



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

February 26, 2016

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

Friends -

I met Jeremy the other night in San Francisco for dinner. The name of the restaurant was Cupiditas. Yeah, I think that was it. It's one of those places where the scientific advances of the 21st Century play a major role in the creation of the food. The walls were white, the tables were white, the floor was white, the waiters wore white. So, bright, but I don't think the intention was cheerfulness – not that kind of bright. It was an open kitchen, and as we dined, we watched the kitchen staff, clad in gas masks and HazMat suits, prepare our next course.

“My goodness,” a lady sitting next to us said, “thrilling, absolutely thrilling!”

She wore bird of paradise makeup and a bright orange blazer. Beneath it all, I think she was in her sixties, but she made me feel old. When she looked over and saw the way I was dressed (not well), her nose rippled.

“Sorry,” I said, trying to hide my shoes.

Jeremy seemed in fine form. He gave the impression, even more than usual, of bursting at the seams or of having the personality of a wood chipper or of being a beast that rakes things toward itself with half a dozen arms and consumes them indiscriminately, roaring and flailing about in search of more.

“Blew out a few disks in my back,” he said, “best thing that ever happened to me!”

His girth had increased considerably since I last saw him. He was also badly dressed, but whereas it was clear that the very idea of fashion was beyond me (I am a hick, in other words) it was apparent that Jeremy had made an effort. He wore a vest, for one thing. Beyond that, I can't remember, but I remember that vest. I'm not sure what a good vest looks like. But this one, I felt sure, was not one of them. Paradoxically, I felt it gave our party of two a certain legitimacy we otherwise lacked, a feeling that we belonged in high-flown company. That's what a vest will do for you.

(In retrospect, I think that feeling of security had more to do with the wine we drank than Jeremy's terrible vest. We did drink a lot of wine.)

“Here,” Jeremy said, balancing the menu on his upper belly and pointing, “give us a few of these white ones.”

“Does the gentleman refer to the Santorini di Fiore, 2013?” the waiter said.

“Yeah,” Jeremy said, “that.”

The wine arrived and Jeremy had the waiter open both bottles and set them on the table.

“This one's yours,” he said, pushing a bottle across to me.

We poured the wine and drank. Some squid came. It was on long silver skewers stuck in a piece of moss-covered wood. The squid was way out at the end of the skewers and looked in danger of falling on the floor. The moss was smoldering. The other diners turned to watch the dish arrive. I felt like I was part of a Shinto ceremony, which was nice.

“So,” Jeremy said, putting some of the squid in his mouth, “How's business?”

“Gosh,” I said, “I guess it's good. People keep buying the wine. All we have to do is make it. I feel like I should have to cry and juggle chainsaws to make sales, but that seems unnecessary at this point. It's sort of disorienting.”

“Victory,” Jeremy said.

“Yeah,” I said, “I guess.”

Jeremy had already finished his bottle of wine. He hailed the waiter and told him to bring something French. He pointed it out.

“You're going to love this stuff,” he said, “it's made by a blind guy. It's got braille on the label.”

“Blind winemaking,” I said. “Now that's a hardship.”

“I think it like, makes his sense of smell stronger, you know?”

“Hmm,” I said.



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The wine was good, though. I thought about the guy's life as I drank it, this blind winemaker. What a rough deal. Some other exotic animals arrived, displayed in beautiful, incomprehensible settings. We ate them and drank the wine. I began to feel increasingly comfortable in my surroundings. I smiled at the lady next to me and introduced myself to her as Whitfield (not my name). Her name was Sloan. We laughed together.

"How about you," I said to Jeremy, "how's your business?"

"Oh, man" Jeremy said, sucking his teeth, "you know how we always used to say that rich people don't really do anything? They just sit around and rake in dough and get loaded on great booze and cavort with beautiful women and cruise around in emerald-colored water in their perfectly restored old Chris Crafts?"

"And nice socks," I said, "Every day in nice socks."

Jeremy raised the cuff of his pants and there they were: argyles.

"It's all true!" Jeremy said.

"Victory!" I said.

There was more food, more wine. In my memory, the stuff we ate and drank that night appears in the concentric circles of a Busby Berkeley musical, at the center of which is my mouth. It was all wonderful, but at some point, I started to feel ill. Not physically, but dare I say, spiritually. I felt a sudden poverty of the soul.

"Hey," I said, "remember down in Fort Worth, when we bought that hairspray company for seven hundred and fifty dollars?"

"That was good stuff," Jeremy said, pointing with his fork. "In dry conditions, a top ten hairspray on the market. In its category, of course."

He had buckwheat noodles in his mouth. Little bits scattered as he spoke.

"We ended living in that park by the 35. That was the summer we discovered it was possible to actually turn a profit by drinking Hamm's."

"The first of many financial turnarounds," Jeremy said.

We clinked glasses.

"Remember Boston?" Jeremy said, "When we started the cage fighter promotions company?"

"A cold winter," I said.

"My ribs hurt," Jeremy said.

"Grilled cardboard is surprisingly tasty," I said, "given enough ketchup."

"Denver?" Jeremy said.

"Rodeo clowns earn their money," I said. "No argument."

We were out on the sidewalk now. I felt invigorated by the night air. The meal at Cupitidas had been remarkable, but secretly I was glad it was over.

"Hey," I said, "you want to get another drink?"

