



# THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

May 6, 2016

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

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Friends -

I hope none of you have met my cousin Leonard. I doubt you have. He doesn't typically move in the circles of people with enough money to buy wine. He's more of a Mad Dog 20 20 kind of guy, a little Thunderbird, maybe Cold Duck on a special occasion. Cold Duck, incidentally, is not a bad drink if you get it cold enough. But I suppose the same can be said of nearly anything with alcohol in it.

Leonard's a not bad guy. He's from my dad's side of the family. He's the son of my aunt who lives in Vermont. She's on – what is it – her fourth marriage? He's from one of the earlier ones, or maybe not from any of them. I haven't kept track. My aunt's name is Martha. We were in touch with her when I was a kid, back when she consorted with bikers and vegetarians and the like, cruised around the country living in vans. She'd show up and ask for a job picking grapes for her and her companion, whoever that happened to be, work for a few days, then disappear in the middle of the night with all our power tools. My dad was very forgiving about these things.

"She has a good heart," he would tell my mother.

"How can you tell?" my mother would say.

Then Martha got religious. Not some half-baked, clove tea and animal sacrifice type of religion either, but one of your historically established brands like Presbyterian or something. Again, I wasn't keeping careful track of it all. The point is, she became an ordained minister. She came out to California in her new role, driving a much nicer van than usual, and tried to talk sense to my father, a drinker of violent temper and about two decades of post-graduate work under his belt. That was one too many for him. He ran her off the porch in the middle of a nice dinner – her and Leonard and her other six children and the quiet, new skinny husband named Ron. I went down in the driveway and watched them all load into the van, waving at their dust until it settled back down in the driveway and left me there. I missed them already. I miss everybody; that's the way I am.

"Sorry about the scene," my father said to my mother when they were gone.

"Are you kidding me?" my mother said, "it's a load lifted."

We're all Jews and atheists around here, not that there's much difference between the two. That may have been it – religious differences. But it could just as easily have been her hairdo. I gave up years ago trying to discover the true source of my father's outrage. But that's another story. Bottom line: he had had enough.

Then, last week, I'm out in the garden planting tomatoes when in rolls this shabby white Econoline with some strangely familiar beardo at the wheel. It was Leonard, of course. He was thirty years older than the last time I had seen him and was missing half his front teeth, but I knew him even before I got a good look at him. A familiar spirit preceded him, you could say.

We hugged and slapped each other on the back and asked the usual questions:

Married? He had been a few times but after this last go-round had finally come to his senses.

Children? Three – two in Florida and one in Minnesota. "I'm a man of disparate proclivities," he said by way of explanation.

Work? Oh, what hadn't he done? He had been an auctioneer in Wyoming, worked in a box factory in Mexicali. The list went on.

"Well," I said, "you look good," which was an abject lie, of course. He looked so bad it hardly seemed possible he could be alive.

"How about you?" Leonard said. "This your spread?"

"It sure is," I said, "I hit the jackpot. Wait 'til you meet my wife."

"I'm going to have to burn that mattress," my wife said that night, lying in bed next to me after dinner. Leonard had stayed for supper and a place to sleep. I had agreed to take him out in the field with me to work the next day.

"Nonsense," I said, "with today's astonishing arsenal of over-the-counter aerosols, stains and odors are a thing



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of the past.”

“Do you hear me laughing?” my wife said.

“No, dear”, I said.

Leonard was in the kitchen making coffee when I got up in the dark of the next morning. He handed me a cup and we rode out into the dawn in my sort of nice old truck. I felt that tingle of happy electricity that hits me every time I know I’m about to screw up. There is a door in every day, a door beyond which lie acts of great stupidity. I am not without happiness, I am not without my common joys. But I say this now and I’ll say it forever – decency is not enough. A man – if the man is me – hungers for a dose of idiocy, no matter what the cost.

“This is called shoot-thinning,” I said in the vineyard. “See these little clusters that look like grapes? Well, they aren’t grapes, but they will be. They’re buds. The buds open into flowers, the flowers become grapes. Take off all the shoots that don’t have buds on them, leave all the shoots that do. Got it?”

“Got it,” Leonard said.

I watched him go about indiscriminately tearing pieces off a grapevine. It was painful, but I hated to demoralize him with too much instruction.

“Man,” Leonard said after we had been working side by side for a few minutes, “this is the bee’s knees, isn’t it? This is the stuff! Working the land and so on. Tilling the earth and bending it to your will!”

“It is the best,” I said.

“You ever find yourself thinking of gin?” he said after another five minutes. “Sometimes I’m just going about my business and all I do is blink and bam – there is a martini staring at me. Do ever have that?”

