyard workers now really contributing to having – My brother is an optometrist. My niece is the highest OB/GYN in California, and they don't stem from my parents belief. And obviously that gets translated into like my sister and me, and my brother, so now our next generation, the third generation, they're like really just bright stars.

Steve Velasquez: Wow, yeah. Now the more we're learning and the more connections people have with some very famous and well known and well respected, so we're just uncovering all of these other stories.

Amelia Ceja: And you know what's so cool [3:00] is that one of the reasons why my parents – you know my parents focus on education – it's really what makes the years different than any other Latino vineyards is because we have had such a strong support from our parents. I mean actually we knew we were going to college no matter what, and I think that is very tangible in the success of our company because when you have an education you learn how to do business with others, and then you have the confidence that comes with it, and it's been very helpful to our company. It's been amazing. Now you know having that next generation, which is our kids, now you've seen them all, well except Navic because he's working. He works in Berkeley, [4:00] but should I go back to my father?

Steve Velasquez: Well no, I mean we can follow this Andy Beckstoffer.

Amelia Ceja: Yeah, Any Beckstoffer.

Steve Velasquez: Now when you guys were starting out was he also important in helping start you guys off?

Amelia Ceja: Well, but you know we all support each other, I mean it's that moral support. He personally did not, but who was very helpful to us was a man named Will Nord, who at the time in the early '80s was the general manager for Domaine Chandon, and because Armando and a lot of Armando's siblings have interned at Domaine Chandon. Armando's intern does well while he was in the UC Davis studying enology. In the [5:00] summers he would work at Domaine Chandon. That connection to Domaine Chandon was instrumental in us planting our vineyard because at that time Domaine Chandon did not have as many Vineyards in Carneros, and obviously to make sparkling wine the two things you need primarily are Pinot Noir and Chardonnay and this is the ideal location in Carneros for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. So, Will was so supportive. He told Armando as well that we need grapes from Carneros, so if we sell you the rootstock, and then you don't have to pay us interest, you can pay us later once you start your grapes harvesting, and then we'll buy those grapes. It was a no brainer – providing the rootstock and then getting a contract to sell the grapes [6:00] to Domaine Chandon, that was a huge help for us. Because think about it, it cost a lot of money to develop an acre of land. It costs thousands of dollars to develop an acre.

Steve Velasquez: Even back then in the '80s?

Amelia Ceja: Oh yeah, oh my God, yes. It's always cost. Even I think at the time, if I remember correctly, it was maybe \$3 to \$4 per vine, let's see so we needed – it was let's 800 x 15 – how many, so that was about 12,000 to 13,000 vines that we needed. This is just the cost of the vines, and you pay \$4, well do the math. Just the cost of the vines you know alone would have been tens of thousands of dollars. We didn't have the money. We were barely making the payment to keep our first 15 acres. And you know we all worked outside [7:00] in the evenings and on the weekends, on weekends and evenings we always worked here on our property. We all had other jobs and that's how we were able to make the monthly, the jumbo monthly payment loan.

Steve Velasquez: Were you working for the union at that point?

Amelia Ceja: No. I never – I worked under the union, not for the union. I never ever worked for the union. I worked on the Napa Valley Vineyard Management Company in Rutherford when it was under contract with the United Farm Worker’s Union.

Steve Velasquez: Okay.

Amelia Ceja: Yes, and that’s where my father worked as well. By then he was a mechanic, and as soon as the union, I mean as soon as the employees voted to have the union represent them, [8:00] then my dad was one of the very first Presidents.

Steve Velasquez: And what year was that?

Amelia Ceja: Oh, that was in the early ‘70s. My dad remembers all of this, but yes it was in the early ‘70s, and then when I was going to college, the very first summer I came back because I wanted to still learn more about viticulture, and most importantly because they were developing some vineyards in Rutherford, and that area as you know is one of the prime wine growing regions for Cabaret. So, it interested me to learn that, so I came and worked that entire summer. I have a picture of that actually when I was in the vineyards. It was the whole summer I worked under the United Farm Worker’s Union, and it was great because I [9:00] remember when I first arrived here, there was really no – I mean we didn’t have like the grapes in between – Let’s say if you work 8 hours, and now you need to take a couple of 10-15 minute breaks – I remember when I first came here that didn’t exist, but when I worked under the United Farm Worker contract we did have those periods in between lunch and then later when the day was over, and I know this was all attributed to Cesar Chavez’s work in Sacramento.

Steve Velasquez: What about housing? I know the union worked a little bit towards housing, and at that time there must have been a lot more seasonal laborers coming in at that point right?

Amelia Ceja: In the late ‘60s [10:00] when I arrived here, and then in the ‘70s, yes, there were still a lot of seasonal workers coming in during harvest and pruning seasons, even more than now because they were migratory workers, but then it was like the mid ‘70s when a lot of other men that decided to settle in Napa would bring their

families, and now well, it's over 35 percent of the population is Mexican descent.

Steve Velasquez: Also, in the late '70s is when they started really just settling in Napa.

Amelia Ceja: Yes, it was. It was in the late '70s when a lot more migratory workers brought their families and settled in Napa permanently.

Steve Velasquez: And so Napa must have seen a lot of different changes and new additions, interesting additions, culturally and socially here right? [11:00]

Amelia Ceja: Once the influx of more Mexican workers with their families came, yes, we started to see more stores that were target of the taste of the new Mexicana immigrants, and it was easier to find all the ingredients that I love to prepare Mexican food, and also more businesses that were pretty much focused on serving the Mexican community were there, and I know just in – My children went to a Catholic School here in Napa, and they started in '86. My son started kindergarten in '86, and when he started, there were not as many students in his class, [12:00] Mexican, not as many Mexican. Actually, maybe two more and that was it, but now – I mean we're still active participants at St. John, and now it's almost like almost 50 percent of the student body is Mexican descent.

Steve Velasquez: Yeah, it's such a different picture of Napa Valley.

Amelia Ceja: And to begin with, Napa Valley was very homogeneous when I arrived here. Like there were the men that would come in, work and then leave, but you also didn't see too many other – I saw a lot of African-Americans outside of Napa, and Asian Americans and other demographic groups, but Napa was very homogeneous. It was pretty much Caucasian, inhabitants, [13:00] but now it has changed. Also, with Napa becoming world-class destination for wine and food, it's drawing a lot of people to live here permanently because they want to work in all different aspects of the industry, which is primarily the hospitality and vineyards.

Steve Velasquez: So after – okay, we'll jump back a little bit more to when you came back from college, you did one summer with the union – one summer?

