



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

February 15, 2019

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

I went out to the desert again with Jeremy last week. What's that expression about being bitten once and shy? Like when you hang out with someone and end up divorced or in a coma or wandering the streets of Cleveland at dawn without any pants, you're maybe supposed to avoid them in the future? Well, if I lived by that logic, I wouldn't have any friends. "What about your mom?", is probably what you're thinking, "You'd still have her." Well, my mom once helped me and my brother try to crush some rednecks by rolling giant boulders down a mountain onto their trucks. That's how I know the jails in Montana serve chili. They lived – the rednecks, I mean – but it was still a great day out.

Jeremy has been into crystals lately. That was the pretext for this trip to the desert. He said he was exploring his spiritual side. Like all quests for self-knowledge, I knew this would turn out to be a boondoggle. I like whiskey and smooth pieces of asphalt, you can keep cheap jewelry and deep thoughts. I guess that's why we love the desert: it has something for everybody.

"There's a mountain out there with the largest rose quartz formation in the southern Milky Way hidden in the depths of its bowels," Jeremy said. "They say that when the light of dawn hits it, you can see the meaning of life."

"Bowels," I said. "Nice."

"We'd be the first middle-aged white guys to ever lay eyes on it," Jeremy said.

"Uh huh," I said.

I wasn't really listening. I'm always looking for an excuse to do something dumb. It's my tragic flaw. I put on my pants, gassed up the truck, packed firewood, ramen, shotgun, handle of Early Times, and that November issue of the *New Yorker* I've been meaning to get to. I love driving Highway 5 at night. You can get going so fast that, when you close your eyes, it feels like you're flying.

"Enter," Jeremy said, when I knocked on the door of his place in Los Angeles.

Inside, it smelled like incense and people who need a bath. Jeremy was sitting in the middle of the room on some pillows. He pretended to be in a deeply meditative state, so that I had to stand there and wait for him to wake up or whatever before he was ready to address me. Finally, he uncrossed his legs and stood up. He was wearing baggy cotton pants with stripes on them and had the beginning of a pointed beard.

"Welcome to my home," he said.

He gave me a two-handed handshake and a hippy smile, too. Real hippies look great when they smile – all beatific and stoned and filled with gooflove that they're dying to share with you. But Jeremy didn't look like that. He's handsome, in a sort of over-the-hill-late-on-child-support-haven't-slept-since-July kind of way, but he's spent too many years drinking Slivovitz and smoking Pall Malls, selling used furniture and betting on softball games to look benevolent when he smiles. His smile is more of an ouch-it-hurts-when-I-do-this-with-my-face kind of smile.

"You ready?" I said.

"I am prepared for this journey," Jeremy said.

I won't tell you what we stopped and ate on the way out of Los Angeles. Jeremy may talk quinoa, but he eats lard. It made me feel like a garbage can. Do I need to mention the traffic? Isn't that assumed? I have never left Los Angeles without questioning my own sanity for having gone there in the first place.

Finally, humanity and its errors lay behind us. We were in the desert. Our faces relaxed. We ridiculed each other and laughed. If I say that we opened the handle of Early Times and drank from it there, in the truck, roaring across the desert and listening to Father John Misty's album *Honey Bear*, that is in no way intended as an endorsement of this behavior in the private sector.

You don't realize how big California is until you get to the parts of it that nobody gives a crap about. They just go on forever. It was somewhere near dark when we got to the place we were going to spend the night: a blank spot somewhere on Earth. There were some mountains in the distance. I guess they could have had quartz or



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something in them. I hear there are mountains made of asbestos. Who knows? I threw some firewood on the ground and poured gasoline on it and sat down with the *New Yorker* and the *Early Times*.

It was late on in the night when somebody wandered into the light of the fire. Jeremy was playing with the shotgun and telling an old baseball story and nearly blew a hole in him before we realized it was our old friend, Tito. If you knew Tito, you would understand that this event was considerably less surprising in person than it looks on paper.

I met Tito in Tijuana. Or else New Jersey. He's the kind of guy you love and regret knowing. He's short. That's the one constant in his appearance. I couldn't tell you what color his eyes are. He had one of the beards Jeremy was working on, only his was the grown-in version. He was wearing those baggy pants, too, and this natural cotton shirt with the sleeves cut off and his buff little hippy arms sticking out. He looked great.

"The last time I saw you," Jeremy said, "you were living in Bakersfield and riding with the Bandidos. Don't you owe me forty bucks?"

"This is where I currently reside, man," Tito said. "I was sitting on a rock over there, just getting in touch with my various past transgressions, my shortcomings, my gambling debts, letting them soar off into the night on the wings of a dove – coo, coo, coo – when I heard your voices and thought I'd come say 'what's up.'"

"What's up?" Jeremy and I said.

I offered Tito a drink of the whiskey but he declined.

"I've given all that up," he said. "People call me Dave now."

"Totally," I said. "I get it."

It's usually weird to get drunk around people if they're not getting drunk, but in this case, it was completely comfortable. The conversation naturally came around to the mountain full of quartz Jeremy had worked into his initial pitch on the trip. Tito knew where it was, had hung out there and eaten a sandwich only last week, actually.

Let the record reflect that I was in favor of waiting until the next morning before setting out for Rose Mountain, but Jeremy wanted to leave right away. Distance and time are hard to judge in the desert, especially when you're drunk and it's dark. I don't know how long we walked. If you told me it was a few hundred yards, I'd believe you. If it turned out Rose Mountain was in Nevada, I'd say, "Huh, I guess I'm in better shape than I thought." Regardless, there we were.

