



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

May 3, 2019

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

You probably already know I'm rich. I can pretty much do what ever I want. The other day, I bought a blueberry muffin – perfectly good muffin – ate half of it, gave the other half to my dog. I went to a matinee last month. Didn't ask anybody, just went. Bam. I can't remember what the movie was about. Is that the point? I hadn't done anything like that in years. I felt like I was turning over a new leaf. "Money is freedom." Who said that? Michael Douglas. I was feeling it.

My wife, Laura, was with me. I elected not to discuss the whole freedom thing with her. Freedom's not really her bag these days. Her dad was a colonel in the Airforce. Not a lieutenant colonel, or whatever, a real one. She used to be a rebel, but now she's more like the old man every day. Time was, we did whatever we wanted – no past, no future, just the bright wide-open now. What happened? Success, I guess you'd call it. We became the people we were destined to be: a moderately successful farmer and his domineering wife.

"How'd you like the movie?" I said to Laura when we came out.

We don't talk much anymore. I guess we're too worried to talk. We worry mostly about money. We worry about our kids sometimes, too. But mostly money. We used to, anyway. Now, like I said, we're rich. We don't worry about anything.

"The main guy was a weenie," she said. "Assassin my ass. I could break him like a twig."

"You could, honey," I said, "you totally could."

That matinee opened the floodgates. I wanted the feeling to go on forever. I paid somebody to trim my dog's toenails. I bought some of my own wine and drank it. Then, when we had some "friends" coming in from out of town, I decided we ought to have a real blowout. I'd never had a blowout before, but I'd heard they're not to be missed.

"Let's eat somewhere ridiculous," I said to Laura, "come on."

"I'm not wearing heels," she said. "Don't ask."

"No, no," I said. "Nothing like that."

The "friends" I'm referring to were Jeremy and his poor wife, Alexandra. Jeremy lives in LA. He's rich now, too. He's always sending me pictures of the mods he does to his Prius: rims, sub-woofers, ground lights, hydraulics.

"You're a frickin idiot," I wrote back when he sent me a video of him bouncing his Prius on Crenshaw.

"Jealous," he wrote.

"Yeah," I said, "your mom is jealous."

But I was jealous.

I remember Jeremy when he was paying \$25 a month to sleep in my friend, Tito's, bathtub. I can't believe he has a nicer car than me. That's the thing about being rich: there's always somebody else richer than you. Worse than that, sometimes that person is Jeremy.

The fancy restaurant was called Poseidon. It's in San Francisco and faces out on the bay. When we arrived, the front of the building was lit up blue, and Hall and Oates was playing through outdoor speakers. The blue light was meant to be evocative of water – duh. I'm not sure what the Hall and Oates was about.



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

Anyway, when we walked in, the lobby, or whatever you call it, was so dark it was hard to see. After my eyes adjusted, I saw that Jeremy and Alexandra were already there. Alexandra is such a nice person: intelligent, good-natured. I don't know what the hell she's doing with Jeremy. I've asked her but she just laughs. Jeremy was wearing an undershirt and a leather vest.

"What's up, player?" he said.

"Can it, moron," my wife said.

The concierge lead us through a dim hallway that led into a dining room surrounded on all sides by a gigantic domed fish tank. I'm not a fisherman, so I can't tell you what kinds of fish they were, but there were yellow and blue and black ones, big and little, smart and stupid-looking fish, skinny, mean-looking fish and corpulent, self-satisfied fish that looked like they would be at home in a leather-backed armchair, smoking a cigar and watching the news. I guess it would be an exaggeration to say that every species of fish on earth was represented, but I feel safe saying most of them were there.

"My name is Christopher," our waiter said, after we had been seated. "Is this your first time dining with us?"

He was wearing a wetsuit and had a scar across his eye – one of those scars that makes you think ouch, close one. He was very handsome, too. Laura was looking at him. Poor taste, I thought, to have waiters with big muscles, especially if they're going to wear wetsuits.

"Yeah," Jeremy said, "but we do stuff like this all the time."

"Very good," Christopher said. "You'll see a selection of entrées on the menu, each of them featuring one of the beautiful sea creatures currently living in our one-of-a-kind Poseidon megatank."

He passed his arm through the air, indicating the tank all around us.

