

Over the Back Fence  
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Homemade winefest  
By Alva Wood

Thousands of visitors flock to the Okanagan Valley each year for the Fall Wine Festival. Not one of them spends any dollars in our village, because we don't have any wineries.

"We gotta find a way of cashing in on the wine festival," said Deirdre Pollacks at a village Council meeting. She and Aynsley Kastor run a B&B that's empty nine months of the year.

"How?" asked Rosie Green. "We don't have any vineyards. We're too high up in the hills for grapes to ripen properly."

"Ice wines are really profitable," suggested Dunc McMahon. "Since we get colder weather, maybe we could grow the grapes pre-frozen."

"They have to ripen before they freeze," mayor Jake Bowers corrected him.

"It's not that we're short of winemakers," muttered Hector Wentz. "Yvonne and I make wine for ourselves."

"So do we," said Jake.

"So do we," nodded Henry Hill, the village administrator.

"Most of us do," agreed Deirdre.

No one really remembers who came up with the idea of a Home-Made Wine Festival. But everyone thought it was a great idea. They could invite some of those thousands to come up and sample the local vintages.

"A home setting should be a drawing card," said Rosie, "not an institutional setting like the bigger wineries."

"Suppose it bombs," Jake wondered. "We could give our community a poor reputation."

"Why don't we do a test run, just our own village, before we try it on the world?" Dunc asked.

So they did. They advertised it all around the village. They gathered a list of people willing to expose their home-made wines to strangers. They sold tickets; \$10 gets you ten homes, any ten homes. They printed posters and placards to put around the village. They made signs to go out in front of participating winemakers' houses.

When the big day came, people started wandering up and down the streets, dropping in at this house and that. After a few hours of sampling, their wandering got a little more aimless.

As the best wines got used up, vintners started serving their second-rate wines. No one seemed to notice.

"Great stuff!" says Sam Burkholder, swilling a thick white wine around inside his glass while his eyes followed the circular pattern. "Tastes a lot better than Roundup."

"Oh, Sam, you're so funny!" squealed Isabella Adams, who had been matching him glass for glass.

Rev. Sid Carter sampled a sweet red that Tessa Vanderkam had made. "Not bad," she admitted. "That could be a communion wine."

"That's what Father Chas used it for," Tessa admitted, "before you came. Everyone thought it came from the diocesan office. Father Chas never showed them the bottle."

The bottles that Henry and Hilda Hill had proudly set out went so fast that Henry had to dig into some more recent stocks.

"Here," he says to Terry Brown, "try some of this beaujolais nouveau."

Terry holds a glass of opaque, slightly frothy liquid up to the light. Not a thing shines through. He sips it. "Yes," he agrees, "it certainly is nouveau. How long ago did you bottle it?"

Henry checks his watch. "Oh, about eleven hours ago," he admits.

Matilda Weatherby entertained the village by singing all 42 verses of North Atlantic Squadron as she wove her way home. Rigger Moortice didn't make it home; he spent the night on the couch in Ray Hiebert's living room. Chief Matthew Brokenwind wasn't sure he could walk home, so he borrowed his son Tom's skateboard, sat on it, and rode it down the hill to the reserve whooping like he was on a bronco.

Everyone agrees we should do it again next year. Even if we get no outside visitors at all.