Many of the mountains of the western desert have folds in them. You've probably noticed this, driving by them on the highway at eighty miles an hour, feeling glad that you don't live there, wondering what it feels like to die of thirst.

Navigating by the light of the moon, Tito led us over to one of the folds in the mountain and walked into it. We followed him. It was dark in there – duh. Tito was in front, Jeremy behind him, me behind Jeremy. I had my hand on Jeremy's shoulder, letting him guide me into the dark. I can't tell you what it looked like in there, but the aroma of my hippy friends was heady, indeed. I'm going to make a confession here: I was kind of starting to not really mind that smell, when I suddenly felt a sharp pain on the back of my head.

What we saw when we woke, was the sunrise. The light of it was refracted, harnessed and conveyed by a giant cone of rose quartz into the dark bowels where Jeremy and I lay. I guess "cave" is the official name of the formation we were in, but it was more like a cathedral – soaring, geometric buttresses of quartz rising all around us to a ceiling hundreds of feet high, a pinhole of sky visible up there. Was it the most beautiful thing I have ever seen? I don't know – I've seen a lot of beautiful things and I don't want to give them short shrift. But, it would probably have been the most beautiful thing *you've* ever seen. Let's go with that.

Also, we had been robbed by Tito. He was gone. We lay there awhile, enjoying the bowels of Rose Mountain, then we dusted ourselves off and went about trying to find our way out of the mountain. When we got back to the campsite, there was nothing left there either. The truck was gone. The *Early Times*. The *New Yorker*.



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Something had eaten the ramen – either Tito or an animal - it was hard to tell. We set out on foot, headed west.

The story of how we nearly died – repeatedly – on the way back to Los Angeles, the feeling of deep ambivalence we felt when we saw the first lights of the city, when we looked upon them and we knew we would have to return to our previous lives, the prison of ourselves – that is another story in and of itself.

Conclusion:

A friend isn't just somebody who drives you home when you've had one too many, or is honest with you about the smell of your breath. Honesty and integrity are nice, but they don't pay the emotional rent. Further, existence is futile, meaning is an illusion, the void looms. What I look for, in a friend, is somebody who helps me court delusion to take my mind off the truth.

Tito, if you're reading this, I want you to know that you're welcome at my fire any time.

This is our last shipment of the **2014 Alexander Valley Estate Cabernet**. In a great vintage like 2014, the winemaker's job is easy. All the Cabernet we harvested that year, from each of our three estate vineyards, was excellent. Thus, blending them was no challenge. My philosophy of blending is: 1 good Cabernet + 1 good Cabernet usually = 1 good Cabernet. If there's a challenge in blending a bunch of good wine together, that challenge is aesthetic and philosophical, not technical. The hard part isn't making good Cabernet, the hard part is figuring out what "good Cabernet" means.

Great Cabernet, to me, is embodied by a wine with a confounding combination of intense tannic structure and delicacy. Tannic Cabernet abounds; Cabernet that is both tannic and graceful is a rare and beautiful thing.

Whether I achieved it or not, that's what I aimed for with the 2014: a Cabernet that exhibits the great tannic structure that only this variety can achieve, while still showing some of the fleeting and lovely aromatics and flavors – violets, fresh plums, blackberries - that might be lost if I focused solely on making the 2014 as dense and dark as possible. This balance is what makes the 2014 a pleasure to drink right now, while simultaneously allowing it to age for years to come. Drink now through 2030.

This shipment also marks the first release of 2015 Cabernet: our **2015 Red Winery Cabernet**. Red Winery Vineyard is a gently sloping vineyard in the foothills of the Mayacamas Mountains, planted by my dad in 1973. The soil there is dense clay and loam, and the wines it produces typically represent the more delicate, spicy, red fruit side of Cabernet. That's true of the 2015, but I also pick up a little more tannin than I would in the average year. It's still tight. Pour in a glass and let it open for fifteen minutes or so and you'll start to smell the layers unfolding: red cherry, cocoa, mint, a touch of baking spice. There's so much tension and excitement here, so much promise. If you're going to drink the 2015 Red Winery now, let it breathe. To see it at its best, let it sit in the cellar for a year.

The **2016 Alexander Valley Merlot** is also in this shipment. This really is an exceptional example of this wine, a departure from what we typically produce of this variety. It's 100% Merlot, sourced from Red Winery Vineyard, the same estate vineyard we have used for every vintage of Hawkes Merlot, a vineyard that typically produces bright and floral examples of this varietal. These descriptors cannot honestly be used for the 2016. The 2016 is dark all the way through: black cherry and plum and bittersweet chocolate. I never say this, but this is a Merlot with the intensity of a Cabernet. We just released it, and I'm already thinking about how sorry I'll be to see it go. Drink now through 2025.

We're letting our **2017 Home Chardonnay** into the world with this shipment. I can honestly say that I think this is a great wine every year, and that I have very little to do with it. It's a wine made by the vineyard. It's from our family ranch on Chalk Hill Road, a place we have been growing Chardonnay for decades, and one of the



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coldest vineyard sites in Alexander Valley. The 2017 is a fairly austere expression of this site's potential; it shows green apple, honeydew and wet slate. The soil here is all round rock and volcanic ash and those minerals come through in the wine; drinking it would be like sucking on pebbles, were it not for the fact that it was aged for six months in neutral barrels and stirred on the lees – a process that had a tempering effect on its otherwise super racy texture.

Ladies and Gentlemen, that's all I got.

Be well and thank you for your support.

- Jake