Amelia Ceja: And I also, No I did also two winters. I had a month break, I liked pruning, and it's also really hard. The first couple of days you are so sore because you use muscles you don't even know you had, but [14:00] it's very important because pruning dictates that year's harvest, and it is highly skilled labor. Pruning is a highly skilled labor. I wanted to learn that aspect of viticulture as well, and it's been very, very, very exciting to be able to [interrupted 14:26 – 14:38] – so I actually worked – Well, I went back to Mexico to study two years for prep school, then I came back to Napa Valley, and started my last 2 years of high school here. During those 2 years of high school I worked in the vineyards, on weekends too. They needed [15:00] like on Saturdays – because I liked too and I could have worked anywhere else because I spoke English well by then, but it interested me, so I actually helped to – and I remember specifically one year I was able to follow since high school all the way into 5 years later, harvesting those plants that I planted, and that was really, really special. I think that's really captured my attention about the whole – the full cycle of wine growing. It was neat.

Steve Velasquez: So, you did everything. Did you do the buds, too?

Amelia Ceja: I did, and I actually – When one of the vineyards that I was working in Rutherford that I helped to first plant the rootstock that later on would [16:00] be grafted with a really great clone, I actually hung out with grafters. And I mean you use very, very sharp knives, like blades, but very, very sharp, and I actually learned how to make the incision once you select the stock you're going to graft, that little bud. That has to fit in, and then you have to cut from a piece of bud wood, making the same sort of like a triangle that's going to fit inside the incision that you just did on the stock that will ultimately be a very strong vine. Yeah, I did that too. I didn't do that every day, but because I was working, and I'm very curious, I wanted to learn, so I would [17:00] know how to do it, so yeah, I do know. Then you wrap it – at that time, now there's – Well, not much has changed in budding, but then once that was done, you wrapped with a rubber band to keep it together, then you put a mound of dirt. It's really neat, and to have seen that in the full cycle, planting, then when the first buds come out a year later, selecting which ones you're gonna keep, that will hold all the crop later on.

Steve Velasquez: So were the supervisors and foremen helpful in getting you to do this, or were you like I want to do this.

Amelia Ceja: No, I was encouraged. Well, typically most good leaders encourage [18:00] others who have interest. I was encouraged. I did spend a couple of days working with this crew because it interested me, but I was also working, digging the holes, so I mean, but the cool thing is that I was allowed to explore my interest, and that was really neat because then I remember – I did a whole row by myself, this on the second day. First, I was only allowed to do like maybe one, but going back later and seeing that 99.9 percent survived, then they became really beautiful productive vines, it was empowering.

Steve Velasquez: Yeah. Were there other women there too at the time?

Amelia Ceja: Well, at the time in the late '60s through the '70s, and even mid-'80s, [19:00] there were a lot more women working in the vineyards. In the '70s I think it was the height of women working in the vineyards especially from the mid-'70s when a lot of the newcomers, like immigrants brought their wives and children. That's when I really saw the influx of a lot of women coming into the workforce working in the vineyards. I mean my sister is a perfect example. She came here when she was 20 years old. She's 8 years older than me. She was in love when she was already an adult, so she knew she was going to marry her boyfriend sweetheart in Mexico, and she did a few years later, but she was introduced to grape growing and us then in the '60s, and up to today she still works in vineyards. She's in charge [20:00] of a crew that takes care of Andy Beckstoffer's most prized vineyards.

Steve Velasquez: Very high end.

Amelia Ceja: Oh yes. She's in charge of Crane Vineyard. I saw her last night, and some of the wine producers, they go and say okay, I'm the only one paying so much – you know they pay for the acre, not per ton, and they say okay, we'll pay whatever, \$25,000, but we only want 2 tons per acre, so they go in, drop off all the fruit, but it's because they are already first growth status of vineyards, and she takes care of them with her crew, and she's cool.

Steve Velasquez: How big [21:00] of a crew does she have?

Amelia Ceja: It depends on the time of the year?

Steve Velasquez: Of the season - yeah, yeah.

- Amelia Ceja: Like right now – during pruning, she starts when – she also has the most highly skilled ones. She has taught so many – I mean she has taught so, so many workers. Her craft is neat. Her husband is the vineyards supervisor. He’s the vineyard supervisor too for Beckstoffer, and he has been working the vineyards since the late ‘60s and early ‘70s, and it’s neat to see their evolution too in their own life. Like my sister, she went to the school that I later went to when I moved here, in Aguas Calientes, and she started Costura – You know, design. She loves to sew, but she did, [22:00] and also first aid because she wanted to be certified to help in our little village. My sister is also really bright. She has other – and she’s very resourceful. I mean she could work doing something else, but she really elected to just work in the vineyards because she says “mija it’s so wonderful being in communion with Mother Nature, and to understand the seasons, and what happens in the vineyards during all the different months of the year.” So yeah, I think she’s a great candidate for you too.
- Steve Velasquez: I’ve marked it down.
- Amelia Ceja: Her name is Maria. Maria De La Luz Aguilera. A woman viticulturist, [23:00] a Mexican woman Viticulturist.
- Steve Velasquez: Is it now called Beckstoffer.
- Amelia Ceja: Beckstoffer Vineyards. It’s B-e-c-k-s-t-o-f-f-e-r. I think it’s two f’s, e-r.
- Steve Velasquez: Beckstoffer Vineyards. Now did she help you here, too?
- Amelia Ceja: Oh, she gives advice, yes. But we have Armando who has been working vineyards since he was 8, and UC Davis, and so he pretty much has designed all of our – you know the row orientation, selecting all the rootstock and clones. Our vineyard in the back, our Pinot Noir vineyard that we just ripped in 2010, it’s – well it was infected with Pierce’s disease, and we don’t want to bombard our vineyards with pesticides or fungicides, or anything because we don’t want – [24:00] first and foremost, we don’t want to expose the workers to anything harmful, nor the soil, so when we ripped that vineyard and planted last year, it was really neat. We were so excited. We selected some clones – There are a couple other vineyard owners that are working with it, experimenting with it, and they were just brought from Burgundy, you know in Pinot
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Noir new clones, like I think we're gonna be one of the first ones to have a harvest from this new clone, so it's so exciting because it's an opportunity to like really innovate, and also just consistently continue the learning curve about clones. It's more important with Pinot Noir I think than in any other varietal because it's just such a finicky grape, [25:00] so it's really fun, and we're so excited. Of course we lost about 3 years of income, but in the long-term, it was the right time to do it because by the time we have the first harvest, we'll have our new winery, and then we won't contract those grapes to anyone, so it worked out perfectly because we'll use them just to make our own Pinot Noir, just from that vineyard, and that's 15 acres.

Steve Velasquez: So that was sort of the new like you said, innovative – did you have that in mind doing your first couple?

