



A STANDING GROUND

However just and anxious I have been,
I will stop and step back
from the crowd of those who may agree
with what I say, and be apart.
There is no earthly promise of life or peace
but where the roots branch and weave
their patient silent passages in the dark...
I am not bound for any public place,
but for ground of my own
where I have planted vines and orchard trees,
and in the heat of the day climbed up
into the healing shadow of the woods.
Better than any argument is to rise at dawn
and pick dew-wet red berries in a cup.

-*Wendell Berry*



DAVID RUSSELL LETT

1939 - 2008

PROGRAM

MEMORIAL GATHERING

December Seventh, 2008

McMinnville Community Center Auditorium

PIPER'S WELCOME OUTSIDE.....*David's favorite way to celebrate an occasion*

R. V aughn Williams
Six Studies in English Folk-Song, for cello & piano
L. V. Beethoven
Sonata in F Major for Violin and Piano "Spring"

JASON LETT.....*Family Welcome*

GOVERNOR BARBARA ROBERTS.....*On Citizenship*

G. F. Handel
B Major Sonata for flute and piano

DAVID ADELSHEIM, ADELSHEIM VINEYARD.....*On a Legacy to Oregon Winegrowing*

J. S. Bach
Cello Suites

HENRY RICHMOND, FOUNDER, 1000 FRIENDS OF OREGON.....*On a Love of the Land*

F. Mendelssohn
Piano Trio No. 1 in d minor, 2nd movement

NICK PIERANO, NICK'S ITALIAN CAFÉ.....*On Friendship and Family*

PICTURES FROM DAVID'S LIFE
J. S. Bach
Sheep May Safely Graze

RUSS MARGACH, THE EYRIE VINEYARDS.....*Instruction for the Toast*

POURING THE TOAST
J. S. Bach
Overture in b minor

JASON LETT.....*A Toast to Papa*

PIPER'S RECESSIONAL

*You are invited to adjourn to the gathering rooms,
for refreshments and visiting*

DAVID'S LIFE

DAVID RUSSELL LETT was born in Chicago on July 5th, 1939. His parents, Roland Lett and Patricia Russell, claimed between them lines of descent mixed from doctors, Mormon pioneers and talented salesmen.



In kindergarten, it was reported that Davie had an independent streak.

In 1946, the Letts moved West, to the Russell family's old cabin in Holladay, Utah. The 20-acre "apple and boulder farm" was located in a spectacular setting at the foot of the Wasatch Mountains. His experiences growing up there instilled in David a deep respect for nature, and a love of wilderness and open spaces.



David attended Olympus High School in Salt Lake City, where he became lifelong friends with a group of fellow roustabouts. They called themselves the "Sons of Orpheus".

Upon graduation in 1957, hoping to get posted to Antarctica, David talked the rest of the Sons into joining the Coast Guard Reserve. They were stationed near San Francisco, and served together aboard the USCG cutter Taney (mostly deck-painting).

In 1961, David graduated from the University of Utah with a BA in Philosophy and Pre-med. His parents were hoping for another doctor or dentist in the family, but were due for disappointment: on a rainy day in early 1962, following an interview at Physicians and Surgeons in San Francisco, David decided to take a drive out into the Napa Valley.

By chance, he happened upon one of the few artisan wineries then in existence, Lee Stewart's Souverain Cellars. Lee and David struck up a conversation about wines and winemaking, and before the day was out, David had found his calling.

In lieu of dentistry, that year David began a second Bachelors degree at UC Davis, in Viticulture. In his winetasting classes there, he was hit by what he called "the cosmic brick" -- a lifelong love for the Pinot noirs of Burgundy. He augmented his education at Lee Stewart's invitation, working at Souverain as well.



After graduation in 1964, David spent several months in northern Europe, researching the specific climate requirements of Pinot noir and related varieties. He became convinced that Oregon's Willamette Valley offered the best American climate for these varieties.

Returning to California in the fall, David gathered cuttings of cool-climate varieties including Pinot noir, Pinot gris, Pinot Meunier, Riesling and Gewurtztraminer from research vineyards around Davis. Through his mentor Lee Stewart, David was introduced to Jerry Draper, and obtained cuttings from Jerry's heirloom selection of Chardonnay.

In January, 1965, at age 25, David arrived in Oregon "with 3,000 grape cuttings and a theory" in his Uncle Don's horse trailer. He planted the cuttings to root in a rented nursery plot, and went looking for his ideal vineyard land. It was the first recorded planting of these varieties, including Pinot noir, in the Willamette Valley, and the first commercial-scale planting of Pinot gris in America.



Later that year, David's friend and classmate at UC/Davis, Charles Coury, returned from Alsace. Coury roomed with David in Silverton while they both looked for vineyard sites. Once Coury found his site, David helped him establish his plantings, setting a tradition of collaboration among winegrowers that has helped define Oregon winegrowing.



David found his own perfect vineyard site in the Dundee Hills in 1966. He also met Diana, at a textbook conference in Chicago. They were married in Dallas in October, 1966, and spent their honeymoon year planting vines. They produced Jim in 1968, Jason in 1969, and The Eyrie Vineyards first vintage in 1970.

In May, 1971, David and Diana finally got a diagnosis of autism for their 3-year-old son, Jim. The Letts began a new lifetime pioneering effort, to help Jim and other children with what was then a little-known disorder.

David also began to be involved with land-use planning. Hillside land was considered uneconomical to farm, and many local development plans called for subdivisions in the hills. David was an active part of a coalition of area winegrowers who felt the urgent need to keep their young vines from being shouldered aside by hillside sprawl.



In the early 1970s, they convinced county planners that the new vineyards could create a more valuable crop to the hillsides than tract housing. Winegrape acreage is now the most valuable farmland in the state.



