



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

May 10, 2021

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

My uncle, Brewer, was a rodeo man. But, this story is about his brief foray into the world of fine art.

Brewer wasn't really my uncle, I don't think, he was a cousin of my mother's. Hers is that kind of family – thousands of them and nobody can keep track of exactly how they are related, so they just refer to each other as “uncle” or “cousin” or “dad” on the basis of relative age and familiarity. A good number of these people lived for a time on John Wright's ranch on Chalk Road, in a sort of trailer park down by the creek run by my “cousin”, Leonard, whom I believe I have made reference to in past letters that likewise include the themes of crime and family and waking up on the highway with dawn breaking and no idea where you are. Well, in a brief aside - that place and everything else on the Wright Ranch burned in 2019; those trailers looked like a collection of chili cans in the ashes of last night's fire or, I guess, like you and I will one day: gray and frail and full of holes. I believe Leonard is up in Eastern Idaho now, running a chop shop and preaching for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. “Splitting the odds,” he called it.

But, about Brewer:

So, he was a rodeo man.

“I wasn't a cowboy by birth, but I was by persuasion,” Brewer said. “What drew me in was the hats.”

Indeed, he was from Tennessee or Arkansas or one of those places. Maybe Mississippi. The part of the country where people aren't so much known for wearing cool hats as for having broken down cars. Even he didn't know where he was from.

“Oh, somewhere down there in the sweaty bits. Where was old Hank One from?”

“Mississippi, I think,” I said.

“That's it,” Brewer said, “more than likely.”

It has been a hard lesson for me: some people are just better looking than you are. Not a bit better looking, but far, far, far better looking.

This accident of fate affords them a certain ease in life; gives them the aura of being seen-over by the Divine. If you can imagine what Rock Hudson would have looked like if he were six four and had a tattoo of a Chevy straight-six on his chest and a warrant for his arrest in the states of Connecticut, Oklahoma, and Hawaii, you will have an idea of what Brewer looked like. His voice was like cool water running through the mountains. I was once in a bar with him on Pine Street when we saw a man down the way open his wallet to pay for a drink, revealing a few hundred dollars in cash.

“Say,” Brewer said, leaning toward him, “you mind if I use some of that?”

“Help yourself,” the man said.

Not even the animals at the zoo could resist him.

It's hard to understand why Brewer ever started painting. But, of course, the same thing could be said for his life of crime. Why rob people if you can just ask them for money and they'll give it to you?

“I enjoy it,” is what Brewer said about that. You know me as a winemaker and family man; I wish I could tell you that I can't understand that sentiment. But that wouldn't be true.



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As a painter, his dominant subject was fast food. Hamburgers, chili con carne, the occasional taco. Sometimes these common foods were mashed together with other interests of Brewer's: he might paint, for example, a train made out of corn dogs or a box of French fries that looked like Pamela Anderson. In what I guess you'd call his most well-known work, the epic landscape of the Southwest is being invaded by Martians. The mesas are hamburgers, of course, the cactuses some kind of meat on a stick. I couldn't make sense of the space craft.

"Why, those are vegetables," Brewer said.

This was down at an "opening" for his work at a fancy gallery in North Beach. I hadn't heard anything about his painting until he called to let me know. When I heard his voice, I assumed he was calling to ask me to make bail.

"I know you carouse with pencil necks," Brewer said, "so I figured you was a good person to rope in."

"Art?" I said. "You're making art?"

"Not art," Brewer said, "painting. I ate a bad Salisbury steak up in Wichita and got visions. Woke up and went at it. I got an agent, I guess you call it, little guy in a suit. Herman or Dexter or something. He sets up the shows. We split the take right down the line."

So, I went. Just me, no additional pencil necks. There they were: nice, skinny people in clean clothes, packed into the place, looking at Brewer's painting. Good lighting, the whole nine. I saw him over by that painting of the Southwest I mentioned, explaining the Martian vegetables.

"It's just your classic good guys, bad guys, type of deal," Brewer went on. "The meat is the good guys, the vegetables are the bad guys."

The agent was there. He was, indeed, a little guy in a suit. He introduced himself to me as Wynn Remmington. He looked like more of a Todd, to me, but I didn't argue. I hung around, drank the lousy imported wine, watched Brewer put a spell on people. A very tall lady in a three-piece suit went around, putting little red stickers on the paintings. That meant they were sold. Towards the end of the night, Brewer came over.

"Well," he said, "what do you think?"

"I would like to see you work-in more Chinese food," I said. "I feel the egg roll is underrepresented here."

"Noted," Brewer said. "I'm thinking of putting old Herman there in the car and taking him out and throwing him off the Dumbarton Bridge. You feel like coming along?"

"You mean Wynn?" I said.

"My foot," Brewer said. "Are you in or not?"

"Argh," I said.