Amelia Ceja: Yes, we feel very strongly, not only as you have seen with our wine production company, and our use of all of the new technology tools to take our brand out there, [26:00] but we've been using technologies since we developed our first vineyard, and you know some of it can be sort of more mechanical, like here in this vineyard in our 1016 Las Amigas Road, we have 5 acres planted to Chardonnay, so we used two different pruning styles on this same vineyard because we were doing our own test. I can go out and show you because it's really cool. One was head pruned and one was king pruned, and you know what we discovered – it's really great – now we're able to use – This was only like our little test sort of a lab test in this small vineyard, but now we've been able to see what really works for our bigger vineyards, and it's really fun. They look very different, I mean the vines look totally different, and how the [27:00] clusters grow and where they hang is also very different. So we've been doing this since the very beginning. I remember we've been planting cover crop since the very first year we planted our vineyard. Everyone was saying but you guys are spending more money, why? We said no, it's bringing back nutrients into the soil, and also providing a habitat to where all the good insects can get rid of the bad insects. It was like a no-brainer. So we've been doing this longer than most people have, and it's also the right thing to do, not because of marketing reasons, but it's just the 'right' thing to do. In November, we're gonna spend a ton of money discing between the rows, then planting different types of legumes, like peas, [28:00] father beans, different types of rye grasses, mustards, yeah and then come back in February and March, and you walk between the rows, and while

I'm not very tall, they're like waist-high. Then when they're at their peak that's when you bring them back into the soil. It's cool.

Steve Velasquez: We're sort of interested in seeing what uses of technologies people have been using, if people have embraced it, or people are more traditional in their work.

Amelia Ceja: Oh, we love technology. It's what has made, in a very short time, California wines world renown. It's because we have access to so much wonderful information through UC Davis, and also California Pioneering Spirit. We're all about [29:00] embracing things that work. But I mean why wouldn't you? Yes, there is – But the tradition of grape growing, I mean dates back thousands of years ago, and unlike France, they have a lot of laws, and we have a lot of laws here too for wine growing, but we're much easier to adapt new technology to – No 1, to make a consistent product, to improve, also quality, and ultimately this is really good for the consumer. We've been all about that since the very beginning.

Steve Velasquez: So let's jump in a little bit to the full idea of starting the winery, [30:00] how that came about.

Amelia Ceja: We bought our first property in Carneros in the late '82, and we took possession in '83. We finally were able to plant in '86. We had our first harvest in '88, and from the very beginning we actually started making wine. You are allowed to make a barrel, which typically translates to about 20 to 25 cases. So we've been making wine since our very first harvest, not for commercially, but for ourselves and our friends; they all like to drink our wine. We knew from the very beginning that we eventually to produce wine under our own brand, but we owed a lot of money. We were all busy with all our other jobs. So, we focused – and I think that was the smartest thing we did. I mean very forward thinking without having a business plan. Sometimes ignorance is bliss [31:00] and we focused on the little profit that we had every vintage into actually buying more property, so it was great because now buying land in Napa and Sonoma is cost prohibited. So that was a major forward thinking thing that we did. Our second property is where we are right now.

Steve Velasquez: Was it a vineyard as well?

Amelia Ceja: No, this was an orchard. That's why we have a lot of trees that – we usually we very gently transplanted them somewhere else

because we wanted to plant vineyards here. So we moved all the olive trees over – I have to tell you this story because it's so funny – Oh my God, it's one of the funniest stories about farming [32:00] that I've ever heard. So, this property was owned by this couple who were hotshot engineers in San Francisco/Silicone Valley. They lived in Marin County with this noble life, but they loved Napa. So, when they retired in the mid '70s, they said they wanted to be farmers. In the mid '70s, Carneros was totally nonexistent, and the name Carneros was named as an appellation in 1983, so this was way back in the '70s. They bought this at \$28 per parcel, the lady divided the parcel, and at the time the land ordinance hadn't been passed. Well one ordinance had not been passed where people were able to separate vineyards, even if it was only 2 acres, [33:00] it didn't matter. The owner of this 20-acre parcel sold the front 5 acres this, this was the original house which was built around 80 years ago, and she sold these 5-acre parcels so she could build her dream house on the back 15 acres, which is the one that we bought in '82 and '83. So, she sold these 5 acres to this couple who moved from Marin County to this 5-acre parcel on Los Amigos Road in '76. They were gentleman farmers, so they had a jeep. They had a tractor. They wanted an orchard, so they planted olives – they had a lot of fruit trees. They had bees. So, when we bought our property they had already been here. When we moved here, they were already here like 7 years. Their little trees, their olive trees [34:00] were maybe about, oh I'd say maybe 3 feet tall. So, when we moved here, and we immediately planted a lot of other – We also planted olive trees. We planted fruit trees, etc. They would come in and scratch their head and say you planted your trees only 2 years ago, and they're like 5 times bigger than ours, but they didn't tell us what they had done, so we said this is what we do, and then – well anyway, when they moved to Oregon in '89, they offered this 5 acres to us first. We paid for this 5 acres with our house that we wanted to burn, but now it's different. The same amount of money – you see how we, us buying a property here raised up the price of this whole area by a lot of money. So [35:00] we bought for the same price that we paid for our initial 15 acres with a house that was almost new, but no vineyard, just the land. We paid the same price for 5 acres with a house that we needed to just destroy. We were very helpful in changing the value price of the properties in Carneros because when we arrived here, no one knew what Carneros was. I remember telling my friend who supposedly was wine-savvy. She at the time she was going to school, medical school, and I was so excited. She was my roommate in college, and I said Robin,

Robin, we just bought a property in Carneros. She said, “is that like in Argentina?” No one had any idea where Carneros was. So, you see, by the time in '89 just from '82 to '89, the price of properties just skyrocketed. So anyway [36:00] we bought this property, and life in the first week, we obviously came in to take out all the trees, and were going to transplant them put them somewhere else, and we found out why they're growth was stunted. They planted all of their trees, and they spent a lot of money, in the container! They didn't take any of the trees out of the containers. They dug a hole.

Steve Velasquez: Did they do that themselves?

Amelia Ceja: They designed their orchard. Oh my gosh, so I told them – They had moved by then because they literally moved after we took possession. I called them up and I said well, we found out why your trees never grew. I mean this was from '75 to '89, that's 14 years, and yeah, it was pretty funny. Now you can see some [37:00] of those trees are those trees there.

Steve Velasquez: Are those trees, oh wow, without the pots. That is amazing.

Amelia Ceja: Do you believe that. So farming, you know a lot of people – you really have to know –

Steve Velasquez: You have to know what you're doing, yeah.

Amelia Ceja: Then we developed our Chardonnay vineyard. This vineyard yields, in my opinion, the flavor profile of these Chardonnay vines yields the most amazing Chardonnay in the world.

Steve Velasquez: Wow, it's very nice. So, it's all Chardonnay, with the exception of the new Pinot Noir.

Amelia Ceja: Yeah.

Steve Velasquez: And it's all original –

Amelia Ceja: This is what we planted back in '89. We just ripped our vineyard that we planted in '86, and that was majorly impacted, you know with Pierce's disease. It was time, and we thought – our contract had expired, [38:00] and it was just the right time, then we're building our winery, so three years, so when that fruit is ready, we

won't contract it at all. We're gonna use it all. It's gonna be the choicest Pinot Noir ever. Oh my God, I can't wait.

Steve Velasquez: So, this was the second property you acquired, and how many more others do you have?