The decade of the 70's also brought recognition to the burgeoning artisanal winemaking scene in America. The success of California wines in the Spurrier tasting in Paris in 1976 astonished the wine world. In Paris in 1979, and in Beaune in 1980, The Eyrie Vineyards brought international recognition to Oregon as a wine region, and established Oregon's reputation as the New World home for Pinot noir.

Throughout the years, David served as mentor and employer to many who took his influence to their own endeavours in wine. His first apprentice was David Adelsheim, but others followed: Fred Arterberry, Bill Cattrall, David Lake, Joel Myers, Veronique Drouhin,



Amy Wesselman, Laurel Hood, Kelly Kidneigh, Maitland Findley, and Kelly Fox to name a few.



Some chose to stay at Eyrie rather than move on: his vineyard crew, composed of Billie Sutton and Irene Sears (now retired); Javier and Jose Garcia; Martin, Juan, and Luis Ponce; and Julio Hernandez form the backbone of Eyrie's efforts.

They have many decades of experience between them. Friends volunteer at harvest and holiday tastings, with Menton Sveen, Steve James, and Norman Shearer lending efforts every year.

David took an avuncular interest in Oregon's rapidly expanding wine industry, while staying true to his own distinctive style. He believed that wine should taste of place and vintage it was grown, and eschewed the new oak barrels and extractive winemaking techniques that he believed impede its expression. As a result of his light touch, his wines have an inherent balance that has given them a well-documented reputation for superior aging ability.

David was an engaged citizen. He was Senior Board Member of 1000 Friends of Oregon for many years, and worked tirelessly throughout his career to protect Oregon farmlands. He also served on the board of the American Vintners Association, and was a founding member of the Oregon Winegrowers Association, the Oregon Wine Advisory Board and the International Pinot noir Celebration.



In 1987, David was named to the James Beard Foundation's "Who's Who of Food and Beverage In America", and over the course of his career received numerous awards for his wines and his pioneering work with Pinot noir and Pinot gris. He was especially proud of the recognition given to him in 2004 from the Oregon Department of Agriculture, honoring his "Individual Contribution to the Progress of Oregon Agriculture." In 2008 David was nominated for the James Beard Award for a Wine and Spirits Professional.

David's devotion to his craft was matched by his love for his family. He and Diana celebrated their 42nd wedding anniversary in 2008, and a life together of hard work and profound love. He had a playful streak that impressed children: Jim and Jason, his grandchildren Margo and Nina, and many of the others he met as well. He was an excellent reader of bedtime stories, with a store of wonderful accents for each character.



David also maintained a sincere love for all things elemental. He cherished his 1961 Morgan Plus 4, an idiosyncratic British sports car with a wooden frame, and his 1967 Land Rover.



He loved the sea and loved to sail. While he never owned a sailboat, for many years he used Eyrie wine and his good company to gain passage on friends' boats. His marine adventures took him from the Queen Charlotte Islands in British Columbia to the Damriscotta River in Maine

Finally in 2002, David bought a boat of his own – a powered 24 foot Maine lobsterboat made of oak. He coordinated its restoration and launched in Yaquina Bay. He joked that having pioneered Pinot noir in place where no one said it could grow, then he could launch a lobster fishery in Oregon as well.



In 2005, David's younger son Jason took over from his father as winemaker and vineyard manager at The Eyrie Vineyards. In July 2008, David formally and proudly passed the torch to Jason at a memorable retirement tasting of Pinot noir Reserves from all of his 39 vintages. David died peacefully at home on October 9th, just as the 2008 harvest was to begin.



IN GRATITUDE

THE LETT FAMILY would like to thank their friends and colleagues for their many generous deeds and kind thoughts during this time of grief. A difficult vintage would have been impossible without your gifts of food and support. We would also like to thank all of those who have joined us here today. Our special thanks for the wise counsel of William Crane and Henry & Ruth Richmond, and to David Bergen, who organized a wonderful team of chef/friends to provide for us all. To David Lett, whose hand guided the wines we drink today: Cheers.

MUSICAL

Daniel Delmain.....*Bagpipes*
 William Crane.....*Piano*
 Greg Ewer.....*Violin*
 Justin Kagan.....*Cello*
 Abby Mages.....*Flute*
The piano for this occasion was sent by Mae's Sherman-Clay Pianos of Portland

VISUAL

Ginny Campbell.....*Original program artwork*
 Jane Coombs and Mary Colletti.....*Florals and Decorations*
 Frank Barnett.....*Program cover photo and slideshow photos*
 Janis Miglavs.....*Slideshow and program photos*

GUSTATORY

Carmen Peirano & Eric Ferguson.....*Nick's Italian Café, McMinnville*
 Nancy & Richard Gertz.....*Red Hills Provincial Dining, Dundee*
 Rob Pounding.....*Blackfish Café, Lincoln City*
 Mieko Nordin, Ko Kagawa, & Yoko Imholt.....*Kame, McMinnville*
 Jason & Laurie Furch.....*Red Fox Bakery, McMinnville*
 Steve Allen.....*Jake's Deli, McMinnville*
 Kristin Schonfeld.....*Harvest Fresh, McMinnville*
 Jason Stoller-Smith.....*The Dundee Bistro, Dundee*
 Kathy Stoller.....*La Rambla, McMinnville*
 Cathy Whims.....*Nostrana, Portland*
 Michael Mueller.....*2601 Vaughn, Portland*
 Tina Bergen.....*Tina's, Dundee*
 Peter De Garmo.....*Pasta Works, Portland*
 Ray and John Duyn.....*Carlton Farms, Carlton*

SACREMENTAL

Jason Lett & David Lett.....*2005 Pinot gris "Original Vines Reserve"*
 David Lett.....*2003 Pinot noir "South Block Reserve"*