



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

May 4, 2018

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

Friends -

I got my first tattoo last week on Facebook Live. Most of you are probably already familiar with that sad affair. This was on the advice of my new social media consultant, Jeremy. It wasn't exactly a success. But I take help where I can get it. I'm outmanned by the requirements of modern self-promotion. I come from a lineage of dinosaurs. The average age of the American farmer is 106. I read – or heard at a barbecue – that Americans spend 95% of their time indoors. Meanwhile, I'm only comfortable relieving myself in the presence of a tree. What do I have to offer? Is wine enough? Mark Zuckerberg apparently sleeps upside down in a pressurized egg. I don't believe they're commercially available. The eggs, I mean. It's probably too late for me. My daughter says the back of my neck looks like a wallet.

My problem is, I'm happy with the way things are. Or were, I guess. I like dogs. I like the sound of a river, the smell of diesel.

"Fire is good TV," Jeremy said. "It's not blood, but it'll fly. Let's think. What do you have that's flammable?"

"A house?" I said.

"Been there, done that," Jeremy said.

We were brain storming. Jeremy had arrived at my place with a jug of plum brandy from Latvia, I think it was. I try not to pay attention when he speaks.

"You remember when we fasted for ten days in the Amazon and ate yak and saw those anacondas speaking French to each other?" Jeremy said.

"I think that was somebody else," I said.

"Huh," Jeremy said. "Well, this stuff is magic for the creative juices. That's the point."

"OK," I said.

If I may share a secret (or two):

1) I'll drink anything.

2) You have to drag me to change.

I guess that second thing isn't really a secret. It's a miracle I've ever sold a bottle of wine. Prior to bringing Jeremy on, I was happy giving people lunch in the vineyard as a way of getting my brand out there. I've never even been on Twitter Face.

"Lunch?" Jeremy said, "Outside? You hillbilly. What are we, in 2015? I'll bet you don't even know what Bodak Yellow means."

"Of course I do," I said.

Those lunches were pretty boring affairs – simple food, a few bottles of Cabernet, some old guy playing the guitar and singing songs about trains. We weren't exactly reinventing the wheel. It's true, sitting out there in the vineyard, I often forgot the importance of social media altogether. I'll bet some of my customers did, too. I confess: I don't know what Bodak Yellow means. I don't think it's a kind of



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

train. I never realized what a bad influence my antiquated tastes were on my customers. I owe you all an apology.

I can't remember how tattoos entered the discussion. The plum brandy wasn't so bad, after five or six pulls. I was in my feelings, as they say. Suddenly, there they were.

"You have any tattoos?" Jeremy said.

"No."

"Piercings?"

"No."

"You aren't giving me a lot to work with," Jeremy said.

"I'm a bad person," I said.

"I've got an idea," Jeremy said. "How about we get you a tattoo on Facebook Live?"

"What's Facebook Live?" I said.

"We'll have a contest where we ask people to make suggestions for your tattoo, then we'll pick a winner and you'll get the tattoo."

"Will this be a picture or a design or a slogan?" I said. "It won't be lewd, will it? Size? Placement? Black and white or color?"

"Whoa!" Jeremy said. "You can't dictate terms to a tattoo. You just have to give yourself over to the process and let it take its course. Take your clothes off."

Jeremy took a picture of me in my underwear and sent it out to the internet with a caption that read:

"THIS MAN NEEDS HELP!"

"Huh," he said, leaning back in his chair. "You look a little sheepish, buddy."

"You mean my expression?" I said.

It was still dark, but night had become morning. Oh that it were true, that there were some kind of alcohol, from some exotic land like Latvia, that would return me to the boundless energy of childhood. But I'm a farmer. Drinking makes me tired.

Jeremy, not so much. When I got up in the morning, he was still sitting at the computer, the jug brandy resting on his stomach, eating Frosted Flakes and manipulating the ethersphere with his fingertips.

"I'm a genius," he said. "Never doubt me."

Allow me an aside, here, to say thank you to all of you who participated in the tattoo contest.

Jenna Collins, from Wichita Falls, wine club member since 2011, sent in a picture of her English Bulldog, Charles, with a nice note, the essence of which was summed up by her own phrase, "everybody loves a bulldog." Thank you, Jenna, your logic is hard to argue with.

Clint Harris, from Port of Comfort, Maine's entry was not a picture, but the phrase, "Semper



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

Wine!” Clint is, predictably, a retired Marine, and a recent addition to our wine club. “In my landlubber days,” Clint wrote, “I’ve found new worlds to explore in Cabernet.” Thanks, Clint. “Semper Wine!” That’s a good one.

Logan Mayfield of Blanco, Texas, member of our Hero club, submitted a map of his home state, with a very compelling argument for both its aesthetic and financial merits as a tattoo design. His letter concluded with these words: “The Past is Texas and so is the Future. And if it isn’t, it ought to be.” I hear you, cowboy, and I thank you for your input.

I could go on. Your submissions were humbling. Thirteen in all, each one as ingenious as the last. For those of you who lost out, don’t feel bad. Choosing which entry would become a part of my body forever was essentially determined by the flip of a coin.

In the end, we settled on a picture from Rudy Sinclair, of Chicago, Illinois, of the Devil wearing a Chicago Bears uniform and drinking a glass of wine (presumably Hawkes Cab). “I’ve been doing art for weeks,” Rudy wrote, “but I think this is my best thing yet.” Thank you, Rudy.

“Look at those flames shooting out his ears!” Jeremy said. “He’s lovin’ that cab!”