Amelia Ceja: Then, you know after you learn how to do something once, then it's easy to do it again so. Then we bought 20 acres in Carneros, by Sonoma. We planted it all to Chardonnay. Then see, the price of land kept going up. That was our third property.

Steve Velasquez: The third property was a vineyard?

Amelia Ceja: Oh no, we've never bought a vineyard. We developed every single property we own. That's also why we have such control because we plant exactly what best grows there. [39:00] The roots stock, the clones, etc. That was really exciting. We were all very young. So, we were able to develop that vineyard right away. This was the one that took us the most because we didn't have any money, and we almost lost it because my parents lost their jobs, and it was only Pedro – Armando was a very poor student at Davis. Pedro and I were starting our little family, and we had to make the payment here, jumbo, and pay for our own because we were living in Silicone Valley because that's where we worked. So it was crazy. So, then the third property is those 20 acres in Carneros, Sonoma. Then another 10 acres became available, and this all happened really quick. Once you can sleep well owing money, another property, what's another few hundred thousand dollars. [40:00] no matter. So, then we bought another 10 acres, also in Carneros, Sonoma, and then we bought – in the early '90s we bought our largest purchase, which was 65 acres in Sonoma Coast. We were able to develop that the same year.

Steve Velasquez: That was in '90 –

Amelia Ceja: '94.

Steve Velasquez: '94, and then –

Amelia Ceja: So, all of this time we- in the meantime there was another property right south of Stag's Leap, right on the Silverado Trail on the eastern side of the Silverado Trail that we were able to get a lease. They didn't want to sell because they like living around the vineyard, but it's a very long-term lease, so we have 10 acres to

Cabernet, which is – So all of our wines come from our estate grown grapes. [41:00] We would never have to buy any grapes. We are primarily grape growers. We sell most of our grapes to others. If we were to use all of the grapes that we produce, we would be making between 75 and 80,000 cases, and we make under 10,000, so we use a miniscule. We will never ever use all of our grapes because we want to remain a very focused winery where we're still in control of the destiny of our wines, that is handcrafted, and we use smaller tanks. Yes, innovation, but you still need – people need to touch the whole process of grape growing and winemaking. So, we don't ever want to use like 100,000 gallon tanks that you have to do really harsh popovers, where you may end up extracting unwanted bitterness and astringency, no. We'll remain pretty much, our artesian handcrafted wines, and being in control of them. [42:00] It's still a very respectable number because we have our license here, the winery that we're constructing, to process 50,000 gallons, which translates to about under 25,000 like 23.4 thousand cases.

Steve Velasquez: 23,000 cases.

Amelia Ceja: Yeah, 23,000 cases. That's a very respectable – you know boutique, very focused, where we will still be able to have great relationships with everyone we meet, so very respectable, and that's where we want to be. We're so interested in quality control. It is of utmost interest to us.

Steve Velasquez: How do the contracts for the grapes go? Do people come to you or do you go to them. Are they short-term or long-term? How does it work with the contracts?

Amelia Ceja: Grape contracts [43:00] work in a couple of ways. Initially we were very fortunate to have Domaine Chandon. We had that contract for the first 5 years, the first five harvests, we already had winery to buy our grapes. They're actually evergreen contracts. I don't know if you ever heard that term before. That means even if you have a long-term contract, let's say 10 years, evergreen means that you go back every year, and whatever the medium price for varietal for a specific appellation, you go back and renegotiate the price, but you still have to sell the grapes for 10 years, but the price is negotiable. So we've had long-term contracts for a lot of renowned vineyards, and sometimes we go to them. If we want to – like I really wanted – because I love Schramsberg Chardonnay, well [44:00] I really wanted our grapes in Schramsberg. I mean I

love Schramsberg sparkling wine, so I really wanted our grapes to be used in a brand that I respect so working with Hugh Davies on some trip through Napa Valley Vineyards, he tasted our Chardonnay, and said guys you have great Chardonnay and I said, well we have some up for sale. So, things like that. Sometimes if we really want a winery to make a wine from our grapes we do, but most of the time in our case, they taste our wines now that we make wine, and they want to make wine from our grapes because it's pretty awesome, and they know the quality of the fruit. Viticulturally we have a huge advantage because Armando has had so much experience. As a matter of a fact, I don't know anyone on the planet who has as much experience as he does just because he was introduced. [45:00] He was almost 8, a couple of months short of being 8 when he started working the vineyards, and throughout elementary, middle school, high school, and college, his entire life he has worked in vineyards, then all in cellars as well, so we have a huge advantage in that we have one person who understands it viticulturally, enologically more than anyone I've ever met. I'm not saying this because he's my brother-in-law. That is just a fact. I've never met any other vintner who has the experience he has, and not only that, but also working – I mean one of his mentors, André Tchelistcheff you know, the famed winemaker at BV. Very few people can claim that I mean when you're young, and actually I don't know anyone else. This is cool, okay, that when he was 17, at that time he was working for the Duckhorns, and he [46:00] was gonna go to UC Davis that following year, so Margaret saw his ambition in going to Davis, and his love of winemaking, so she says okay Armando, you save your pennies, and we'll give you enough grapes, your favorite grapes from our vineyards, you know Duckhorn Vineyards, for you to make your first barrel of wine. So, he made his first barrel of Cabernet Sauvignon when he was 17.

Steve Velasquez: Wow!

Amelia Ceja: It's pretty cool.

Steve Velasquez: Yeah.

Amelia Ceja: I wish I had some of those bottles left. Yeah, it's really neat. So this is –

Steve Velasquez: With also Tchelistcheff's direction at that point?

Amelia Ceja: He was working with a lot – he was also working Don Dyer, a winemaker at Domaine Chandon for 25 years, and then from Chateau St. Jean- because they work the entire – not only my family, [47:00] but the whole entire Ceja family. They could work anywhere else, too, but literally all of the kids fell in love with the whole aspect of winemaking, and they also all worked during high school and college in the vineyards, so Armando had a great opportunity to work under a lot of really good people. They knew that he was someone special that cared deeply about, not just about the viticultural processes, but also making wine, so to have made a barrel of Cabernet from one of the choicest grapes. He did save his pennies, but used a French barrel.

Steve Velasquez: Wow!

Amelia Ceja: He did, and it was an amazing wine. It was awesome. So that was in '78.

Steve Velasquez: Does he still have it?

Amelia Ceja: Well he gave about 5 cases away. I saw Margaret not very long ago, and you know, she's now divorced from Dan, but I saw her not that long ago [48:00] at an event, so we were reminiscing about that, and she said you know – because they got 5 cases, and I thought that was really sweet. They didn't expect any wine, but I said Armando, you should have kept one bottle because that was pretty legendary, but no, everyone drank all of the wine. I think Armando said he was 23 cases, so he gave 5 cases to the Duckhorns, and he got the balance. The very last bottle was consumed, oh my God, a long time ago, in the late '80s. See but like I didn't save all of those recipes, you know from those early dinners, and you can't like – Now we know that it's so important. Things that might be crucial to a story later on we have to keep.