"I'll have the octopus with a side of roasted potatoes," my wife said. "That guy, there."

She pointed with her fork.

"We pick the fish out and you have it killed for us?" I said.

"As your waiter, I'll be spearing your chosen specimen myself," Christopher said.

"Bomb," Jeremy said.

He held out his fist and Christopher pounded it.

"May I please have some whiskey?" I said.

"Yeah," Jeremy said. "Something Japanese or old. Baller whiskey."

I love eating animals, but there was something about sitting there with a napkin in my lap and watching a guy run them through with a spear that makes me queasy. But, I did it. That's the thing about being rich, it occurred to me: maybe you want to take your shoes off and go running through the grass and eat popcorn for breakfast, but you're not allowed to anymore. Hmm, I thought, hmm indeed.

I had the grouper. It was the ugliest fish I could think of. I still felt guilty. I looked him in the eye, right before the waiter got him. He knew I was responsible. I could tell by the look he gave me. Twenty minutes later, there he was, battered and fried, crunching in my mouth. He was right not to trust me. There the waiter was, too.



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

His hair was dripping. He was smiling and I noticed how white his teeth were. I disliked him more and more.

“Great choice on the restaurant, killer,” Jeremy said when we had gotten outside.

“Yeah,” I said, “a night to remember.”

Laura and I stood there and watched them walk away. They were holding hands. I wondered where they were going and, for the simple reason that they seemed so happy, I envied the night before them without even knowing what it held. Jeremy and I once spent three days and nights in a Chinatown bar drinking plum wine and playing Pai Gow. I doubted that was on the menu this evening but, still, there was the sense, looking after them, that anything could happen. Some people are just better at being rich than others, I guess.

Later, when Laura was driving us over the Golden Gate Bridge, leaving the world of intelligent, sophisticated people in the lights behind us, returning to the backwater of my home, I said to my wife, “Did you really like that place?”

I wouldn’t usually address such a direct question to her, but I had drunk quite a few of those baller whiskeys and was feeling inspired to honesty. She was smoking a Swisher Sweet, tapping the ash on the floorboard.

“I ever tell you about when my dad was stationed in Liverpool?” she said. “Worst time of my life. They had a product you could buy on the base there called fish squares. They were made out of the stuff they swept off the floor at the processing plant.”

“That sounds terrible,” I said.

“They were delicious,” my wife said, “I just hate the Beatles.”

“I hear you,” I said.

For the record: I don’t hate the Beatles. I just didn’t want to break the mood.

“You remember when we used to live in the van?” I said.

It’s true. Twenty years ago, when my wife and I first met, we used to live in an Econoline. “Tonight’s the Night,” by Neil Young, was our favorite song. We ate cold hotdogs out of the package and drank Hamms. The sky was always full of stars. I mean, I’m sure it wasn’t, but that’s the way I remember it.

“Yeah,” she said.

“I miss that,” I said.

She didn’t respond. I just looked at her, watched her smoke. She’s mean, my wife, but I love her.

We crossed the county line into Sonoma and came over a hill. There were the vast fields of home, made silver by the moonlight.

“Hey,” I said, “you want to run around in that grass?”

Laura didn’t look at me or speak, but she pulled the car to the side of the road, just north of Petaluma. You might know the place – where the hills and valleys are covered in living carpet and go on forever. We took off our shoes and ran across those fields together. We ran on and on. We ran forever.

Then we got back in the car and drove home and paid the babysitter and checked on our kids and brushed our teeth and got in bed and listened to our various appliances buzz. We were still ourselves. But we felt better.



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

Suddenly it's Chardonnay weather: it went from being cold and rainy here in Alexander Valley to being 95 degrees overnight. The good news? Many of you just received a bottle or two of our **2017 Home Chardonnay**. As usual, the Home Chardonnay comes from the vineyard on Chalk Hill Road that my parents and I have been farming since 1972. It's one of the coldest sites in Alexander Valley and our Chardonnay reflects that fact. It's a lean, racy, ultra-bright expression of the varietal, showing flavors ranging from green apple to honeydew to wet slate. I love the way it's aging in the bottle, too. At its current age, the brightness of the 2017 is unalaid with a round and welcoming texture that has taken time to develop. It's at once mouth-filling and light, tropical and citrus-laden.