“I can see the frost on the glass,” I said.

“And the little chunks of ice, the way they melt on your tongue,” Leonard said.

“Magic,” I said.

The best bar in town is called Hal’s. There’s one window in it and it’s about at the level of your waist, so no direct light touches the room until very late in the day, when even normal people might be enjoying a cocktail. We sat there, our sins dissolving in the haze, Hank Williams Jr. and his cohorts serenading us from the jukebox.

“Farming is hard work,” Leonard said, “but it’s worth it.”

“Amen,” I said, raising my glass.

Sometime in the dark we found ourselves on the street. We set out for home on foot. It’s a long walk – eight miles or so. There may have been a moon in the sky, there may have been stars up there. Who can say? Leonard produced a bottle. We pulled from it and shared truths as we walked along, cars passing us occasionally with the horns blaring. Eventually we stood in the driveway, looking at the lights in the windows of my home.

“We don’t want to go in there,” I said. “My wife will kill us.”

“Ha,” Leonard said, stepping toward the door, “she’s a firecracker alright.”

“No,” I said, grabbing his arm. “Feel my shoulder. You feel that?”

“Why, that don’t feel any different than a head of cauliflower,” Leonard said.

“That’s where she winged me with the four-ten last time I came home this way,” I said. “We’re better off sleeping in the chicken coop and making peace tomorrow.”

“I love a woman who speaks her mind,” Leonard said.

We bedded down with the chickens. It was a mild night, I had changed the straw only the week before, it wasn’t bad.

“I feel like I’ve finally come home,” Leonard said, as I was drifting off, “I owe you one.”

“Anytime,” I think I said.

I woke in the morning when my wife threw a bucket of water on me.

“Satisfied?” she said.



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“Whatever it is,” I said, “I’m sorry.”

I staggered to my feet. I have never had my head cleaved in half with an axe, but I found myself imagining. Leonard’s van was gone. I walked over to it, staggering, holding the mess of my brain in the cup of my skull. I bent and touched the tread marks his tires had left in the gravel. I felt a familiar feeling move through me. I rushed to the tool shed.

“He cleaned us out,” my wife said. “Even the curling iron.”

“He has a good heart,” I said.

Everybody reading this letter has received at least one bottle of our **2012 Pyramid Cabernet** and most of you have received a few bottles of the 2012 Alexander Valley Cabernet. This may be the last time we ship wine from this vintage, and as I have said before, it is one of the best we have ever produced. Defining a great wine may be difficult, but what makes a great vintage is simple – it’s the weather. 2012, 2013, and 2014 were all dry winters, early springs, warm summers, and long, dry falls. We were in the teeth of a drought, a drought that this past winter has done a blessed lot to mitigate. I hope we never see that weather again, but I will miss the wines.

The Pyramid is named for its steep, terraced front hill, but the whole place is rocky and rugged with spectacular views in every direction: Knights Valley to the east, Chalk Hill to the west and south, and Alexander Valley to the north. The steepness and exposure of the vineyard lead the Pyramid Single Vineyard Cabernet to be dark and intense every vintage. The 2012 is nearly black and surprisingly generous for how young it is. After a few minutes in the glass, the nose is bursting with Santa Rosa plum and crushed blackberry. It hits the palate with layers of sweet and savory: black olive, burned beef, plum jam. Amazing freshness, and although very tannic, more drinkable than I would have thought.

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 into glasses and let it open for a quarter of an hour before starting to enjoy it. It should easily survive for a decade or more in the cellar.

Good as these wines are now, there have never been better candidates for the cellar. We still have large formats available of all four Cabs we produce. The three Single Vineyards are \$153 each for members and the Alexander Valley is \$122.40. Let us know and we’ll set a few bottles aside for you.

This will be the last shipment of our **2014 Home Chardonnay**. This wine 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.

Some of you have also received 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, and baking spices. Drink now through 2026.



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A new wine not to be included in this shipment is our **2015 Vin Gris**. We only made about 150 cases of this bone-dry rosé, made from a one-acre block of Tempranillo on our Red Winery Vineyard. It's pale fuchsia, it smells like white flowers, and it costs \$21.25 delivered for wine club members. Free delivery with a six bottle order.

Speaking of our brand new Vin Gris, we'll be pouring it all summer long, including at our four Summer Nights events – **June 17th, July 15th, August 19th, and September 16th**. They'll be music on the patio, a chef in the garden and ice buckets full of wine all over the place. Come on out and we'll buy you a glass of Vin Gris and a plate of delicious food. It's going to be a beautiful summer.

Happy drinking and thank you for your support. – Jake