

A VINTNER EXTRAORDINAIRE GUIDES MAJESTIC VINES INTO FINE WINES

“Believe in yourself – That is always a homerun. That would be the name of my wine.”
—Elaine Pivinski

Elaine Pivinski, the owner of Franklin Hill Vineyards, was among Pennsylvania’s first wine makers and owners. In 1975, she began her vineyard in Bangor, Pa., with a dream and a promise: farm the earth to provide for her family and for future generations.

“Some say life is a journey,” she says. “A path that leads you through joy and sorrow. My path has been here, among the vines. I planted them, I nurtured them, and I watched them flourish. As they have grown, so have I. With each season that passes, I grow stronger in my purpose—cultivating life’s balance and giving back to the soil hasn’t been easy.”

Elaine has weathered many storms, both literal and figurative. She went through a difficult divorce in 1985 and worked even harder to support her family. As luck would have it, she hired an exceptional woman named Bonnie in 1979 who ultimately became Franklin Hill Vineyard’s head winemaker. By 1981, the vineyard was growing strong.

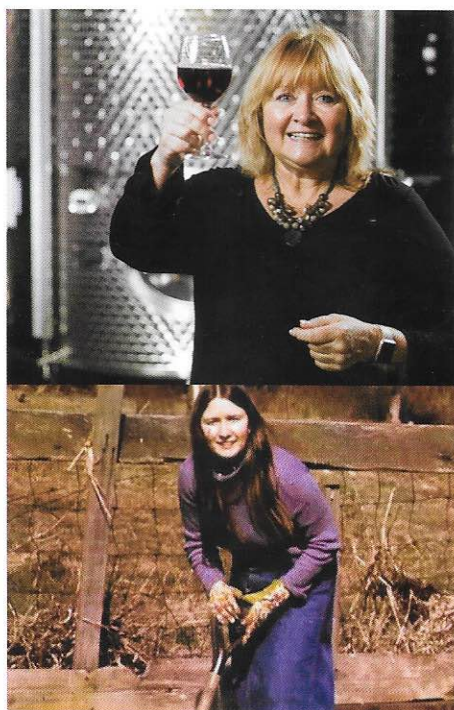
But the two wine makers faced continuous challenges from Mother Nature and the obsolete laws which favored husbands over wives. Elaine and Bonnie were about to pack it in when they won three medals in a wine competition.

“This is what changed my life,” said Elaine.

Elaine and Bonnie trudged ahead, more determined than ever. Family and friends helped where they could, and soon, a core of five women emerged at the winery.

Elaine worked with all the moms who lived along Franklin Hill Road. These women would refer others, and the “sisterhood” grew to 12 women. Elaine says she was able to do it because she “put family first.”

“No child will go into daycare when your mother works here,” she told her employees. She’s dedicated to supporting working



mothers and has 20 women on staff.

Elaine’s source of strength was her father Walter. “He was her number one supporter and sold more wine than anyone,” said Elaine’s daughter Jennifer. He liked to smoke a pipe with Sir Walter Raleigh tobacco while he worked at the store. People came just to chat with him.

Elaine’s heart was broken when Walter passed. As a tribute to Walter, Franklin Hill renamed his favorite country red “Sir Walter Red” and depicted him on the label smoking his favorite tobacco.

Up until this point, “Country Red” never won any big medals. But, the year after the rebrand, Sir Walter’s Red won its first series of gold medals.

Visionary, hippie, wife, mother, friend, feminist, rule breaker, wine merchant, and mentor, Elaine has worn many hats and evolved into a compassionate, creative, and intuitive entrepreneur.

The secret to Elaine’s success lies in her big heart. She is filled with love for her work, her family, her employees, and her clients. She gives her staff the tools they need to succeed. and then does her best to stay out of their way.

Her reverence for Mother Earth is also palpable. “At the end of a long and hard day, there’s nothing more romantic or magical than walking the vineyards,” Elaine shared.

Today she produces over 80,000 gallons of wine each year. She has four locations and has recently expanded into over 125 state stores and over 50 grocery stores throughout Pennsylvania. In the last year they’ve seen a 30% increase in their overall sales and continue to grow.

According to lehighvalleywomen.com, Elaine has been inducted into the Lehigh Valley Business of the Year Hall of Fame and has received numerous awards, including the Trailblazer Award from The Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce, Women of Influence in the Lehigh Valley, and Pennsylvania’s 50 Best Women in Business Awards. (LehighValleywomen.com)

Elaine prides herself on looking ahead for the next big thing. Franklin Hill Vineyards has created 24 wines, three of which are named for her grandchildren: Evanswood, White Jade, and Red Head.

In late 2013, Elaine’s son Adam started a spirits business. Social Still, the next generation of business for Franklin Hill, resides in Bethlehem’s Southside, and has become a popular hotspot.

“She and I were willing to put it all on the line and reinvent ourselves for a second time since the 80s,” said Adam. “It was scary but she trusted me.”

—Deb Lehman