Some of you have also received some of our **2016 Alexander Valley Merlot**. Our Merlot is always sourced from the same small block on our Red Winery Vineyard in the foothills of the Mayacamas Mountains, planted by my dad in 1973. It's a vineyard that typically makes a bright, floral style of Merlot, but the 2016 is dark all the way through- black cherry, plum, and bittersweet chocolate. It's aged predominately in neutral barrels which lets the fruit shine all the way from the aroma to the flavor to the finish. Drink now through 2025.

This marks the first shipment of our **2015 Alexander Valley Estate Cabernet**. What a thrilling and dynamic wine this is. It's a blend of fruit from all three of our estate vineyards – Pyramid, Stone, and Red Winery – with Pyramid playing the largest role, accounting for about 55% of the blend. The reasons for this are few and obvious: first of all, we are in the process of replanting much of both Stone and Red Winery. That means there are fewer producing vines in both those vineyards and, thus, less fruit to draw from for either the Single Vineyard bottling or the Alexander Valley Estate. Second, even when all three vineyards were in full production, Pyramid produced more fabulous wine than either of the other two. That's not to say that every bit of Pyramid makes better Cabernet than every bit of Red Winery or Stone. In any given year, the best Cabernet from Stone and Red Winery is just as good as the best Cabernet from Pyramid. The thing about Pyramid is that nearly every lot of Cabernet we make from it every year is excellent.

So, with that in mind, the blend for the 2015 Alexander Valley is about 55% Pyramid, 30% Red Winery, and 15% Stone.

The defining character of the 2015 is its incredible freshness. The fruit is right out front: aromas of blackberry, current, and black cherry. But there are other less-obvious, more nuanced aromatics all around the edges, most notably crushed bramble. This slightly herbaceous character gives the wine dimension and liveliness that make it much, much more fascinating than it would be if it were simply a bunch of delicious, ripe, fruit. These tertiary aromatics will only grow as the 2015 ages. In ten years, they will give it the kind of broad spectrum of aromatics and flavors that only aged Cabernet Sauvignon can achieve. For now, the color has a vibrance – a slightly electric hue of magenta – that matches the dynamic freshness of the aroma and palate. Drink now through 2030.

Speaking of scarcity, this will be the only shipment of our **2015 Stone Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon**. This is by far the most difficult of the three vineyards we farm and, largely as a consequence of my difficulties with it, I



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

think I have learned more about it and made more improvements to the wines from Stone than either of our other two vineyards. It's set at the southern edge of Alexander Valley where nights down in the hollows and swales get very cold and afternoons on the hills are hot. The soil is a fascinating, frustrating mashup, too – volcanic ash with streaks of gravel and clay, all laced with many, many large, round fieldstones. There are about 43 acres of vines here with a dozen subtle changes in soil type and climate across them.

In general, wines from Stone tend to be very tannic. It's my view that, in the early days of making wine from this vineyard, we sometimes picked the grapes a bit too soon and the resulting wines were tightly wound and tannic to the point of inaccessibility. Some of them, like the 2005, aged beautifully, but I don't think it's practical to produce Cabernet that takes ten years to reach a state of comfortable drinkability.

These days, I've learned to wait until I'm sure the grapes are ripe before we pick them. That doesn't mean I'm looking for raisins. I don't like the flavor of cooked or stewed fruit in Cabernet, but I love blackberries and cherries and fresh plums.

Those flavors of ripe, black fruit are front and center in the 2015 Stone. It still comes across as young for its age – the nose is a little closed at first and the finish shows that signature dusty tannin I always find in Cabernet from this vineyard. After a few minutes in the glass, crushed blackberries and coffee and baking spices start to emerge. The palate is sweet and tangy; for all the dark fruit here, there's plenty of acid. Plenty of tannin, too. Plenty. Drink for the holidays this year and save some for Christmas 2040.

In closing, I exhort you once again to come visit us. We have an exciting season of events on the books – from vineyard hikes to vineyard lunches to prime steak tastings. Alexander Valley remains the kind of place that is so beautiful, those of us who live here feel compelled to share it with our friends. When you get here, you'll know why.

In the meantime, thank you for your support.

-Jake