

November 2017

Dear Family and Friends,

I have not written for a while. So to honor those of you who have asked for a write up - here it is!

Nine years ago - 2008 - Arden, our last child steps into the college campus and suddenly my whole world grows sharply small. I am no longer the pivotal force or a need for the three grown kids. Instead, pitifully hurting that I was returning to an empty house, a reconnection with a husband who was traveling for work and learning to adjust to a world with no school schedules of any kind. Smart women have known to get back into the work force or not give up work entirely, but I did and do not think I could have been a good mother had I opted to do both. I made the right decision for me.

And then the crazy notion to make wine - similar to having a fourth child - what did I even know about wine? I drank average stuff and on occasion, a good bottle would knock my socks off. But I did not think I would be learning to make the vino. Or that it would entirely change my whole life. That making wine is one thing but I would be out selling it as well - I thought hey, this is seasonal, I will work my buns off for all the wine work and then return to a life that allowed volunteering and some down time.

Which brings me to the two worlds that I live in.

World One:

A candlelit dinner. A beautiful menu. A dashing sommelier describing the regions and the wines and the stories of the winemakers. A choice is made. Wine arrives table side at the right temperature. Decanted flawlessly. You swirl, you breathe in the aroma, you wonder at the gorgeous color, you swirl again, sip once, twice....you know you have the perfect wine for the night, conversation moves in easily and the wine is making all the elegant moves to let you relax and enjoy. You can feel the story in the wine - you pick up the bottle, you note the label, you remember an evening that started with just the wine, but now you are becoming part of the wine story and you memorize the wine to make that evening happen again.

Glamorous. Elegant. Classy. A validation of a wine well made. The satisfaction of knowing that both the customer and the winemaker are lost in the making and drinking of the wine.

World Two:

You wake up at ungodly hours - it is freezing and you can barely see but you are at the vineyard before sunup! You have piled on lots of sweatshirts, perhaps two pairs of socks with thick boots. You make a fast run to the privy, take a quick sip of that coffee and you are on your way. A crawler - a piece of machinery that runs between the rows in the vineyards - this crawler has steel wheels - it can make it through very steep slopes, loamy, sandy soil - but it crawls - hence called a crawler. You get on the side of it whilst huge bins are set behind it where the fruit (grapes) are going to be pruned, put into small bins and then transferred over to the large ones on the crawler.

You begin your first sort - remove the dead leaves, anything that is not a cluster of grapes and you work fast since the small bins come in rapidly. Who would have thought the fruit would be icy cold...but wow, they are and working gloves are a mercy. Mind you, as you are bending forward to sort, the vine canes are slapping your behinds because the rows are narrow. The front of the crawler is blasting the dust and dirt clearly into your face, the hands are semi frozen but still working, the backside is whipped. Hours later, you get off the crawler - you are stiff, you know you lost parts of you, but dare not think twice.

Speedily you get to the winery where the second sort happens which is comical like I Love Lucy trying to pick out the damaged chocolates on a fast-moving sorting table.

Let me be clear here. Nothing, absolutely nothing we do at the winery is easy. It is back breaking work. Setting up the destemmer (machine that removes stems in one direction and throws grapes on the table), or the massive hopper that first gets all the clusters....each of these equipments has to be meticulously washed - these are massive machines - you climb ladders (not the light ones - hefty ladders) to wash. Then you learn to use clamps and gaskets and hoses that are so unwieldy and heavy....you make a mistake here and you can have all the wine leaking out.

When we are thoroughly pleased with the fruit sorting, we clean out tanks and totes and start the fermentations. Once again, you are squeezing into the small opening of the tank to connect hoses, cages and valves. We double and triple check that nothing will leak. That everything was sterilized with hot water.

Then every day of the fermentations, you are keeping track of the brix, the alcohol, the warmth of the tank, the acidity.....for six straight weeks - it is Groundhog Day because each vineyard and each block gets its own time to work itself into a beautiful wine.

Winemaking is demanding - no short cuts, giving time and attention to every detail for every wine we make. Mistakes will show up sooner or later so doing things thoroughly and tending to it non-stop, will make a wine that will be stunningly good. Like making time to raise kids and putting in the necessary work and then they are these wonderful adults!

Shoulders are shot, hands are scraped or is arthritis setting in, wrists are aching, elbows start misbehaving, feet take a punishing ache, yellow jackets find a way to sting body parts that are covered. There is absolutely zero need for a watch - eating breakfast at 2 pm or missing it altogether - dinner could be a hopeful trip to town, but otherwise what we can make do with because we get home utterly zonked. This year, three of us did the key work and frankly if you put the three of us to make one body that functioned well, that would be asking too much.

So, what have I gathered from nine years of doing this? That I will do it again. That it will not get easier. That I enjoy a well-made wine and so very much appreciate what it takes to make it. That I would like to feel during harvest that the woman who goes into it does not come out of it looking like an unkempt creature but alas, wine work is about work, hard work and the fine elegance in World One is simply because World Two knocked itself out to make it. That, when we rarely introduce our wines to the public, they make me weep with happiness for they often validate that the work we do shows up in their glass and they simply love them!

2017 is happily in barrels - time to recoup and mend and get ready for 2018!

Hugs az,
on behalf of The Farm Winery Gang

