

# ONE BOTTLE: The 2001 Allegrini “La Grola”

by JOSHUA BAER

My parents grew up during the great depression. They believed in accountability, character, hard work, and obligation. They also believed in the power of beauty.

My wife and I grew up during the Cold War. We believed in animals, creativity, love, metaphysics, and wilderness. We also believed in the power of beauty. Anything beautiful had a message behind it. To decipher that message was to glimpse the nature of existence.

My children grew up during the great bull market. My daughter believes in Jesus Christ and in helping people. My son believes in himself and in his future. Both my daughter and my son believe in the power of beauty.

Without being authoritarian, both of my parents were authorities. My father was a famous photographer. He knew so much about cameras, darkrooms, light, and printing that other photographers used to hang out at our house in case some of what my father knew fell off of him and landed on them. My mother was an artist. She gardened, cooked, painted, told stories, and laughed. She had a knack for arranging rooms. She arranged rooms in such a way that any room she had arranged felt like a breath of fresh air when you walked into it. My parents were not “beautiful people” but their marriage was an ongoing homage to beauty. Without ever insisting that beauty was a big deal, they both had lifelong relationships with beauty. Their lives were beset by anger, frustration, regret, and sorrow, but they managed to live beautiful lives.

The biggest surprise of my life was, has been, and continues to be how much I love my children. Both my daughter and my son came into the world with large, invisible packages of love attached to them. At some point between conception and birth, they delivered those packages to my heart. I started loving them before they were born. I will die before I stop.

When I was a child, I assumed that when I grew up I would experience some measure of the expertise I observed in my parents. Imagine my disappointment when I discovered that as a parent you are never the expert. (Of course there are times when you pretend to be the expert but those times don't count as expertise. If anything, pretending to be the expert is the opposite of expertise.) Instead, you are the clueless beginner, the perennial novice always taking that first step.

You learn that you know nothing. Slowly, you accept the fact that only a fool is certain. You learn how to act without information. You learn that your experiences, your memories, and your regrets have no currency with your kids. That's why they roll their eyes when you lecture them. They don't want your wisdom. They want your protection.

Being a parent prepared me for becoming a person who likes to drink wine. Not a wine expert. Not a connoisseur. Not a wine writer. I am none of those things. I am a person who likes to drink wine. Period. If a wine tastes better each time I drink it, I figure out a way to write about it so that my relationship with that wine exists in print. My approach to wine is that there are the wines that speak the language of sophistication and taste and then there are the wines that speak the language of beauty and love. I like the wines that speak the language of beauty and love. I think they have something to say.



Children play. This is the thing that makes children extraordinary. By “play,” I mean that children act out imaginary events. They pretend. They live at the crossroads of charades, games, performances, and stories. In the same way that adults feel compelled to act like we won't die (although we know we will), children feel compelled to act like their fantasies are real (although they know they're not).

The next time you open a bottle of wine, set aside whatever you think you know about wine. Pretend that you are drinking wine for the first time. Wine tastes weird. It's a beverage you inhale as much as swallow. Wine tastes real but it also tastes like a world beyond your vocabulary, an experience that vanishes the moment you attempt to describe it. Drinking wine reminds you of a conversation you had with an adult but you can't remember where you had the conversation or who the adult was. Having wine inside you makes you feel giddy, light-headed, powerful, and powerless. It gives you a glimpse of who you might be but it also draws a veil between you and your ability to measure who you are.

Which brings us to the 2001 Allegrini “La Grola.”

The Allegrini family grows grapes and makes wine in Fumane di Valpolicella, a village in the Veneto region of Italy. Valpolicella is a valley two hours west of Venice, a half-hour northwest of Verona, and twenty minutes east of Lago De Garda. The word “Valpolicella” means the valley (*val*) of many (*poli*) cellars (*cella*).

The Allegrinis have farmed in the Valpolicella since 1630. In the 1970s, they started making an Amarone. Their Amarones from the 1990s are among the finest wines made anywhere on earth. In addition to their Amarones, the Allegrinis make a wine called La Grola.

The *cepage* of the 2001 Allegrini La Grola is seventy percent Corvina Veronese, fifteen percent Rondinella, ten percent Syrah, and five percent Sangiovese. In the glass, the color oscillates between purple and crimson. The bouquet is simultaneously aggressive and kind. On the palette, the 2001 La Grola gives you permission to follow your taste from the center to the edges of the wine. Many wines lock you into their flavors. The 2001 La Grola allows you to wander from one association to the next. The finish is more like the last moments of a dream than the aftertaste of a wine. It haunts your memory.

A wine as generous as the 2001 La Grola could only be made by a family. As individuals, we are too caught up in the cult of identity to appreciate the generational lineage that creates lasting beauty. It's only after we surrender to the fact that we are part of a family that we're allowed, thankfully, to taste the beauty of life.

*One Bottle* is dedicated to the appreciation of good wine and good times, one bottle at a time. The name *One Bottle*, and the contents of this column, are © 2006 by onebottle.com. If you need help finding a wine or building a cellar, write to Joshua Baer at [jb@onebottle.com](mailto:jb@onebottle.com).

