



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

November 14th, 2014

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

Friends-

I got this boat at the dump. It's crab season. Commercial doesn't open for a few weeks but sport has been going since last Saturday. When I was a boy we used to harpoon them but there's been a drastic reduction in the big fellas. You've got to go out early to get the good ones. You've got to show initiative. You've got to think like our Paleolithic ancestors, who roamed this land in buckskin underwear and carried fire in their hands. You've got to think hungry.

We scheduled seats on a charter and Jeremy came up for the weekend. We went out drinking, of course. It was terrible. There used to be bars in this town, real bars, places where people got pregnant and lost teeth. Now those have all moved or changed hands and when you go out for a drink you feel like you've wandered into a nightmare where you are forced to consume Wild Turkey in an office building, surrounded by the people you went to high school with who have all lost their sense of humor and started wearing plaid. Then, like waking up, it occurs to you that these people always wore plaid and never had a sense of humor; this is not a nightmare, it's Healdsburg.

"Did you know that people used to just stick their hands in the water and let crabs grab them?" Jeremy said, sipping Chartreuse.

"Absolutely," I said. "Fingers were lost. These were the lengths to which ancient bipeds went for supper."

"These were the lengths, man."

"Life was better then," I said, "more painful, but better. Are you with me?"

"Whoopee cushions used to be made from the bladders of goats."

"What we need is a little danger. There's no salt like the risk of life and limb. Are you with me?"

"I'm with you."

We drank our beers and listened to the jukebox.

"Is that true about the goat bladders?" I said.

"It's written," Jeremy said, "I read it."

"Where?" I said.

"I better take my exit," Jeremy said, "these lights are making my epilepsy flare up."

We went out and sat in my truck and rolled down the windows.

"Should I feel comfortable barfing in here?" Jeremy said.

We got out of my truck. At some point, we set out walking toward home.

There was a glow, a sort of pale green halo that bleeds from the edges of any modern town, and soon we had passed beyond it and were out in the real darkness, into what was called Oak Savanna. I have read (or at least heard from some hippy) that before Europeans, this was one of the most inhabited areas west of the Mississippi. For eight thousand years, small, peaceful people hung out around here, fishing and smoking pipes. We walked on the remains of their civilization; the broken pieces of their stone tools were the gravel beneath our feet.

We reached Alexander Valley Road and turned up the hill to the refuse transfer station. Conversationally speaking, I'm not sure what pointed us there, perhaps it was merely my subconscious leading me to take comfort in garbage. The past was certainly on my mind, and it cannot be denied that dumps, not books, contain our true histories. We came to a gate and climbed it. We paused to weigh ourselves on the scale and call each other fat. We found the recycling section, and took out a few of the bikes and rode them around yelling. We found the huge stockpile of discarded toilets and assumed predictable postures to make predictable jokes. Then we saw the boat.

What is a schooner? What is a junk? This thing was about forty feet long and had a high sweeping bow that



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towered black against the stars. The hull was wooden. The planks had once been painted white or maybe pale yellow but now most of that paint had fallen off to reveal raw wood, bulging here and there with mushrooms and strips of grass growing in the seams.

“She feels sound,” Jeremy said, circumnavigating the hull, slapping it with an open hand. “Could use a little guar gum in the leeward huskaw, but I think we can make it through the rest of the season as-is.”

“Season?” I said.

“Here,” he said, “put your shoulder to the stern and give a heave.”

I followed him around the back of the boat and leaned into its moldiness. It sat on a surprisingly modern trailer, complete with inflated tires. It moved rather easily and soon we had it rolling, out of the recycling yard and across the scale. We stopped near the top of the hill that is the dump. The view was spectacular; I have loved it since I was a boy. By modern logic, there should be a hotel there instead of three billion pounds of trash, but when we first came here in our pickup trucks and began kicking things off the tailgate, there were no hotels. This wasn't a beautiful view; it was just the way things were.

The valley spread before us, illuminated in the pale crystalline light of the cosmos. A few hundred feet below, the silver surface of the river winked at us through the trees. I was lost in thought when I realized the boat had begun to roll again. I was jogging to keep up. Demonstrating good agility for a big man, Jeremy jumped on the trailer's fender and pulled himself onto the deck.

“All aboard!” he shouted, hanging from the stern and stretching out his arm to help me up.

By the time I gained the foredeck we were shooting down the hill with the wind in our beards and the leaf springs of the trailer singing. We smashed through the gate and dragged it sparking in our wake. I'm sure I was screaming, but who can say? We crossed the road in a cartoon blur. By then, I had left my body and was watching my impending death from a comfortable distance. The trailer went down an embankment and stopped suddenly on a tree stump, throwing the boat with us on it forward and into the water of the river. I bumped my head on the molding of the little pilot house and was out.

