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2005 NHN&WR letter/story #12)

**Winemaking**

When not on their January 1st - March 21st abstinence discipline, the staff of NHN&WR are apt to consume a bit of alcohol. A goodly part of the consumation is wine. Believe it, ... wine prices in Canada were a shock to our motley crew, ... and troubled the Captain’s Mind!\* Stateside, Burgundy & Chablis in a cardboard box cost about $11.00 for 5 liters. That’s $2.20 (us) per liter. (And in spite of whatever Parisians may think, this is good wine.) In the Canadian Province of Ontario a drinkable bottle of wine costs about $12.00 (can), ... Upon re-reading that is a bit confusing. The (can) is Canadian currency not a can. The wine comes in a bottle and the bottle is 3/4’s of a litre. So, ... we think that comes to $16.00 (can) per litre. Across the Ottawa River in Quebec things are a little better, however ... these people were on strike this winter, so a lot of good they did us. So much for facts.

Now, the scene. Late November afternoon. Lucile is drinking Chablis. Ken is drinking Burgundy. Jason is waiting to lick out the glasses. A daily ration of 3/4’s of a liter is very manageable before bedtime. **Holy Moley! $24.00 per day.** Granted it is Canadian and the exchange rate helps a bit, but that’s sort of a "gagging" amount. More than "gagging", this is deficit financing in the extreme. What to do? Well, at this point Lucile and Ken visited Claude and Jeannine in the Laurentians. Jeannine is Lucile’s cousin. Claude and Jeannine are into making their own wine. They buy "kits". A kit contains all the ingredients necessary to make 23 litres of wine. 23 litres makes 30 3/4 litre bottles. On Jeannine’s last trip to their kit suppliers there was a two for one sale in progress. Lucile & Ken were given the Freebie kit, Chardonay, as a gift. The die was cast.

We will spare you the acquisition details. Equipment needed came to

\* As in, ... *"A very fine ship for an ocean trip*

*was the Wallopping Window Blind"*

about $250: Carboys (2), Must Bucket, 30 bottles, 30 corks, Corking

Machine, Sterilizing chemicals, Siphon, Siphon shutoff, Wine thief,

Specific Gravity Kit, Bottle washer, Three Foot Wooden Spoon, Huge Spring Water Bottles, Stoppers, Airlocks, Bottle Drying Rack, Titration kit, Labels/Neck Covers and Brushes. Impressive Huh? But one time startup costs seem more palatable than a daily drain. i.e.: In retrospect the Claude/Jeaninne visitation cost NHN&WR $250.

We set things up in the basement laundry room. We followed the multi-lingual instructions. By careful font selection, English and French take up the same space. Piece’a cake. Just five problems: Glass siphon tube, Proper level to fill up the bottle, Shrinking the neck covers, Soaking the corks. and "Racking" under the Abstinence. (RUA) The siphoning tube has a glass part, which goes in the must bucket/carboy, and a plastic part which goes into another carboy or a wine bottle. We could not get the connection between the two airtight and eventually used just a long piece of plastic tube. Initially we filled up the bottles too high. This resulted in the corking machine having difficulty compressing the air in the bottle. It seemed there was not enough space to compress it. We botched the decorative neck covers completely. No one told us you had to steam them so that they shriveled up on the bottle. Cork-soaking has been our nemesis. One must do this about 3 hours prior to corking and we keep forgetting, ... they are either too wet or two dry. ( Like WWII, ... either too young or too old.) Racking is the process of transferring the wine from its initial percolation vehicle (must bucket) to a carboy (23 liter/litre) glass bottle and leaving the dregs behind. This requires suction. The handiest source of suction is a mouth. Insert the siphon tube in your mouth. Suck. Watch the wine move up the tube and approach the mouth. Fascinating. When the wine is a couple inches from the end of the tube, stuff the tube into the target vehicle. It is amazing how difficult this simple operation is to do! You are eyeballing the wine as it progresses through the tube. You haven’t had a glass of wine for two months. Also, you’ve been baby-sitting this batch for two weeks. Is it any good? Then, ... whoops, too late, your mouth is full of wine. The tube can be put in the carboy/bottle but you still have a mouthful of wine!

Jason’s eyes say, *"Spit it out! You’re on the wagon!"*

Lucile’s eyes say, *"Don’t spit it out, Jason’s medication says he should not drink alcohol or operate heavy equipment"*

The abstinence pledge loses out. Gulp.

Hey! Pretty good and only two weeks old! Instantly confirmed vintners. Four batches of wine have been produced in the laundry winery: Chardonay I, Merlot, Chardonay II and Pinot Noir (The latter batch was finished up through the courtesy of Linda & Norm McDevitt.) Discounting start-up costs, we are averaging $1.70 per bottle bringing maximum consumption cost per day to $3.40. All Right! $1.70 also discounts labor cost. Factoring in same at minimum wage, NHN&WR Wine would probably retail for about $17.50 a bottle. We believe a bit of efficiency could be obtained by making two batches simultaneously, ... one white and one red. Running the white through the process first could cut equipment sterilization time in half. Might even end up with a couple bottles of Rose.

Some 16 socializers have sampled/guzzled our wine to date. To our knowledge all are still among the living. Wine is stored in the Ottawa "Cool Room". We plan to keep two bottles of each batch as an aging test and sample them one and two years after their bottling date. Other than that *"aging in the bottle"* is a mystery wrapped in an enigma.

The NHN&WR motto is, *"Once it’s in the bottle, ... drink it!"*

If you are a person who enjoys a glass of wine, we heartily recommend winemaking as a hobby.

Lucile & Ken

North Hero, VT

A few lines left. Space for some WOWS!

Carol (1) & Mackenzie: Paris, ... WOW!

Carol (2) & Gerry: Mexico, ... WOW!

Etta & Frank: Ireland, ... WOW!

Keith D.: Triathalon Win, ... WOW!

Michelle & Marc: The Big Apple, ... WOW!

Nancy & Erhart D.: Jordan, Lebanon & Syria, ... WOW!