



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

May 5, 2017

Friends – It goes without saying that I have doubts about who I really am, that I often feel like an imposter in my own life, that I harbor fantasies about disappearing forever on a motorcycle, that it occurs to me that my real parents might have died in a shipwreck off the coast of Greenland, that I was rescued – the lone survivor – a baby of three months old, adrift on a raft of ice in the Norwegian Sea. That my parents, bereft over the recent death of their infant son, Ralph, saw the story of my miraculous survival on the news, and through a series of unlikely and yet totally believable events, ended up adopting me and raising me as their own son, forever concealing my true origins.

Who is really only one person, the same person at every hour of the day? Is that possible? Is that a reasonable expectation? Why is the world breathing down my neck?

This brings me to my Uncle Charles.

Last weekend, I went to visit Charles for the first time in many years. He lives out in that desert east of L.A. Not the Palm Springs one, where there are music festivals and swimming pools and private airports and “architecturally significant” houses that look just like regular houses to you and me but are apparently indispensable pieces of our common cultural lineage – not that desert – the other desert, where abandoned cities made of tin talk in the wind, where truckers rule, where people who cannot abide the horseshit of everyday life escape to construct new modes of interstellar transportation from the discarded pieces of the mainstream’s blind existence, vehicles they will one day climb into and blow off this exhausted backwater of a planet once and for all.

Charles does voices for cartoons. He’s done them all my life. It’s not just a profession, it’s a passion, an unrelenting state of being. If my uncle has a “normal voice,” I don’t know what it is.

I remember visiting Charles as a child. He had all the work he wanted and could do it from anywhere with nothing but a tape deck and his own inexhaustible imagination and vocal chords. This gave him the chance to live in various locations at the margins of civilization, spots with a minimum of human interaction, including the last place I saw him, which was somewhere in southern Canada, in a town whose only industry was a huge dump where garbage was received all night, then pushed around with bulldozers in the snow. A place so foreboding, so ice-covered and unfit for population by any living thing, it is amazing, in retrospect, that my parents took me there.

I had never been happier. It was so cold it hurt your lungs to breathe.

“Uncle Charles,” I said, “why don’t you ever come visit us?”

I lived in the same place my parents live now – a farm down on Chalk Hill Road. Some people – I mean everybody – would call it beautiful.

“That hole?” Charles said. “The cage with golden bars? Not on your life.”

It was the voice of James Cagney, though I didn’t know it then. I thought it was Daffy Duck. We were sitting in a lean-to Charles had made with a view of the dump. I don’t know where my parents were. Probably cowering in the house like the adults they were. Charles was smoking drugstore cigars and eating Vienna Sausages from the can, watching the bulldozers work. Every now and then he pressed record on his tape deck and spoke into it in the voice of a Warner Brothers character.

“Uncle Charles,” I said, “do you think I could be like you when I grow up?”

“No,” Charles said, chewing. “In fact, you’re less like me every day.”

“Really?” I said.

“I’m an artist,” Charles said, in the voice of Vivian Leigh, “blessed with the eternal flower of youth.”

“What am I?” I said.

I was about ten. Charles looked at me, his fingers fishing for a sausage as he searched for words.

“You’re just another beauty dying on the vine,” he said. Who was it? Pepe Le Pew? Brando with a French accent? Did he ever do that?

Immediately after this, there was a falling out of some kind between Charles and the other members of my



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family. I don't know what happened, I only remember my mother saying to my father, as we waited in line to cross the border: "I never want to see Canada again."

I'll try not to over-explain my own life, here. If you've ever seen the work of the 19th Century French pointillist, Georges Seurat, an example of which features prominently in the scene of Cameron's psychological collapse in the great John Hughes film, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, made more than a century later in Chicago, it's sort of like that: idyllic from a distance – beautiful children, a wife who looks great in jeans, a dog with the temperament of Siddhartha. But as the viewer draws near, the elements of the painting begin to abstract, until, eventually, all sense of order is lost, and it becomes clear that my life is actually a blizzard of multi-colored snow or confetti maybe, or less euphemistically, a pile of clown vomit.

This is the context in which I drove into the Southern California desert to visit my Uncle Charles. I had hired a private detective to find him. That's another story in and of itself, of course, but I'll leave it for later, offering only this as a teaser: he wore a waxed mustache and a chrome .44 and was named William Teague Menace. Although I had never seen my Uncle Charles's most recent dwelling, I recognized it right away. It was a single-wide on jacks with a wolf tied to the railing of the plastic porch. I got out of the car and stood next to the driver's side door, looking at the wolf, who in turn, looked back at me with the easy self-confidence of something that could end my life with the effort it takes me to open a beer.

