

Fall-Winter 06-07

TRIBUTE

Encarta World English Dictionary defines "tribute" as something said or given to show gratitude, praise, or admiration. This definition describes pretty accurately how I feel about my father who passed away on November 17th.

Ten years ago this was not the case, in fact, it could not have been further from it. We were not speaking to each other and he had even taken the time to put in writing his desire never to see me again and to insure that I would have no part of him. Harsh times emotionally.

To say that things have come full circle in the last ten years is just a beginning. Many things and many circles have been made.

Thirty years ago when I was completing my first circling of the globe, the last city I stopped in was Hong Kong. A month later, I was working the first harvest at the winery. Thirty years later, weeks after the conclusion of our thirtieth harvest, I was again in Hong Kong, this time, celebrating the fifth anniversary of our Hong Kong distributor. The first night there I co-hosted a winemaker dinner at a restaurant aptly named "Tribute," the name, according to the owner, being attributed to winemakers. I couldn't help but think what an amazing coincidence this was, and how it seemed to me these last ten years have in some ways seemed like a "journey" to tribute.

Nine years ago, mostly at the wise urging of my wife, Jennifer, I reached out to my Dad when he really needed some support. To make a long story short, we were able to reestablish our relationship. He asked me to take over his affairs as he felt that he was really ready to retire and I agreed.

For the first several years, I had to focus on the structural problems that the winery was suffering from and I noticed that I was quite eager to assign these various problems to my perceived shortcomings of my father's personality and I was energized by the thought of succeeding where he had come up short.

With the passage of a few more years and the indispensable help of the crack team at the winery of Matt, Randy, Laura, Nils, Art, Jeanne, and Jennifer, all those old problems seem like ancient history now and almost like they never were that big of a deal. The focus the last couple of years and now is not one of repair but of harnessing our creative energies to move forward, and to always improve. Re-doing the tasting room, installing a solar energy system, and creating new wines are the order of the day.

The last six harvests have all been incredible and the sky seems like the limit. During this period I have noticed how my thoughts and public comments about my father have completely changed in tone. There is no longer assignment of blame, but credit and praise for first having the vision and second the tenacity to hang in there long enough to provide us the opportunity to finally bring his dream to fruition.

Oddly enough, Dad never again visited the winery after I came on board. He was strangely superstitious and somehow thought it would be best if he just stayed away. Well, now another circle is completed. Dad, in condensed form, now resides on top of the armoire in the tasting room where he can get a bird's eye view of the vibrant activity in the tasting room and keep an eye on our blending sessions for a while.

Holiday Cheers,

-Michael Keenan