



BRION



Stories from the Vineyards

THE KENNY STORY

FOR ME, STARTING this business wasn't solely about wine or the vineyards. I wanted to change to a life where I could actually be living with someone, have a dog and take a walk, and work in farming. At that time, it wasn't my objective to make a top wine. I wanted the wine to be respectable; being right beside Monte Rosso Vineyard was part of that.

I brought my brother Dana down from Washington to help me get this land ready for vineyards. And he brought along his good friend—a guy who'd had a sand and gravel business up there, a crazy guy and a hard, hard worker. And that was Kenny.

Kenny was a typical construction guy; he'd start working at daybreak and work till dark. He could just *destroy* equipment, but he was a big laugh all the time. And he could accomplish three times as much as any other person. He was living up here, by himself mostly. He would walk around without a shirt on, sometimes less, chain smoking. He'd play loud music and sit around the fire and drink whisky.

From the beginning, I *really* didn't want to take a lot of trees out; I just wanted to take out enough to be able to make a little bit of wine. On the weekends I would go visit Ronda and I'd come back and find more trees taken out and raise hell with Dana: "Why are you taking my trees out?"

And he said, "We can't farm with this many trees around the vineyard," which was true. But every weekend I'd come back and there'd be more gone. I finally said, "You got to quit. Absolutely no more trees cut. I don't *care* whether I grow any more grapes."

With this project, we'd be bringing in power because there was no electricity. I was not going to have any power poles where I'd be looking at overhead lines. I worked with PG&E, saying we would go ahead and dig our own ditches, put in our own conduit, lay down the wires, and then they could just put the transformers in, which was a good deal.

So, Kenny got out there to dig these trenches. There was a rocky ridge that he had to go through, and he had the water truck there just in case anything happened. But he hit a bunch of rocks, and the sparks off the rocks started a fire. Generally, you just start using the shovel of the excavator to cover the dirt back up and put the fire out.

Well, in doing that, he broke the hose on the excavator. Now we've got hydraulic fluid spraying all over a full-on fire. He backs that excavator up, and he grabs the water truck and starts trying to get the fire out.

By that time, there's smoke. And then the fire department's been called. Helicopters start coming in; bulldozers start coming in. I mean, within minutes, there's all this equipment on the hill. It was a beautiful hillside of trees. And it wouldn't have been that bad if the fire department had been a little more careful with what they did. But they just went around the whole thing and pushed all those trees down.

We looked at it all afterward, and I said, "Well, I guess it's cleared now; we may as well plant it."

—Brion Wise, *Founder*, BRION

BRION Moon Mountain Estate; after the cleared land was planted to vines it became Blocks Three, Four, and Five, some of the best fruit on the property, and the source of the first BRION Moon Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon