



## Mission Grapes of the Past

By Ernie-Lee Miller

When I was first commissioned to paint a painting representing the history of wine in New Mexico by our 3 area Rotary Clubs, I remembered my friends Alvin and Evelyn (Klopfer) Cook telling me about their knowledge of the topic. They told me of the lonely grapevine trying to survive while hanging off an arroyo bank on the old old Borunda Family Vineyard. This is thought to be the first vineyard in the area. The vineyard grew Mission grapes, which were brought into this area from Spain by way of Mexico to produce wines for the church.

My first vision for the painting was of a window with a still life of grapes, wine bottles, and a grapevine climbing up the wall. Then looking thru the window into a view of the past depicting the first vineyard in the area. When I told the Cooks of my project, they gave me so much. They lead me on a tour to see the old grape vine, the ruins of the old Borunda House, and the old apple orchard where Evelyn's dad added trees 60 years ago to the already existing orchard.

So then, I only had to put it on canvas...

## Early Grape Farming In Laborcita Canyon

The bright New Mexico sun has splashed down on colorful bluffs and life sustaining valleys on the Borunda place in Laborcita Canyon since the beginning of time. Native people camped and harvested choke cherries, pinons, native black walnut, yucca bananas and wild game. These Native people established granaries on the Borunda place. (See the matates and monos collected by Aubrey Daugherty on the Borunda place and donated to the Mescalero Apache museum and cultural center.)

The Borunda family came from Spain via Mexico and settled over across the canyon near a little spring. A high vertical bluff protected the place they chose for their first home. They built small rooms out of adobe and caliche bricks. The ruins of these homes remain today. They planted corn, chili, beans and mission grapes from cuttings they brought with them. They had herds of goats and some cattle. At a later time they felt secure enough to build a larger home to the south, away from the protection of the high vertical bluff, which protected their earlier dwellings. Early surveys (I believe 1857) note this later dwelling as "an old established ranch house".

To this day the bright New Mexico sun splashes down on mission grape vines still surviving by clinging to the arroyo banks near the old apple trees planted by the Borundas. Borunda family members no longer live in the canyon but some descendents live in the surrounding areas.

Mission grapes from these original vines continue to sustain canyon residents today.

~Evelyn (Pete) Klopfer Cook