"Um," I shouted into the wind. "Um, Uncle Charles? Um?"

My Uncle Charles came out on the porch. He was exactly as I remembered him, even if his appearance had changed completely. I would say that he looked wilder, somehow – his hair farther off the side of his head, his eyes rounder, the distance between the top of his pants and the bottom of his shirt a bit wider – but that would be disingenuous. His physical appearance was irrelevant. I had no memory to compare it to. It was the sound of his ever-changing voice that made him unmistakable.

"Who the hell are you?" he said in either the voice of Bruce Cockburn or Yosemite Sam, I couldn't tell which. It could have been an over-the-top Robert Mitchum. I love Mitchum. Do yourself a favor and see *Night of the Hunter*.

"It's your nephew," I said. "Jacob Hawkes."

"Get in here," he said.

"What about the wolf?" I said.

"What, Rambo?" Charles said in the character's own voice. "He's harmless."

We sat at the kitchen table, such as it was. A big piece of the back wall of the trailer was missing, sheet linoleum and fiberglass insulation torn off as if by giant teeth in the near-death experience that had landed the single-wide and Charles in this place – a void in the boundless apocalypse of Southern California – a tape deck, a toilet, a wolf, a desert littered by the mistakes of man.

There was a bottle of whiskey there on the table. We drank it. As we did, I began to see the majesty in that view. Charles spoke almost ceaselessly in a variety of voices from SpongeBob to Mitch McConnell. He'll never be out of work. Whitman came to mind – the whole "I contain the multitudes" bit. I suffered yet another of my many revelations about the psychic prison of adulthood – how, when we are children, we are free not only to be whatever we want, but to be however many *different* things we want, too. Then, when we "grow up," we are forced to choose. I'm not speaking of sex, here, although that does occur to me as a logical progression of this train of thought. What I mean is:

Banjo-playing hobo OR loving father of two?

Texas roughneck with no past OR farmer's son following in his father's footsteps.

Steele Nelson, demolition derby legend and Pilot of SATAN, a flame-shooting monster truck with an inexhaustible appetite for blondes and anything two wheel drive OR whatever I actually am – a winemaker, I guess.



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At one point I got up and went out to the car and carried in the case of Cabernet I had brought down for Charles. I wanted to show him that I had made good, in some conventional sense, but it only confused him. He spoke in various appreciative voices and broke the neck off a bottle on the side of the sink and drank from it, making a show of his enjoyment but, as I watched him, I felt the sadness of the fireman putting out the fire.

“Here,” I said, taking the bottle back. “Cut that out.”

I took another bottle of whiskey off the counter and handed to him.

“Water!” he said. I think it was Eli Wallach. Again, though, it could have been Daffy Duck.

The day became night and, presumably, that night eventually became another day, by then we were not counting. At some point, I felt a warm rain on my cheek. It was Rambo, licking me. Bob Dylan has an album called “Time Out of Mind.” It’s from after his religious period and before his New Orleans pimp phase. It was like that. I could tell you what happened over the course of that time with Charles, a period spent suspended in the ether of countless voices and the contents of just as many bottles of brown liquor – but I’d rather not knock the dust off the wings of its memory by discussing it further. Suffice to say that I left there feeling both exhausted and filled with life, a combination that marks one’s departure from all great parties, regardless of size.

I could tell you, too, about arriving back home, how I dreaded confronting my “real” life the way one might dread a visit to the dentist in a world without anesthesia and how, in spite of that dread, I was pleased to find that, in addition to being an incurable sack of crap who likes to drink Old Smuggler and sleep on dirty mattresses and consort with wolves, I am also a family man and a farmer. I could try to relate the joy I felt tucking my children into their clean little beds, or how I lay down next to my wife and, looking out the window at the moon, spoke words of love to her in the voice of Jimmy Stewart.

But that would be a lie. I didn’t speak in the voice of Jimmy Stewart – that saccharin hack job – I spoke in the voice of Bugs Bunny, as I often do when I’m feeling romantic. Him or Scarlet Johansson. They both have great voices. Sometimes it’s hard to choose.

Before I begin talking about each of the wines included in this shipment, I want to mention that we now offer deeply discounted cold shipping during the summer months. For obvious reasons, the warm period we’re presently beginning, the one that lasts until September or October, is the longest stretch we go through without making a wine club shipment. So if there’s anything you need before fall, let us know and we’ll figure out how to get it to you in good shape.

