

## Who'd like £3,000/\$4,500 to travel?

11 Jan 2009 by Jancis Robinson

Nick and I have been closely involved with the Geoffrey Roberts Award since its inception in 1996 to commemorate the pioneer importer of 'New World' (there's a term that dates Roberts, pictured here) wine into the UK. Every year we give a travel grant of £3,000 (about \$4,500) to someone we think will make a positive difference to the world of food and/or drink as a result of their travels.

Perhaps this year, with so many people finding themselves un- or under-employed, the award may be of interest to a wider range of applicants than usual. Do you know a potential achiever in the world of food and drink? Or someone who can really make a difference in either of these fields?

Please tell them about the Geoffrey Roberts Award, an annual international travel award given each year to someone who can convince the judges that their proposed trip is really worthwhile. Applications for the 2009 Award, via [www.geoffreyrobertsaward.com](http://www.geoffreyrobertsaward.com), close on 31 March 2009. Applicants of any age or nationality are most welcome.

The judges were so impressed by two of the applicants for the 2008 Award that they decided to choose two equal winners, Magdalena Eriksson and Nelle Gretzinger, both of New York City. Not only did both winners live in the same city, they both intend to use their awards to carry out projects in developing countries within 20 degrees of the equator, and both are already developing businesses that will empower women in rural and impoverished locations.

**Magdalena Eriksson**, a biochemist and journalist native to Sweden, has already moved to Ghana in West Africa and intends to develop products based on the conical, white-fleshed variety of pineapple grown there. In 2006, she visited the small, impoverished village of Ekumfi-Edumafa for the first time. The village council, assembled on the beach, invited her to become the queen mother of women and girls in the community. Eriksson's parents, who for many years have been associated with Edumafa as developmental chief and queen mother, introduced her to the village. Accepting the position, Eriksson was subsequently installed and granted the name Nana-Nyena II. Her goals for Edumafa include that all girls should complete nine years of school, to improve the health status of all villagers, and to create business opportunities for women. Pineapple is one of the few crops that thrive in the coastal biotope, but most of the traded fruit goes wholesale to juice making for a dismal profit. "I will help develop refined products of these delicious pineapples for people overseas to enjoy," Eriksson says. "I want the women in my village to be the real winners of this award."

Quarter-way around the world from Ghana, in southern Belize, **Nelle Gretzinger** will be working to establish the commercial cultivation of vanilla. She will draw upon her experience of developing a women's clothing business in Brooklyn to come up with vanilla-based products and the means to market them effectively. Vanilla grows wild in the rainforest in Belize but has never been grown there commercially. Gretzinger says, "The fact that it's never been done before is both exhilarating and terrifying: exhilarating because my actions could help to shape a different kind of future for Belizeans and terrifying for exactly the same reason!" Gretzinger's fascination with vanilla arose from a trip she took to Belize in November of 2006. The ancient Maya Indians of Belize utilised vanilla in the drink they called xocoatl, but Gretzinger could not locate any vanilla beans in the town market in Punta Gorda. Serendipitously, she was introduced to Dawn Dean, of Maya Mountain Research Farm, who happened to be cultivating 250 vanilla vines. This project will take time but Nelle is now able to travel to Belize when propitious to bring it to fruition.

The Geoffrey Roberts Trust was established in 1996 to commemorate the life and work of the late Geoffrey Roberts, the UK's pioneer importer of New World wine. The Trust has made awards every year since then to individuals who can convince judges such as Neville Abraham, Jill Dupleix, Sally Clarke, Nicholas Lander, Willie Lebus and Jancis Robinson that their journeys will improve the worlds of food and/or drink.

For more details of the Award and of past winners, see [www.geoffreyrobertsaward.com](http://www.geoffreyrobertsaward.com)