

GROWING CLOSER IN DISTANT VINEYARDS

by Jameson Fink

In 2007, my father dropped dead while standing in a lift line at a ski resort. I heard a similar refrain from a lot of well-intentioned people, “At least he died doing something he loved.” Which was no consolation to me because, well, dead is dead.

I was upset and cynical, mostly because my dad had just retired and looked forward to years of travel with my mother. She posed a question: Would I travel with her instead?

I said yes, though we weren’t close at the time.

Fortunately, there was wine. Starting with a stint at a Chicago bottle shop, I had indoctrinated my parents into the world of wine. It was there to drink, of course, but also to help guide our travel destinations. Our first trip was to Argentina and Chile in 2009. It was a luxurious vacation, but to keep costs sane, I had to entertain notions of insanity and stay in a tiny space with my mother for three weeks. (Hello Dr. Freud.)

Do I sound like a self-absorbed jerk? I probably was. (And I still have my moments.) But there was one experience where I realized I needed to confront who I was as a person and son.

We were in Mendoza, Argentina, at Bodega Benegas. I had been obsessed with its Luna Benegas Cabernet, a delicious bargain red, and I was really geeked to visit owner Federico Benegas Lynch. I couldn’t resist asking for a photo with him.

His response? “Only if your mother is in the photo as well.”

Almost a decade later, I can hear Federico’s voice, and sentiment, clear as a bell. He was gracious; I was oblivious. Though it wasn’t Federico’s intent, he forced me to confront my “me-first” mentality. I was in Argentina and Chile to be with my mom and share experiences with her. Wine was secondary.

I knew that trip would be an opportunity to learn about wine, but I never thought it would teach me to be a better son.

Subsequent trips to Australia and New Zealand have taught me it’s not a straight path. There are moments when you thrive, like a cruise through Milford Sound fjord, and some you hope to survive, like being chased by a dog through rural Tasmania. But I can’t wait to see the next passport stamp we get, together.