Speaking of warm weather wine, a few of you are receiving a couple bottles of our **2015 Home Chardonnay** with this shipment. This lean, crisp Chardonnay from my parents’ ranch on Chalk Hill Road makes great summer drinking. It doesn’t see any new oak and does not go through malolactic fermentation, things that give it a freshness and texture that’s evocative of Sauvignon Blanc, while leaving the varietal character of the Chardonnay fruit very much intact. I always aim for plenty of acid in this wine, too, a quality that makes it drink well cold. That’s important this time of year.

This marks the last shipment of our **2013 Merlot**. We used to farm Merlot in two different vineyards – Stone and Red Winery. But the Merlot from Red Winery so consistently out-performed the Merlot from Stone (we have never included Merlot from Stone in a bottle of Hawkes) that we eventually pulled out the Merlot at Stone to make room for more Cabernet. No regrets; I love the bright cherry and baking spice I’ve grown to depend on from Red Winery. I think of the delicacy and balance in this wine as the defining characteristics of the Hawkes Merlot style, a style that exists as a counterpoint to our signature, Cabernet Sauvignon.

The 2013 Merlot is 100% varietal, aged for about 20 months in French Oak, mostly neutral. 2013 is a heavy, intense vintage. While the vintage has left its mark on this wine, it retains a brightness that makes it very versatile – a suitable pairing for everything from steak to grilled salmon. Likewise, although the 2013 should thrive in the cellar, there’s no reason to be afraid to drink it this summer. I won’t do our 2013 Merlot the disservice of



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calling it a quaffing wine, but I will say that it is both approachable and affordable. Let us know if you need any more before it's gone.

There are two different bottlings of Cabernet Sauvignon going out in the shipment – the 2013 Alexander Valley Estate and the 2013 Pyramid Vineyard. Both are 100% varietal and all estate, and both are lovely, if I do say so.

The **2013 Alexander Valley Estate** is blended from all three of our estate vineyards – Stone, Red Winery, and Pyramid. The aromas in this wine are as dark as the color: crushed violets, chocolate, and Santa Rosa plum. Although this wine is gritty enough to promise a decade of improvement in the cellar, given a little time in the glass, it makes a very fine companion to a black and blue steak right now. The truth about 2012, 2013, and 2014 is that they're all so damn good, you can't lose by opening a bottle, whether you do it now or in 2025.

This is the first of two shipments we'll make of the **2013 Pyramid Cabernet**. What can be said about this wine that hasn't already been said about lying in a hot tub, listening to Otis Redding and looking at the Northern Lights? It's grown in a fantastic, dramatic site – a steep and varied collection of slopes in the volcanic mountains between Chalk Hill and Alexander Valley – with an innate tendency to produce huge, purple Cabernet. Combine that with a historically good vintage and this is what you get. My advice regarding the consumption of this wine is to do it a lot – both now and later. Yes, it will last a good long while in the cellar, will continue to evolve new and fascinating dimensions, but there is something vital and dynamic in this wine that wants to be experienced now, too. Good luck holding onto it.

Oh, boy, we've got a lot going on this summer:

First, there is our usual series of **Summer Nights** events, featuring a different band on the patio and a different chef in the garden every month. The Saturday dates for 2017 are June 24th, July 15th, August 19th, and September 16th. This year, these Summer Nights events will be your only opportunity to get our Vin Gris. We'll have it on tap back in the garden and will be selling it by the liter in flip-top bottles. As a wine club member, you're invited to come enjoy a glass of Vin Gris and a plate of food on us.

It's been a few years since we've done any wine club events in the vineyard, and well, I miss them. Our vineyards are the foundation of what we do. I guess that could be said of any winery, but it is especially true of Hawkes. After all, we farmed grapes in Alexander Valley for thirty years before we began to produce wine commercially and every bottle we make today is 100% estate grown.

In lieu of the usual, rather formal, multicourse dinner, this year we will have three family style lunches, one in each vineyard. May 27th at Red Winery, I'll be serving classic barbecue of smoked brisket, homemade sausages, and baby back ribs and we'll have the horn-heavy Americana band Mr. December playing. July 8th my family and I will prepare French country fare like pork rillettes and fig tart with the Django-inspired Yacht Club of Paris performing gypsy jazz in the Stone vineyard and, on August 12th, we'll be at the Pyramid, cooking bistecca Fiorentina, drinking a selection of vintages from the host vineyard and listening to some sort of live music.

I hope you can join us.

If you're still there, thanks for bearing with me and, as ever, thank you for the support.

– Jake