I woke to us floating on a stretch of river where the water was wide and flat. The distant banks were lined with gray willow trees that grew from swaths of large round stones. Jeremy sat with his feet dangling over the gunwale, smoking a pipe. The cuffs of his pants were turned up in the manner of Huckleberry Finn. He was working willow canes with his hands. A number of large basket-like things lay about him on the deck.

“Where are we?” I said.

“About two miles from the mouth,” he said. “I've got the crab pots about ready here, but I'm going to need you to make some rope out of those shore reeds I gathered.”

He motioned to a pile of what looked like grass.

“Whu?” I said. “Whu?”

My face was covered with a crust that cracked and pulled on my cheeks when I spoke.

“Are you with me?” Jeremy said.

We came around a bend in the river and there was the mouth – half a mile wide and letting out into the surf of the Pacific Ocean. Spires of rock that had once lived miles out beneath the surface and had risen from it on waves of subterranean magma like the Titans of Atlantis (or some other Titans) hulking in the bleached moonlight, white water streaming from their flanks. The sound of the waves was horrifying and magnificent.

Jeremy stood over me with his hand on my shoulder.

“Are you with me?” he said.

“Yes,” I said, “All the way.”

Most everyone reading this letter will receive a couple bottles of our **2010 Alexander Valley Cabernet**. It



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is the last shipment we will make of this wine; in the spring, it will be replaced by the 2011, another one-hundred-percent Cabernet Sauvignon, but a very different wine, all the same. We have already begun pouring a few other 2011 reds, and much of the commentary about them revolves around their “brightness.” “Bright” is an expression I use quite a lot to describe wine, and what I mean by it is a combination of high acid and a relatively delicate texture – characteristics that are thought to be more common to Pinot Noir than Cabernet. The 2010 Alexander Valley, on the other hand, is much darker, riper, and heavier than the 2011. A little over half the fruit for the 2010 came from our Pyramid Vineyard (a site that always produces heavy, intense wine). The dominance of this site in the blend, combined with a warm, fairly wet vintage make the prominent flavors and aromas in this wine dark: plums, blackberries, chocolate, a little smokiness. The 2010 is drinking very well now, but I think it will continue to evolve and develop for another five years and hold for another five after that.

A new release in this shipment is the **2011 Red Winery Cabernet Sauvignon**. I love this wine, and I can already see the day when it is gone and I’ll wish we had more of it. It is one hundred percent Cabernet from the top of the hill on a ranch in the foothills of the Mayacamas Mountains that my family has been farming since 1973. It was the source of our first single vineyard designate, a 2003 Cabernet that was very supple and easy-drinking when it was first released and, eleven years later, remains stunning. The nose of the 2011 shows baking spice, dry rose petals, and mint, while the palate opens out amazingly to a mixture of black cherries, toffee, and chocolate. The finish is already long and smooth but, just at the tail-end, shows a nice dusty, tannic lift that is particular to Cabernet with good cellar potential. Drink now through 2020.

The **2011 Alexander Valley Merlot**, another one of the bright 2011’s I referenced earlier, has been very well received in the tasting room, a fact that surprises me a bit. I really liked our 2010 Merlot, a classic of the vintage – dark, ripe, and fruit-forward – and although I like the 2011 very much as well, I find it to be pretty different. Both are one-hundred-percent Merlot from our Red Winery Vineyard, but where the 2010 is characterized by dark fruit flavors and aromas, the 2011 is lifted and floral and full of red cherry, from the aroma to the tangy, high-tone finish. This wine is still fairly tart in my estimation, and I think it needs another few years to show at its best and will continue to age and show well for another ten years after that.

Some lucky few of you are also receiving a few bottles of our **2013 Home Chardonnay**. This is a single vineyard Chardonnay from the ranch on Chalk Hill Road where I grew up. The vineyard lies at the very southern edge of Alexander Valley where it joins the considerably cooler Russian River Valley, and our Chardonnay always reflects that borderline climate – citrus and an almost grassy character from the cooling fog off the river, balanced by riper, tropical notes of mango and lychee from the warmth of Alexander Valley. Underlying all of this is the signature minerality of this vineyard, something like sucking on a piece of slate. It sounds odd, I know, but somehow it works.

I only have a few more things to mention before I signoff:

First, we have started what we call a holiday Magnum club, where members sign-up to automatically receive a 1.5 liter bottle of wine from our library to enjoy over the holiday season. This year’s selection is the **2006 Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon**. This is a huge, lush wine drinking in the prime of its life. It will sell out quickly. Please let us know if you’d like to be added to the list.

Second, I’d like to warn all of you that we will be sending a series of emails this year, that we are calling our 12 Days of Christmas Gift Offerings. Beginning in early December, we will send a new email each day with a new gift offering in it. The gifts will range from rare and large format wines, to Hawkes Farm products like olive oil and honey, and shipping is free on every gift for Wine Club Members.

Lastly, the Giants won the World Series with a team of re-treads and teenagers, so I guess anything can happen, including rain. Here’s hoping.

Thank you for your support. - Jake