Steve Velasquez: Yeah.

Amelia Ceja: But I'm glad I kept those posters.

Steve Velasquez: Yeah, the posters [49:00] are great because it's – you know that's one of the most interesting innovative things that we've come across is the whole wine and food pairings that you really use as your base, your seminar.

Amelia Ceja: It's been – even on our website, and this is so cool, we launched our 750 cases in 2001, and we worked on our website in 2000 because even then I knew that you had to have a presence, and you know at that time, most winers didn't even have website, and we hadn't even launched our brand and now I know it was important to invest in having a website. So in all of 2000 I was working with a designer. I mean at the time it seemed like a lot of money, and it was – our very, very first one [50:00] – but even then, I was like occipital horn my God, I wish I could still have – It was so cool because we also, would post recipes with the new vintages from the very, very, very beginning, and that has drawn people back many times because they're always wanting to learn something new.

Steve Velasquez: Was that your idea to post the recipes?

Amelia Ceja: Of course, of course, with Mexican food, always. Well remember, I was cooking for my friends in college Mexican meals with wine, so this is – and I wasn't 21 yet, either – so I would come back to Napa like say for a weekend or Thanksgiving because my dad had access to a lot of great wine. Oh, I also met André Tchelistcheff when I first came here because my dad would be – To make extra money [51:00] after his regular work, he had a big – a different license that allowed him to drive big trucks, so it's a different license, so he would pick me up at school like if I wanted to stay at the library, and I couldn't ride the bus from RLS in St. Helena, so he would pick me up, then I knew I would go with him to some vineyard, pick up a gondola and haul it back to BV, there would be – because at that time vineyards did not have their own scales. Now most vineyards, if you're a big –

Steve Velasquez: If you're a big distributor –

Amelia Ceja: Yeah, you have to have your own scales, so when the grapes are taken to the winery they're already weighed, and at that time no one did, so you had to bring in a huge gondola that probably fill like I don't know, 3 or 4 tons. Now they're smaller because you don't want the grapes to get crushed, so I'd be doing [52:0] my homework, and we'd go to some vineyard in Oakville, Rutherford, or Silverado Trail, and pick up these gondolas, then we would come and get in line behind everybody else for the gondola to be weighed, so I would be in the truck doing my homework, and he would get out, and talk – you know he knew everyone else there, and then this one time my dad came up, he knocked on the door,

and he goes hey, “*mija bajate*” and I go okay. Here is this man who was about my height, with a little beret, smoking, and says “*mija el es amigo*” because he had been driving delivering fruit there since he got his license, his trucker’s license, which he maintained it just for that, plus he liked the camaraderie you know because you typically would hang out there for hours, so you get to know the people behind you, before you, anyway, [53:00] so I got down, and it was really neat because – Well he spoke some Spanish, you know an immigrant via, paths– and then finally arriving at BV– I had just arrived maybe like a month earlier, so he said come on, come on in, so I’m tagging along into this cellar, he was showing me, and I understood some though most not, but we understood each other. It was really sweet because he was explaining to me about some of the wines that were going through alcoholic fermentation, some that were not, [54:00] that were already in there barrels – some were in these big vats, cement vat - some in these giant redwood barrels, and it was neat. So the rest of the harvest, my dad said yeah, yeah because you’ll be bored, so just go talk to André, so I said okay, and he didn’t mind at all. At least twice a week, and it was cool because then the very next year, the same thing, and then I was really involved in sports, so my dad really had to come pick me up because I had missed the bus staying for practice. By then I spoke English, so it was really neat. Then I understood a lot, and I’m so glad that he liked to share. He liked my dad because he had met him like the last 5 years that my dad was bringing fruit, and it was neat, [55:00] I really enjoyed that especially when he finally said okay – I had questions, and this was when I was in 8th grade, you know that harvest time, and I had questions, so he said well come here, I’ll show you. I said you know the grapes taste very sweet. Then I tasted some from alcohol fermentation had happened for like three days, so they were less sweeter. Then ones that were pretty much done, but of course there was no sugar, so I wanted to know why, and yeah, he explained to me, and I thought that really made me – that was so cool. This is one – He said come, you have to taste the finished product that would be bottled in, I don’t know, in the winter time. So, at 14 years old I was tasting wine.

Steve Velasquez: With André Tchelistcheff. [56:00]

Amelia Ceja: With André Tchelistcheff, while waiting for my dad to have the gondola weighed for the grapes.

Steve Velasquez: So, you had an informal education under Andre Tchelistchef.