"What did you have in mind?"

There was a convenience store on the corner. We bought two giant bottles of malt liquor, broke the seals, and let our feet carry us where they pleased. Soon, the San Francisco fog had drawn its velvet cape over us and we were released from the tethers of time and forgot the precise circumstances of our lives. We sat on a curb somewhere, groaning contentedly and sharing truths.

"Hey," Jeremy said, "I just remembered something."

"Uh oh," I said.

"The winemaker isn't blind. It's his wife. She's blind."

"Oh," I said, relieved. "That's alright. I mean, it's terrible, I guess. A lasting and terrible hardship. For her, I mean."

"Yeah," Jeremy said.



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“It sounds kind of nice, though,” I said. “Doesn’t it sound nice?”

I didn’t expect him to know what I meant. I wasn’t sure I knew myself.

“Yeah,” Jeremy said. “It sounds great.”

In the morning, driving home, alone and dehydrated, I saw the ridiculousness of that idea. I don’t want to be blind. Nobody wants to be blind. That’s ridiculous. But, life is full, I mean *full*, of the ridiculous. That much I understand. The rest of it – good, bad, beauty, ugliness, happiness, despair – these things are harder to keep separate.

Everybody receiving this shipment is getting a 2012 Cabernet or two. Frankly, both are excellent. All credit goes to the dirt and the weather. As usual, I didn’t do much.

In the past, I have almost invariably advised you all to hold onto our Cabernets for years before drinking them. The reasoning behind this was mostly driven by two things: I think of these wines as precious, and I think of them as expensive. Well, I still feel both these things, but I’m trying to change my way of thinking about aging wine, anyway.

2012, 2013, and 2014 are all great vintages. I may like the 2014’s the best, but ask me tomorrow and I may have changed my mind. I’ve been talking about this for about a year now – how great these vintages are. It’s almost become a mantra. And, my initial thinking was that because these three vintages are so great, because they show such great potential to age, they should be held even longer than other vintages with less obvious gifts.

But, the more I think about it, the more I think we ought to just be drinking these wines all the time. Yes, they will age wonderfully, but they’re wonderful now, too. So, drink them now, save some and drink it in three years, save some more and drink it in ten years, and in twenty. My grandfather is ninety-five years old. When I finish writing this, I’m going to visit him. Thus, the phrase “you can’t take it with you,” is very much on my mind. If these (’12, ’13, ’14) are some of the greatest vintages California Cabernet has ever seen (and they are) and we love California Cabernet (and we do) we ought drink as much of them as often as possible (let the devil take tomorrow).

This is the only shipment of the **2012 Stone Cabernet** we will make. It sold out months ago and we saved some for the wine club. It comes from the vineyard on Chalk Hill Road where I grew up. It was first planted in 1972 – one of the earliest plantings of Cabernet in Alexander Valley – and is at the cold end of the spectrum of viable places to grow great Cabernet. For that reason, I think it really shines in warm vintages like 2012. The other notable feature of the Stone Vineyard is the fact that there is literally almost no topsoil there. This, in combination with the cold nights, conspire to make the Stone Vineyard the most tannic of the three single vineyards we make, year in and year out. In 2012, this tannin is overlaid with generous black fruit and crushed bramble. This is an exuberant wine that is exciting to drink now and will age for a few decades.

The other Cabernet in this shipment is our **2012 Alexander Valley Cabernet**. It is a blend of fruit from all three of our estate vineyards – Red Winery, Stone, and Pyramid – and is composed of a few dozen lots of Cabernet harvested throughout the month of October. Each lot is crushed, fermented, and aged separately, then blended, barrel by barrel, to make this wine. The nose is all fresh berries, ripe and lush, and the texture is soft and round on the mid-palate, then slightly closed and dusty on the finish. If you’re going to drink this wine now, decant it ahead of time or just pour in the glasses and let it open there for a quarter of an hour before starting to enjoy it. It should easily survive for a decade or more in the cellar.

New in this shipment is our **2013 Merlot**. It’s what I’m drinking as I write this and, well, it’s frickin’ delicious. It is our eleventh vintage of Merlot and each one has been a single vineyard, 100% varietal from our Red Winery Vineyard, first planted in 1973. The 2013 is just over 14% alcohol, on the high side for this wine, and I find it unusually open and drinkable for being so young. Moreover, there’s very little evidence of oak influence at work; this Merlot is all about the fruit and the fruit is lovely – black cherry, blueberries, violets, baking spices. Drink now through 2026.



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The **2014 Home Chardonnay** comes from our vineyard on Chalk Hill Road, first planted in 1972. It's a fabulous site for Chardonnay, and since we started making this wine in 2005, we have honed a technique to produce Chardonnay that represents the exceptional character of the vineyard, leaving out the things we don't like in most California versions of this varietal. Our Chardonnay is made without any new barrels or malolactic fermentation. Although defined foremost by its freshness - bright, crisp, and fruit-driven - the 2014 carries a bit more heft than past vintages. The aroma is huge and complex, ranging from honey to grapefruit to mango. There's a ton of citrus of all sorts here, especially key lime and tangerine. The finish is tangy and flinty and refreshing.

It's raining again as I write this, promising a beautiful spring. I encourage you, as ever, to come visit us and enjoy this beautiful countryside and beautiful wines. Don't wait.

Thank you for your support. – Jake