I have a friend named Dino. Not the pizza guy, another Dino. This Dino lives in the Sierra Foothills and makes a living transporting things across the state line into Nevada. He also gives tattoos. He brought his van down and we set up in the back. It’s a pretty nice space, the van – miniature velvet curtains, fish tank. The lighting was very tasteful. I sat in what I would call a barber’s chair in my underwear. It was a little hard to get comfortable. I’m a swim-with- his-shirt- on kind of guy. I turn the lights off when I get out of the shower so I don’t have to see myself in the mirror.

“Can’t I at least put my pants on?” I said.

I guess I don’t need to tell you what it’s like to get a tattoo. You probably already have one.

“Action!” Jeremy said, standing behind his camera (phone).

My lip was quivering from the moment Dino touched the needle to my skin.

Jeremy scribbled on cue cards and held them up. This is how they started:

“YOU’RE A ROCKSTAR”

“YOU GOT THIS!”

Then they went to this:

“PROJECT CONFIDENCE!”

“STAY STRONG.”

Then this:

“BE A MAN!”

“WHAT THE HELL IS THE MATTER WITH YOU?”

After that, I couldn’t really read them because I was crying.

“Are we almost done?” I asked Dino.



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

We had been at it for hours, I'm pretty sure.

"I'm just finishing up the first horn," Dino said.

"Cut!" Jeremy said. "Cut!"

"Don't call me again," Dino said, later. "I can't be associated with weakness or my business will go to hell."

"I completely understand," Jeremy said.

They did one of those fraternal handshakes that are so complicated you can't believe people remember how they go. Nobody has ever offered to teach me one of those handshakes. Is that how it works? Or do you have to look it up on Rube Tube?

"Well," Jeremy said, "you blew it again."

"Yeah," I said.

I looked down at my arm. There was a small, inflamed spot on my shoulder with some black markings on it. Privately, I felt proud.

We were reduced to beer. The Latvian plum brandy had been exhausted in the creative process leading up to the tattoo debacle. In my happy memories, it is always evening, an orange sun spread gently across the bucolic paradise that is the backdrop of my disastrous life.

"We should probably be twerking about this," I said.

"Yeah," Jeremy said. "It's tweeting."

"Right," I said.

"I'll bet this is what killed the Romans, too," Jeremy said.

"Beer?" I said.

"No," Jeremy said. "Happiness."

"Well," I said, "it's not a bad way to go."

Some of you are receiving our **2016 Home Chardonnay** in this shipment. This comes from the ranch I grew up on; I have either lived there or made wine from there nearly every year of the forty two years I've been on earth, and I still feel grateful for it. My parents bought this place more than a decade before Alexander Valley was established as an appellation. It turned out to be the coldest vineyard in the appellation, and the wines from here reflect that. I try to handle the fruit with an eye toward preserving the character of the vineyard. Our Home Chardonnay doesn't undergo secondary fermentation and never sees a new barrel. That leaves it bright and racy and lean, a stripped down version of California Chardonnay that puts the fruit from this incredible vineyard out-front. I always get citrus in this wine. In the 2016, I also pick up green and lemongrass. It's a natural beauty.



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

All the reds in this shipment are from the 2014 vintage. Of all the vintages I have been involved with in this valley, 2014 is my favorite. The varietal character – the fruit, the tannin, the aromatics – in each of these wines is something I'll harken back in the years to come as a model of what can be achieved in Alexander Valley (by a guy with limited winemaking knowledge and access to great vineyards).

First, the **2014 Merlot**:

Sourced from our Red Winery vineyard, planted in 1973, where the soils are clay-heavy and dense, the kind of dirt you'll find in France's legendary Merlot vineyards like Cheval Blanc and Petrus. This is not a Cabernet, and it doesn't pretend to be; the nose is floral and full of baking spice, the palate is sewn with tangy, high-tone red fruit, most notably, cherry. Best after 7 a.m. and before 2030.

Our **2014 Alexander Valley Estate Cabernet** is also part of this shipment. This is 100% Cabernet blended from all three of our estate vineyards in Alexander Valley. Each year, we pick, ferment, and send to barrel about two dozen lots of Cabernet, then sort through them to make this wine. There is so much to love in the 2014 Cabernet that it's a bit hard to know where to start and stop. The fruit is both dark and bright, by which I mean that the flavors are predominately dark things like plum and blackberry, but with lots of bright acidity. That gives the 2014 great freshness and vitality. The tannins are also abundant and layered. To me, tannin is more important in Cabernet than in any other varietal. They are essential to it. Thus, the 2014's have great varietal character. For those of us who love Cabernet, that's good news. Right now, the 2014 needs a steak to show at its best. Drink before 2030.

The **2014 Stone Vineyard** is also in this shipment. This is one of the first sites for Cabernet Sauvignon in Alexander Valley. My mom and dad bought it in 1971 when it was a prune and cattle ranch and planted Cabernet on the hills the next year. The topsoil is incredibly thin and the bedrock beneath is compressed volcanic ash – a soft, yellow that gave the area of Chalk Hill its name. This unique geology, in combination with the cool, slightly marine climate, produces Cabernet with intense, layered tannin, dark fruit, and aromatics of crushed blackberry, boysenberry, and bramble. The 2014 is a benchmark vintage from a historic vineyard. The wine made itself. It should drink well for more than a decade.

Before I sign off, I'll exhort you (that's right, exhort you) to come visit us. The landscape is spectacular, the roads are open, and the wines have never been better.

Thank you for your support.

- Jake Hawkes