- Amelia Ceja: Yeah, and I had no idea that he was famous, neither did my dad. He just said it “*Mija el sabe mucho*. [57:00] “*El sabe mucho*” I had no idea at all that he was famous. See, those details are – need to be preserved. People that arrived here in the early days like Bob Mondavi. He gave my father the letter of employment, so that we could get our green card because when we came here we had our green card, and he came to welcome us. So you see how the circle goes?
- Steve Velasquez: Yeah.
- Amelia Ceja: Oh, so when you stop at the downtown salon, you have to take a look at the aerial photograph of Mondavi’s winery. We have it there.
- Steve Velasquez: Okay, yeah.
- Amelia Ceja: It is, you have to see it. It’s right – well just as Michael, but I said I want this displayed because I have it on loan because it’s the only one they have. When I saw it, I was like oh my God. I was walking through here, I knew this – My dad planted these vines around here. She said, oh you have to keep it then for a while. It’s really cool, and the valley looks really different.
- Steve Velasquez: Oh yeah?
- Amelia Ceja: Yeah, you gotta check it out.
- Steve Velasquez: I’ll check it out.
- Amelia Ceja: That’s what it looked like when I arrived here. My sister and I on Sundays, we would walk from Rutherford to Oakville because we had our PO box in Oakville, you know it’s only 2 miles, and we would walk on the train tracks, so we would go by Mondavi, [58:00] literally walking, and we would take little detours and see all of what's new because when we arrived here it didn’t have a roof, then we were working over there. I mean I saw the entire process of pretty much Mondavi’s winery being finished and becoming a world-renowned place. It was cool, and we had a connection you know to Robert Mondavi because that letter of employment, it supported that my dad could support us financially over here, and hence we got our green cards.
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- Steve Velasquez: What year was that?
- Amelia Ceja: 1967. My dad sent – this is neat because my dad had been living in Napa permanent, not since the early ‘60s – He lived in a housing, a farm housing compound on Galleron Lane., right across the street from Franciscan. [59:00]
- Steve Velasquez: Oh.
- Amelia Ceja: Yeah, on the right hand side, it was housing for farm workers.
- Steve Velasquez: Labor camp.
- Amelia Ceja: Yes. It doesn’t exist anymore, not that particular one. There are three others, but not that one. He had – I mean it was really cute, but when we came here – He had already before we arrived rented that little house right next door to the Rutherford Granger home – so where am I going with this – what was I talking about? I'm sorry.
- Steve Velasquez: Mondavi, Oh I asked about the year getting papers.
- Amelia Ceja: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, all right, so in 1967, June 1967, I had just finished my 6th grade, and that was it for my little village. If I had remained in Mexico, [1:00:00] I would have to go to a bigger village to go to secondary school, but I didn’t know any of this that my dad wanted to bring us here. So I was really excited about going to secondary school, so we had gone to the river to wash our clothes, fetch water – It’s about maybe 3 kilometers from my village where a pristine, beautiful river flows through, and we had gotten back late, and I knew it was my aunt, my mom, my sister, a whole bunch of people, and we had an amazing day because it was sort of like a picnic where you take food, wash your clothes, bathe, and bring really good water and it was late coming back. I remember distinctly because my grandmother had fresh made cheese and some really good frijoles de la olla, [1:01] just delicious, and some fresh corn tortillas and chile de molcajete, she had made, and we were famished. She had a big smile on her face. She said well this came for you to my mother. We were all so excited because it was from my father, and in that letter, it said – There was another little slip of paper that summoned my mother to go pick up a registered letter because there was no post office in my little village. We had to go to a little town about 5 kilometers away, not very far. So the letter said, I am so excited to tell you
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that now that I I've settled in Napa Valley, Rutherford, and I have a really good job, rented a little house, I really want- to my mother you know, you [1:02] and my daughters to come up here, so please go pick up – and she had the little slip – please go to the post office in the land of El Refugio, and he had sent money like he always did once a month, but it was more, and also you will get all of the instructions for what you need to do because I just applied to – it was in Mexico City – now you can do it in Guadalajara but at the time we had to go to Mexico City – to the U.S. Consulate, and I just applied for you . I sent an attorney or someone he paid to send all the paperwork, so you will know what you need to do. Oh my God, I started jumping up and down because I thought of “El Norte.” I'm so excited, and my sister no because of her boyfriend. [1:03] So this was in early June. My mom went and picked up the check and instructions, so by the end of June we got all of the documents, registered documents from the Consulate, also from the Embassy because two different transactions were happening at the same time for us to get our green card, and we needed to go to Guadalajara to have all of our exams done because you have to be in a specific – I mean now you can do it anywhere, but this was in the '60s. I had never been to Guadalajara, so oh my God, I couldn't sleep. I was so excited to go to Guadalajara, and it just happened that my sister had gone to – The school that she went to was Aguas Calientes, and one of the girls was from Guadalajara, she had just moved there so she – because we didn't have phones [1:04] in our village, but she wrote to her, and she said oh please, stay with us. It will be a great opportunity to see you. So we stayed in Guadalajara to have all of our exams that said – there were all these papers that we needed to provide. Then like soon after that we had to go to Mexico City to get our passport. Oh my God, to go to Mexico City, another amazing event in my life. Fortunately we had my dad's brothers – 12 of them lived in Mexico City, and they loved us. I mean we saw them not very frequently, but it was like we were like country bumpkins you know. They were sort of more sophisticated, etc. They just loved us though, so my sister and I loved baseball, and we would listen to it on the radio. We had our favorite team, and so [1:05] a lot happened because it really allowed us to say oh my God, there is a world out there. We had never been outside of just Jalisco Village in Las Flores and Aguas Calientes, San Juan that was it. My uncle because he knew how much we loved baseball, made sure – and our two favorite teams were playing against each other – so my sister and I got to see our favorite teams play when we went to get our passports in Mexico City. I said this is a good sign. I mean all

of these cool things that we always wanted to do were happening to us, so this was then by mid-July, and then it was just waiting time – oh no, then they interviewed us, too. It was so cute because when they interviewed us, well my sister had her reservations but I on the other hand, I said [1:06] I want to learn English, I want to study, I want to learn about what my father does, I mean I think they were bored because I just talked non-stop. This is what my mom – I sort of forgot that too – they didn't say anything, just taking notes, so we waited. We did everything that all of those papers that my dad sent had told us to do, so then it was just a waiting time, so like in August 10th, we get a letter, a registered letter. You have been approved to be a resident of the United States. Oh my God! I was so excited. So we immediately wrote my dad, and he got the same response, and so he said go to the Land of Refugio, because there was a phone there, and that's if you wanted to speak in person, [1:07] go to the Land of the Refugio, on a certain date at this time, and I will call you. There was only one phone, so we did, and we had a chance to speak with him. We didn't know what he wanted to tell us, so he said I'll be on September 5th or 6th – I don't remember the date exactly, but it was either the 5th or 6th, I will meet you in Guadalajara, and my cousin is going to take – you know you will speak with, and I will try to listen, my cousin Candelaria is going to take you to Guadalajara where we are going to meet. You guys are coming to EL Norte[1:08] . So, we left Guadalajara – and my mom knows, I think it's the 5th or 6th, but we came by train and oh my God, another amazing experience. That lasted about – I think it took like – I know we slept at least one night, but it probably took like 2 nights until we went to Mexicali and my grandmother's favorite sister, very close sister lived there, and they loved us because they moved to Mexicali, there when I was like 8, and we were very close, so we arrived there, and oh my God, it was amazing. The anticipation was great. So we arrived there like three days later, so it was either the 9th or the 8th, and we stayed there a couple of days, and we crossed the border on September 10th because it was my sister's birthday, and we arrived in Napa Valley on September 11th 1967. [1:09]

Steve Velasquez: Wow. I was going to ask you about the trip.

Amelia Ceja: That because it will forever be – we crossed the border with – at Calexico and at that time you had your proof, and from there they took all of your paperwork, and that's where you were photographed, and then a few months later you got your green

card. We had all of our proof, but it was easy then. I mean from June to August, it took like 2 months.

Steve Velasquez: Yeah, yeah, easier.

Amelia Ceja: Yeah, it was very, very easy. So That whole journey was very meaningful because my father had a vision that he wanted his children [1:10] to have a better life for themselves, and he knew, I mean from the very beginning he was going to do anything and everything to make sure we had an education. He worked like a “burro” you know a donkey, he would do anything, and he really encouraged, which is so unlike many others. He was so encouraging. Basically, the first few years all they worked for was our education. When I went back to school in Mexico, and it was his idea, the entire money that they made, anything they had left over, it was to pay for my schooling.

Steve Velasquez: Yeah.