Brewer went over and threw his arm around Wynn and walked him outside. His car was parked there. It was a huge old Cadillac, half a block long. It was painted like a calico cat. All three of us got in the front seat and set out, Brewer driving, Wynn sitting between us.

Here is a fact:

You can take the most beautiful night God ever made and make the air sweeter with transgression. I wish I had never discovered that, but I've known it since I was a boy. We bombed down through the city. It was dead and



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we were alive. We felt sorry for ordinary people because they didn't know what we knew, whatever it was. There were things they wouldn't do and, whether they knew it or not, they were burdened by decency, whereas we were free.

Brewer stopped in the middle of the span of the Dumbarton Bridge. For those of you unfamiliar with the Dumbarton, I will tell you that it is somewhere between a causeway and a bridge. Where we were, it was about eighty feet down to the water. The Golden Gate is two hundred and twenty. Still, in the dark of night and in the company of Brewer, the water looked like oblivion.

"Hey, Herman," Brewer said, "come look."

"Look at what?" Wynn said.

I think he had gotten the feeling that something was up. He looked like a wet cat. His feet couldn't decide which way to go.

"Come on," Brewer said, "come take a look at this water."

Wynn went to the rail and looked over.

A strange thing happened, then. I looked at Wynn and he looked at me. Then, as if it were planned, we took hold of Brewer, one on either side of him, and heaved him over the rail. It was easier than you might think. There was a short period of extreme silence, then a splash.

"Vegetables are not the enemy," Wynn said.

We stood there for a few moments, looking down into the water. I thought I heard the sound of swimming, or at least splashing, down there. I couldn't be sure. We got back in the car and drove north. I dropped Wynn and the car in the city and came on up here, into the folds of my homeland. My wife, Laura, was awake, reading, when I got in.

"How's your Uncle Brewer?" she said.

"Me and this little guy named Wynn threw him off a bridge," I said.

"Which one?" she said.

"The Dumbarton," I said.

"Oh," she said, "He'll be fine."

She went back to reading. I lay there, looking at the ceiling. The journey toward the self is a journey that lasts a lifetime and ends in darkness.

"What?" Laura said.

"Nothing," I said. "Good night."



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This shipment includes the release of our **2017 Red Winery Vineyard Cabernet**. My parents bought this ranch in 1972 when it was planted to plums. Over the last seven years or so, we have been replanting it, piece by piece. I was just there this morning, this afternoon, and this evening; it has never looked better: the young vines are beautifully tended and healthy, without being over-vigorous. The 2017 Red Winery includes wine made from some of these young vines, and I think they give it a welcome vibrance and intensity. I get violets and black cherry and nutmeg. A hint of toasted French Oak. A lovely, full-bodied embodiment of this vineyard's character. Surprisingly easy-drinking. Drink now through 2035.

This also marks the final shipment of our **2016 Alexander Valley Estate Cabernet**. This is a one-hundred percent Cabernet Sauvignon, blended from all three of the vineyards we farm. 2016 is a dark, luscious vintage in Cabernet and this wine shows that: purple-hued and laced with dark fruit on the nose and palate, most notably blackberry and plum. It has a brambly, herbaceous character, too - a touch of thyme and sage and violet to balance the dark fruit. In saying goodbye to the 2016, I can't help but look forward to the life it has ahead of it in the cellar. It's not the flashiest or the fleshiest Cabernet we've made, but it is extremely balanced. I think this balance will stand in good stead as it ages; I won't go so far as to recommend aging for twenty years, but I, for one, look forward to tasting it while I yell at my grandchildren.

Some of you are receiving a bottle or two of our **2018 Alexander Valley Estate Merlot**. We have produced every vintage of Merlot we've ever bottled from the same few acres of clay and loam on Red Winery Road since our inaugural vintage in 2002. Our customers and friends in the industry love this wine, and I do, too. It doesn't have the color or tannic intensity of our Cabernet, but it has a grace and elegance they rarely achieve. The 2018 is still young. There's a lot of fresh blueberry and blackberry here, along with the signature baking spice this wine always delivers - star anise, nutmeg, cinnamon. This wine has a long way to go. Drink now at a barbecue, drink in ten years with your best friend.

This shipment also includes our **2019 Home Chardonnay**. This wine always comes from our family ranch on Chalk Hill Road, where, on a given day, it is about 5 degrees cooler than the rest of Alexander Valley. The vines grow in the sand and gravel of an ancient riverbed, and the wine expresses the character of its origins - flinty, saline, decidedly cool-climate. The 2019 is a touch richer than in most years - there's a layer of honey and toasted bread on the nose - but the finish is a flash of silver light - citrus, lemon verbena, a hint of salt. No new oak, all fresh fruit.

In closing, I exhort you to come visit. Our Sonoma tasting room is open inside and out, with expanded seating on the patio. Up in Alexander Valley, we'll be unveiling new garden seating soon and welcoming guests back by reservation starting May 15th. Get here!

Until then, thank you for your support.

-Jake