

Word-Portraits capture life story

By JAMES RUSSELL
Of the Emerald

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Phyllis Benbow, free-lance writer and a self-proclaimed 'idealist', is enthusiastic about a new idea called Word-Portraits which she says could offer a piece of immortality to all who possess them. Benbow hopes to make her 'invention' a household word. "I'm enthusiastic about this project as our affluent society allows me to be," she says. "The idea may not become as popular as the camera but it will be copied. We thought radio would go out when TV came in but it didn't so there's just no telling."

The Word-Portraits are based on the premise that every individual is interesting, says Benbow, who was once religion editor on the defunct Los Angeles Times-Mirror. Putting this premise to work, she has established an entirely new profession—writing biographies for the common man.

"Word-Portraits are the capturing of a life story in words for the family and friends of loved ones to treasure for



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Phyllis Benbow

generations to come," she says. The immortality she offers lies not in extra years of actual life, but rather in words.

"Thank God we've got individualists and common people in this world," Benbow relates. "There's nobody really unimportant in this world, and it's time people came down to that realization."

"The idea hits you hard when you stop to think that there's a possibility that nobody is going to put flowers on your grave," she says. "It really makes you think..."

The Word-Portrait market should be primarily in the over 50 age bracket, although Benbow says their use "accelerates down through the young-marrieds, the singles, and teens until maximum use is in the pre-school and yet-to-be-borns."

"I write what I see," she says. "But I make no interpretations. The story is as the person tells it. I am careful to be a mirror that is sensitive to every light and shadow, but not to intrude."

Right now, Benbow stresses, "I need five writers from this area to help with five initial Word-Portraits which will serve as samples for Meier and Frank," who have expressed interest in

marketing the idea in the Northwest.

She envisions Word-Portraits becoming a new form of status symbol, possibly equalling or surpassing the status value of oil portraits.

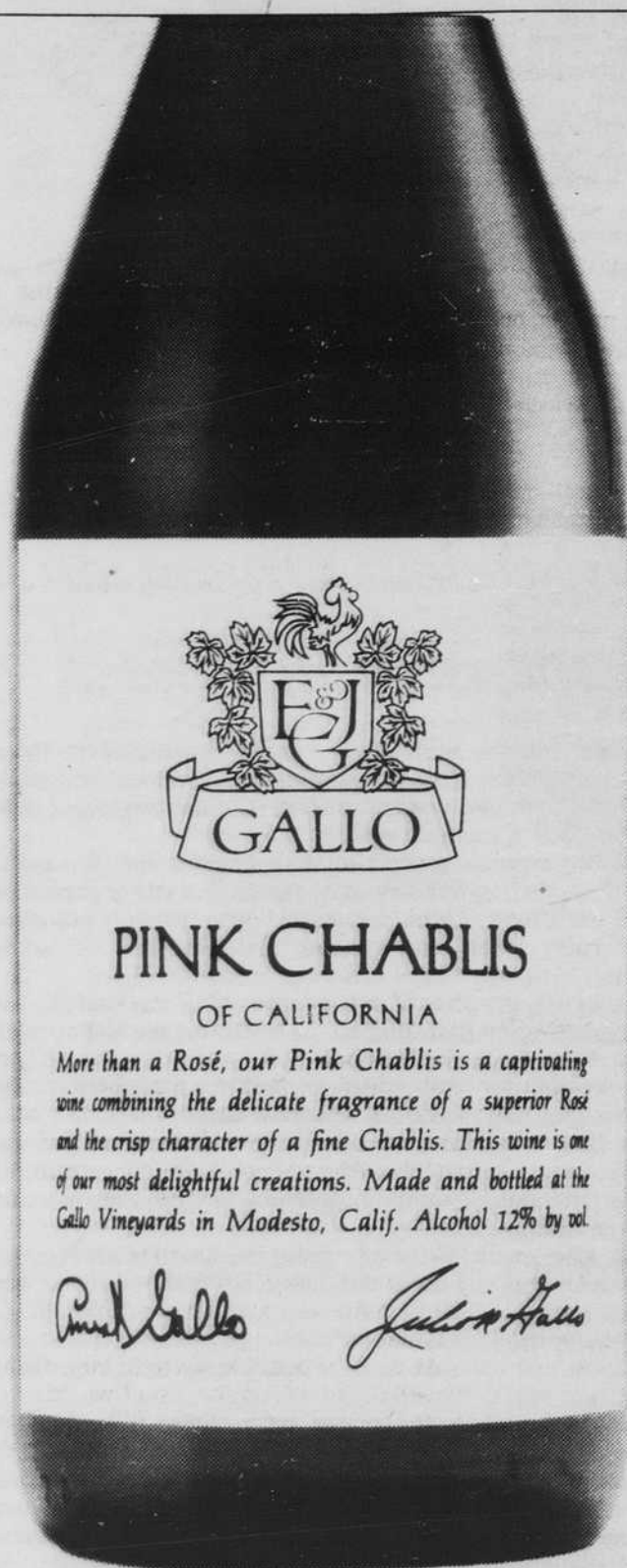
The potential job market which might develop because of Word-Portraits is another important asset involved with the idea, Benbow says.

"Who we are is the most important thing about us, not what we know," she says. "Word-Portraits try to capture a piece of each of us. They preserve it for generations to come. People want to be remembered and loved as much as everyone else, and when you start to get older, people start to think about that."

That's one of the reasons that Benbow wants to get young writers involved with her idea, "they're so alive, so impressionable, so vibrant," she says.

"If we can teach them a little bit about those around them, how it's important to remember and care about those you love or love you then everyone might be a little bit better off."

Interested writers or subjects should contact Benbow at P.O. Box T, Springfield, Oregon, 97477.



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