Amelia Ceja: That’s why those 2 years I was there I couldn’t come and –I didn’t see them for 2 years. They couldn’t afford to go and visit me, and they couldn’t afford to bring me up here, but I’m pretty strong, [1:11] and I have so many – my grandparents were not too far from there, so I at least saw them once a month. Then that gave me the opportunity to travel even though everyone that was in the school was very wealthy. They’re were like the crème of the creme in Mexico, and I was the daughter of a farm worker, and I was so proud of my parents. I never felt any different, and I excelled in school there too; all 10s in all of my classes. You know my friends – and my mother who is very, very protective, all of her letters and phone calls – it was a really great accredited school, we would talk every Sunday, and I would hear the same recommendations because she loves and is so protective, and she would talk to the directora [1:12], the principal, who was a nun, a brilliant nun, and she would make sure but we had a real understanding, the principal and I. She would say and please make sure that she’s safe, that she’s only allowed to go with my parents, and I had a cousin there who lived in Aguas Calientes, who was also my age, but went to another really cool school, but make sure she’s not allowed to go anywhere else because I just worry about her, etc. The mother superiora said what your parents don’t know won’t hurt them, so I was invited by like my best friend who we still stay in touch, Patricia Gonzales, incredibly wealthy from Guadalajara, and her entire family was there because they had from K through 12th

grade and they also had *comercio*, [1:13] a separate – for anyone who wanted to go after to study business they could. Her parents were divorced, and they were with her dad, and the dad knew it was an amazing school, the food was really good, and that's another reason I really liked it, so he would come and pick the entire gang up, her and five other siblings, and every weekend we would go and explore something really cool. I got to know Queretaro, like the back of my hand, which I never knew – well, I knew the history, and I got to know Guadalajara, so well, and I got to know Zacatecas. He took us on a long trip during Easter to Vera Cruz, I mean really cool stuff. Then my other friend from Oaxaca– [1:14] I was invited to go to Oaxaca, I mean the children, the Governor's children from both Coahuila and Zacatecas, were there at the same school, and they would send the chauffeur to pick up the girls, and guess who went along? It was so fun, and I never felt any less never ever – and I think that's why it – they also liked me plus I also had a lot of fun, and always looking for adventure, and so it was an idyllic two years. It was really hard because I could have just easily done my four years there, and then I mean, but then it would have taken me a little longer to transfer to a university here because you have to take all of those other tests, and SATs. So it was really hard to me, but by then I felt such a connection [1:15] to the entire country and not just to my little village, but you know that was – those two years gave me the confidence to do anything I want because I feel very proud of my heritage. I feel very proud of who I am as a human being, and as a citizen of the world, and most importantly I'm so proud of my parents and grateful for them giving me that opportunity to be who I am.

Steve Velasquez: Following up with that a little bit, you just said it sort of brought you closer to this national connection. You've been really involved with other wine associations here like with Napa Valley, and the Mexican Vintners, [1:16] can you talk a little bit about how the Mexican Vintners came about, and what their role and mission is, and some of the history behind that?

Amelia Ceja: Sure. Since we launched our Ceja brand in 2001, we've become members of every trade association because they have a lot of resources that are very helpful, and also because we want to be a part of the bigger wine picture, and from the very beginning Pedro and I had this vision of having – as more vintners, Latino vintners emerged, we said hey, it would be really cool to begin a trade association that would focus on hosting events that are focusing on

our culture in [1:17] different parts of the country, and to support each other and bring awareness, also about the contribution of Mexico, not only in the vineyards, but also increasingly in the winemaking aspect, so since the very, very beginning, you know we like – I remember speaking with Manual Frias from Frias Family Vineyards, dad, not junior, and he had launched his brand before us, but I had seen him somewhere and I just tossed this out, and I said you know we need to do something together, a united voice is more powerful so we sort of you know – well, finally in about 2004 and 2005, we really focused on getting the attention of other Mexican-American vintners, and we actually met here many, many times [1:18] out there, and also at some other sites, like once we met – Initially it was the people that were really into this were – I can name you the vintners, it was us, the Ceja Vineyards, Frias Vineyards, for a little while Gustavo Thrace, also Robledo and Keever vineyards, Keever, Olga Keever. She's Mexican, well Mexican-American; she was born here. Her family owns Keever vineyards, and we met in a class at Napa Valley College, and we just – we did, actually one of our wine club members who is an attorney – we brought into – I have a friend that I met at Wine Institute, Sandra Gonzales, she founded Vino Con Vida, and I had met her because we did a big event [1:19] at Wine Institute – [interrupted noise] Ceja Vineyards had done an event at Wine Institute with John DeLuca who never went to any, but this time, back in maybe even back in 2002. It was early, 2003 at the latest, because we were members, and I said okay I'm going to start coming because I really like marketing and I want to come because I want to learn, and so I became involved right away and then fortunately Sandra was the outreach director, director of Outreach to the members, and that's how we met. She's a very dear friend now, and so I said Sandra, wouldn't it be so cool if we can do a wine presentation like on to buy an entire member –Well everyone that works at the Wine Institute, which the office is in downtown [1:20] off Market Street in downtown San Francisco. I said yes, well let me talked to everyone and everyone was so excited. I took the bell, and then I did – and we also had bites because I said it would be really cool if we had food, so every single person came, even the Board, which was really neat, and John who at that time was still the director, and CEO, but he never went to these sort of things. It was supposed to be 2 hours, the tasting turned into like 4 hours. So we really connected, and just talking to her and the importance of banding and comarketing together, so she also came on board, and we met for about a year, and at the time, Mi Sueno was not at all interested. [1:21] That happened later, but

NVMAVA really was visualized in the early 2000s. I'm so glad that finally happened. The ones I mentioned were the only ones on board, no one else was really interested, and they thought we were crazy. It's true.

Steve Velasquez: Were they just too interested in sort of reaching the larger wine community or just too focused on what they were doing, sort of growing.

Amelia Ceja: I think at that time it was they were more focused on what they were doing, and maybe reaching – maybe they thought that – Because it wasn't called Mexican American. It was actually called Hispanic Vintners Alliance, and we have the bylaws. We have everything. So NVMAVA is new, but the people that worked really hard the first I mean way, way back, it was pretty much the people I mentioned. I think it was also because they said I don't think there's a market with the Latinos, I don't know, but no one else wanted to be a part of it. Oh, Alex Sotelo was part of it too, from the very first. It was really Alex, us, Olga, Sandra, and some of the other ones sometimes came to the meetings, sometimes not. It wasn't consistent. Sandra has always been a part since the very beginning. Then one of our wine club members is Saul Arrera. He's an attorney, so he says he loves to give voice, so he said okay, I'll pro bono, and I'll help you guys with establishing a non-profit, and all of this stuff. Then what really happened was that we really wanted to incorporate everyone, [1:23] but somehow it wasn't happening. Everyone was busy, so we sort of let it go for about a year-and-a-half, and then finally in 2010, May of 2010, we were invited to be recognized by the Governor of Michoacán, in Morelia, so we were invited, then the new kids on the block were also invited, like Maldonado, Mi Sueño was invited as well, the Robledo's were invited, oh, were the Frias invited, Encanto was invited, Alex Sotelo was invited, Rios was invited, and so we all went. There, the continuation of the idea [1:24] that we have had for a very long time and that we had actually worked on, especially having a lot of wine after – We were all staying in the same hotel, and we actually met with a lot of people, then there were some functions, etc, but at night when everyone gathered back at the hotel, we all had a lot of wine, and then they would order – I don't drink Tequila, but they do. So anyway, we would stay and talk until about 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning, and that's when it really hit everyone that if you're united, people pay a lot more attention to you because that trip really – my gosh, here's a group of Mexican-American Vintners coming all together, and people really paid

