



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

November 16, 2020

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

I was out fishing the other day. This was with my niece, Geraldine, and my old friend, Chris Monk. We all just call him Monk, of course. Monk is one of those guys who was born in a snowstorm – I mean outside, in the snow - and has never really warmed up since. He bought a piece of property in the woods of Maine when he was a teenager, cleared it and built a house. He bow hunts elk in Show Low Arizona every year, lost his best friend in a mine collapse. If you stub your toe around Monk, even if it really hurts, it's probably better not to say anything.

Geraldine's got purple hair and stuff in her face. Rings, I guess you call those. She's not really my niece. She's my cousin, Zeb's kid. Yes, Zeb. Short for Zebulon.

"Do me a favor and check on Geraldine," Zeb said. "She's in trouble."

"What kind of trouble?" I said.

"Her life's not headed in the right direction," Zeb said.

"I can take her fishing," I said. "Will that work?"

"Perfect," Zeb said.

He's an astronaut, Zeb. I don't know if you've spent a lot of time around astronauts. As a group, I'd describe them as overbearing. It's hard to feel like much of a success, hanging around with astronauts.

What'd you do today?

I don't know, made a little Ramen. Re-watched Big Trouble in Little China. What'd you do?

Me? Oh, I went to the moon.

So, I guess this was a reaction thing – the purple hair and whatnot. The foul language. The drugs. I assumed the drugs part. The foul language too. Me and Geraldine don't stay in touch. She lived in a trailer, it turned out. It was actually quite tidy, from what I could see. House plants and such. A banjo. I don't know, maybe there is no longer a correlation between hair color and drug use. In my day, you knew who you were dealing with.

We hit the coast, drove down to Bodega, drank coffee from a thermos, peppered each other with disingenuous questions, parked, got on a boat in the dark. Monk was already aboard, fine tuning the rigging and what have you. He looked like one of those plastic sea captains you see on the roof of fish and chips places; not so much a human being as a rendering of one that may or may not have existed in the distant past. You can't tell guys like that they look adorable. It's not the look they're going for.

We were fishing for albacore. Eaten raw, it is the best food on earth. Look it up. Monk was excited about it. Not the fish, but the fishing. That's the basis of our relationship: Monk likes to catch fish and I like to eat them.

"You got to go way offshore for these sons of bitches," Monk said. "And, when you get into them, you got to slay them without mercy. Flood the deck in blood. There are barely any left. Who knows when you'll get another chance. Danish?"

We had motored out through the channel and hit the open ocean. It was still not even the morning, really, but the end of the night before. I don't know where Monk gets his danishes. They come in Styrofoam packages covered in cellophane and he is never without them. He held them out to us – me and Geraldine – then took one himself, lit a cigarette, and took a bite of it.



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“Beautiful sea today,” he said, “So, what, are you a lesbian?”

“Are you speaking to me?” Geraldine said.

“No,” Monk said. “I’m talking to the man upstairs. Yeah, I’m talking to you.”

“I dunno,” Geraldine said. “I guess I’m gender fluid.”

I admired her composure. I can’t tell people about myself. With good reason: if you knew me, you’d hate me.

“I remember being your age,” Monk said. “I was pretty full of gender fluid, myself. Take the wheel. I gotta hit the head.”

Geraldine took the wheel before I could get there. That was alright. Responsibility doesn’t really appeal to me. I looked back, out the rear door of the little cabin. Monk was peeing over the side of the boat, smoking a cigarette. I guess he’d finished the danish. Then, while I was looking at him, he went over the side.

“Holy magoly,” I said.

“What?” Geraldine said.

“You’re doing a great job,” I said. “Hold the course or whatever.”

I went back and looked around. I hallucinate sometimes. Not a lot, but enough that it was worth taking into consideration in these circumstances. But, no, Monk was gone. I held on to the little rope railing and looked into the continuously evolving wake that stretched out behind us into the night/morning.

“Chris?” I said.

Then I went back inside to tell Geraldine. She looked good behind the wheel. Comfortable. In command. It’s funny, about the young. Yes, they are mostly useless and incompetent, but sometimes they rise to the occasion.

“We lost the captain,” I said.

“What?” she said.

I told her again.

“He didn’t look like much of a swimmer,” she said.

It was quiet. What was there to do? We both looked out the back door. The sky was beginning to get light in the east. We sat there, the motor idling low, the water lapping at the hull. Soon, there the sea was: not only beautiful, but limitless in a way that can compare to nothing but the sky. There was no land, no point of reference, nothing by which to navigate.

“Are we going to die?” I said.

“What is that?” Geraldine said.

“What?” I said.

She pointed. Up ahead, at the place where the water and the air met, there was something I find it difficult to describe. It could have been rocks – the merciless rocks of fate, for example, on which the hopes of fools are dashed– or it could have been the bosom of my wife – a sight that, though familiar, never fails to give me joy.

Geraldine thrust the throttle forward. I stumbled and grabbed the cabin to steady myself. Then I stood back and watched it come toward me: the future.



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This shipment marks the maiden voyage of 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.

These wines are the stories of the vineyards they come from. Nowhere is that more clear than in our **2018 Alexander Valley Merlot**. We have been making this wine from the same few acres on our Red Winery Road Vineyard since its first vintage, in 2002. And, all those years, I have been trying without success to explain why it's so good. It could be that this site is an exceptionally good place to grow Merlot: the soils are tight and clay-laden, reminiscent of those you'll find in Pomerol. I think that's part of it. But, part of it must have to do with the way we make it. Put simply, we get out of the way. We don't age the wine in a heavy percentage of new oak barrels, we don't fine it, we don't blend it with anything. It is Merlot, unadorned, from one little place on earth.

I wrote in my last letter that the 2018 Merlot seemed young. I still find that to be the case, but it's opened up noticeably in the past few months. There's a lot of blueberry starting to emerge. Blackberry, too. I get star anise and nutmeg. There's a lot of grip here, a lot of tannin, a long way to go. Drink now through 2030.

The **2016 Alexander Valley Estate Cabernet Sauvignon** is 100% varietal, blended from all three of our vineyards - Pyramid, Stone, and Red Winery. 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. Today, this is an exciting, tumultuous wine that demands food. Give it a year or two and watch it get broader in every direction. Drink now through 2035.

Man, what can I say about the Pyramid Vineyard that hasn't already been said about the voice of Otis Redding? What an incredible accident of nature, what a gift.

This ranch was a hundred and fifteen acres of abandoned cattle land when my parents bought it twenty-five years ago. I worked clearing the brush, laying it out, and planting it. Today, it is one of the most spectacular vineyards on the North Coast - incredibly steep hills, volcanic soils, an infuriating variety of aspects and exposures for a single vineyard of no more than twenty-four planted acres. It's very, very difficult to farm and the rewards justify the work.

The **2016 Pyramid Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon** is drinking remarkably well right now. I say that because 2016 was a fairly tannic vintage and this vineyard tends to produce very tannic wines. There's abundant tannin here, but there's an unexpected grace, too. I get violets and fresh currants on the nose. The palate is all fresh blackberries. The finish is very dry and smooth. The color is purple-black. What a balanced wine. I'm delighted. Drink now to 2035.



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Lastly, I want give a shout out to my cellar crew (composed of a father and two sons named Vazquez) and, most particularly, to Francisco Jr. I've known Frank since he was seven years old, and he got married on Monday, God rest his soul. I love you, Frank.

Ladies and Gentlemen, that's all I've got for the night. Thank you for your support.

- Jake