



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

September 2, 2016

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

Friends - Today's my birthday. It woke me up last night – the creep of old age, the unrelenting search for meaning, my inability to get anything right. I've been this way since I was a boy. The world as it is has never been enough. Back then, on the ranch on Chalk Hill Road, I used to climb out the window and wander the fields and the creek and the big woods behind the house. There were all sorts of animals in those woods – bears and deer and pigs. There was a little town of rabbits up by the old lake, and in the high Doug Fir trees, a complex of turkey penthouses made of twigs and whatnot.

Hard as it is to believe, we didn't have television to keep our minds off things, me and the bears. No, it was mostly card games and conversation, low-proof cocktails and the occasional cigar. Animals are mostly a clean living people, in spite of their intrepid nudity. The turkeys were morons, of course, and very irritating – talking louder than anybody else in the forest, crapping down on the rest of us like a rainstorm, bragging about the view from up there – but everybody got along just fine, in spite of it. We didn't get into the big stuff, either – we just passed the bottle and passed the cards, let it all fall away. We knew that the earth's rotation was slowly grinding to a halt, but for some reason, it didn't matter.

At the end of the night, when I felt the sky begin to go light before I could actually see it through the trees, when I had to say goodnight to the animals and go down and climb into bed and pretend to sleep, I was sleepless, but I was made clean in mind and spirit, ready to meet another day, much as though I had actually spent the night sleeping instead of playing cards with bears and drinking amaro (a children's beverage from Italy).

As an aside: my favorite evenings were those on which the beavers came up from the creek and sat in. The way they walk cracks me up to begin with, but they were also very serious about cards and yet very bad at playing – a combination that is a hit at any poker table. "Impossible!" this one guy, Mick, would say every time people flopped their hands and he came up short. It really takes your mind off your own troubles to have a card-playing beaver around.

These days, I'm sort of a man. I'm a long way from the forest of my youth, you might say. I have taken on important things, like grape juice, to keep me up at night. I can't go around playing cards with bears or while away the nights trying to take money off some beaver. Forget bears. You'd be lucky to find one these days, and even if you do, you can't even drive to up Klamath Glenn for a few nights, coming home with only one of your front teeth missing and maybe a few scrapes along the side of the truck without your wife calling you things like a "degenerate gambler" or "the worst thing that has ever happened to North America." Nope. It's a brave new world. You've got to keep it between the lines. You've got to find civilized ways to stave off the void.

Still, a restless mind will not be quieted by sleep. I've got to move, see. But I can't even start the car, or my wife will be on me before I leave the driveway, barring the way in her vintage kimono, pointing the four-ten at me like she doesn't even care about the windshield; she means it this time. I don't blame her. I should just anesthetize myself by drinking vodka soda and electronically communicating with strangers, but I'm old fashioned, I guess. Like every other adult, I have spent the first half of my life unraveling the world of my youth and will likely spend the second half putting it back together again.

They aren't the woods of my childhood, but I am lucky enough to live within wandering distance of the mountains behind my house, where, in spite of my attempts to reform, any given night will find me on foot in various stages of insomnia and undress. My friend, Wayne, a mustachioed biker with illiterate tattoos, a saint, a hangover from primordial times, keeps a little trailer up there where I'm always welcome. Wayne works in heavy equipment for a guy named Sankey. He never, as far as I can tell, eats or bathes or changes his clothes or goes to town. Self-contained, you could call him.

Sankey pretty much owns everything up there that the government doesn't own. I don't know how a thing like that happens. He wanted it, so he bought it, I guess. He has Wayne chopping the mountain into little pieces and building another mountain out of it – an eccentric billionaire in the pursuit of some grand design only he can



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

see. It's more of an apocalypse than a Garden of Eden, but it suits me pretty well. We sit out front of the trailer, just a little tin box perched out on the rim, where the stars look as close as the earth. We don't play cards much, but there's plenty to drink, as long as I bring it, and although Wayne is not much for words, we have the occasional exchange wrought with subtext:

"Wayne," I might say, "how old are you getting to be?"