attention to us. So anyway, so then the idea that we had everyone else – we got everyone on board then [1:25] rather than just a few, so we said okay, as soon as we get back to Napa we're not letting this one go. So as soon, literally immediately after – that was only May 2010, when we all came back to Napa, it was Pedro and Rolando – See by then Rolando was really on board, before it was not really. So the meetings started happening pretty much almost initially like weekly because the momentum – you didn't want to lose the momentum. You know Board of Directors – well first of all, and fortunately one of the growers, Rios, is an attorney, so he said okay, this is great, I will do all the filing, and he knew all of the legalities, so it worked out very well. We immediately wrote our mission statement, then [1:26] our bylaws, but it was so very Democratic. That's why it took so long because it was – See I have been on the Board of many non-profits, and also worked very closely with Napa Valley Vintners on committees, and on the Board, so I've had a lot of experience, and also, Rios, oh my God, what's his – Rafael, and also Gonzalez, Sandra Gonzalez, but no one else. They're pretty immature. So it was very patiently done because everyone had to understand the process because we feel so strongly about doing things right from the beginning, so if we rushed anything – so Pedro became heavily involved, he is the Treasurer, and he really keeps everyone in check. It's really cool, so [1:27] let's say by January, so it took a lot of months, a lot longer than most non-profits, but by January of this year, we really had our vision, we had the grasp of the whole concept, and then we started planning – Our first inaugural event, which happened on July 30th of this year, and it was a resounding success. It was seamless. It was a united front, which is what we needed. It wasn't united when it was just the few of us that wanted this, but not everyone wanted it. Now it's wonderful, so immediately I said look, the first thing we need to do is because Napa Valley Vintners Association is very protective of the name Napa Valley, so we need to make sure that they're never gonna have an issue with us naming Napa Valley [1:28] Mexican-American Vintners when not all of the Vintners are in Napa Valley. That's something we have worked so hard to maintain, and to grow the Napa Valley name, and all of us 'good idea', and it was great. So we approached Linda Reef as well as Terry Hall, the Marketing Director and the President of Napa Valley Vintners, and oh, they are so supportive, and you know why because the critical mass is here, and they know that by them helping us means we're going to help them to grow the industry for everybody. So yeah, we're able once again, to use all of the resources from NVV, and I've

worked – My primary focus with Mexican-American NVV is actually in public relations and marketing, and I worked [1:29] with Sandra Gonzalez, and bringing, telling everyone, sending the press release, you know we pretty much did the press release, and well, now people really know about who we are, what we stand for, and what we're doing, and with NVV, Napa Valley Vintners Association, they gave us their approval, and then I was also able to meet with Terry Hall later so that he could also give us a bigger glimpse and access to – but I already had access to a lot of the media because I'm a member, but the thing is that not all of the members of NVMAVA are member of NVV, so like I really have a great idea for a wine auction – Napa Valley Vintners Wine Auction [1:30] next June. It's to do on NVMAVA, live action, donate – we've done some amazing – Ceja Vineyards not anyone else because we've donated some really quirky live auction lots that have gone for tens of thousands of dollars, so now we need to expand and do something that would be a first time, say like host a Mexican-American Fiesta with all of the different Vintners, not only, but obviously NVV, there is a caveat. They will help us, but anything that we do through NVV can only include the vintners, the NVMAVA vintners who are also NVV vintners, which is cool though. [1:31] Obviously we've been a member since the very beginning. The Renteria's are members. The Robledo's will never be able to be members because they're in Sonoma. Rios, they finally became members, but they've not been members long. Maldonado are not members. Mi Sueno is a member, so we'll still have enough NVMAVA members, so that we can craft a live lot that would be so historical that will sell for hundreds of thousands of dollars, and guess what, all of those moneys go for farm workers housing, healthcare, and education, which is what is important. We've already been doing it, I mean all of the other members, no, but we've understood [1:30] that people really like to hang out with us, that we really offer an experience that no one can duplicate, that has a lot of value, and so we've been doing it alone, and our lots have sold for a lot of money, a lot. We've been able to actually do hundreds of thousands of dollars, and all of those moneys go to everything that is very important to our community. But now we'll be able to do it in a much larger scale, and I think that is so cool. This year's event that we hosted, the Bautizo, which means Christening, on July 30th, we actually had a silent auction. We just wanted to sort of test, and we were able to raise some really nice money already with them –

Steve Velasquez: What's this idea?

Amelia Ceja: Just with our inaugural Bautizo, [1:33] which was held on July 30th, we've already been able – We threw in – it wasn't just the party, the inaugural party. We also had a silent lot, and already raised money through NVMAVA, yeah, so next year, we're going to incorporate our live auction as well, but for Napa Valley Vintners, which has even a bigger stage – see I'm thinking always bigger. If you don't I mean, that's why we got Eric Asimov (?) to come and write about us because I approached them. I brought him here. But anyway, so I feel very strongly that now as, the organization, NVMAVA, as an organization, we need to be on a bigger stage, and NVV gives us that. People come from all over the world to a wine auction, [1:34] and we're going to be crafting a live lot. I have just spoken to a few, and I think it will be really cool. We're not gonna – We'll probably include some of the other Latino vintners that are NVV, Napa Valley Vintners members, because I think it's very important to be inclusive. They're Latinos, I mean like there are others like the other Quintessa, I mean they're Latinos. There's like Palmas [Palmas?]. They're so many other Latino vintners that need to be a part of this as well. It'll be very exciting because it will be one of a kind. It's never been done. I had this idea. I actually wrote out a description last year, but we weren't ready, so hopefully – [1:35] We will do a blog, keep a blog so that we'll make it so exciting, so by the time the auction happens in early June, everyone wants the lot.

Steve Velasquez: Well that sounds very exciting.

Amelia Ceja: Yeah.

Steve Velasquez: Well, we've spoken for quite a while, and I know you're very busy, so I want to thank you for your time, and your stories and insight for our project, and hopefully this will be one of many conversations we'll have later.

Amelia Ceja: Thank you so much Steve, it will be my pleasure to host to you and your team and your other coworkers here at Ceja in Carneros, and not in such a rush, moments as it was this past Friday, but also really invite you to explore all of the angles because [1:36] all of Mexican labor force, specifically in Napa has really impacted this culture in so many different ways. So, thank you. I'm delighted. I can't wait for the whole project. It's very exciting.

Steve Velasquez: Well, thank you again, and that's exactly what we're hoping to highlight, the whole role of Latinos, Mexicans in the wine industry from every possible angle. So thank you.

Amelia Ceja: De Nada

[End of Audio] [1:36:42]

Duration: 97 minutes