"Hell if I know," Wayne will say.

"Who you voting for for president?"

"Of what?"

"What about Sankey?" I once said, edging toward conversation of an inappropriately personal nature, "I mean, what's his story? Why does he want you to move the mountain around so much? Why not just leave it where it is?"

"I never asked him," Wayne said.

"Well, geez," I said, "just this once, take a guess for me. Just guess, OK Wayne? Guess!"

"Are you shoutin at me?" Wayne said.

He turned to look at me, now. I realized I had never met his eyes before. They were like lanterns lit by eternity. It wasn't pleasant.

"Sorry," I said, sitting down. "Sorry for the outburst, buddy."

"Mmm," Wayne said.

We sat there in silence for a few minutes, passing the bottle and taking in the stars.

"Ambition," he said.

"What?" I said.

"That's what I think Sankey's got."

"Mmm," I said. "What a curse, huh?"

"Mmm," Wayne said.

That was all.

If synthesis is called for, maybe this is it: It's like I said about those moronic turkeys – they can't help it and neither can I. I'm a restless bastard. It's my nature, but it's a pain in the ass.

Almost everybody suffering through this letter has just received, as their reward, a couple bottles of our **2012 Alexander Valley Cabernet** (among other things). This is a one-hundred-percent Cabernet Sauvignon, a blend of fruit from all three of our vineyards. 2012 was the first of three historically wonderful vintages for California Cabernet, vintages that coincide with a statewide drought. The wines reflect the times: the crops were modest, the berries small and the fruit incredibly concentrated. Our 2012 Alexander Valley started its life a bit tannic and remote, but four years on, some of those rough edges are wearing off and the black cherry in this wine is shining through. Decant it and drink it now with a steak or put it in the cellar for ten years. You can't lose: '12, '13, and '14 are the vintages I'll be drinking in retirement.

This shipment also marks our first release of a 2013 Cabernet – the **2013 Red Winery**. I use exclamation points sparingly, but: these are the glory days, people! God, I love this wine. It reminds me quite a bit of the first single vineyard cabernet we ever bottled – the 2003 from the same vineyard. The 2013 has all the finesse, all the chocolate-cherry, all the clove and allspice of the 2003, only with greater power and more concentrated fruit. Whereas I think the 2003 took years to shine (it was a subtle beast), the 2013 is a great pleasure right now. What's my cellaring advice? A tough one. This wine will only improve for five years and will last for another ten after that, but it doesn't need to wait that long. Again, as with the 2012 Estate, if you drink it before 2025, I can't see you being disappointed.



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

The only bad news about the 2013 Red Winery Cabernet is that this will be the only shipment of it that we make.

There's another single vineyard wine in this shipment from Red Winery – our **2013 Alexander Valley Merlot**. My dad and mom first planted this vineyard in 1973, putting in fifteen acres of Cabernet and five acres of Merlot. In subsequent years, a little more than half that Merlot has been torn out and planted to other things (like the Tempranillo for our Vin Gris). The two-acre vineyard that remains has been the soul source of Hawkes Merlot since its first vintage in 2002. We grow Merlot elsewhere and we've tried making wine from it, but I don't think it's ever compared to what comes off Red Winery. 2013 is probably the darkest and most intense this wine has ever been – it still shows the same high-tone fruit and baking spice that have always characterized it, but the fruit is as dark and tannic as most years of Cabernet. Cellar this wine – it's good now but it will really blow your hair back in 2020.

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, from key lime to tangerine. The finish is tangy and flinty and refreshing.

It is, as usual, a wonderful time of year to be here. Our last Summer Nights event of the year is Friday, September 16th. I'll be there, likely covered with grape juice. Come out and let us buy you a glass of wine.

Thank you for your support. – Jake