

ONE BOTTLE:

One Bottle: The 2009 Allegrini Valpolicella

by JOSHUA BAER

Before Elkhart, Indiana, became an American city, it was a gathering place for members of the Chippewa, Ottawa, and Potawatomi tribes. In 1829, Anglo-American settlers from Ohio established a village called Pulaski on the north side of the Saint Joseph River. Pulaski consisted of a post office, a mill, and three log cabins. In 1831, Dr. Havilah Beardsley purchased a square mile of land from Pierre Moran, a half-French, half-Potawatomi chief who claimed sovereignty over the region. Dr. Beardsley's intention was to establish a town called Elkhart as a rival to Pulaski. In 1839, Pulaski was incorporated into Elkhart.

There are conflicting theories about the name "Elkhart." One theory is that an island in the Saint Joseph River at the center of town forms the shape of an elk's heart. Another theory is that the town was named after Chief Elkhart, a cousin of the famous Shawnee chief Tecumseh. Given that the nearby town of Mishawaka was named after Princess Mishawaka, Chief Elkhart's daughter, the latter theory may be the more likely of the two.

Elkhart's central location—one hundred and fifty miles north of Indianapolis, one hundred miles east of Chicago, and seventy miles northeast of Fort Wayne—made it a crossroads for transportation and a Mecca for skilled workers. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the town's economy was driven by drugs and music. In 1884, Dr. Franklin Miles, a specialist in the treatment of eye and ear disorders, founded the Miles Medical Company in Elkhart. The company's factory manufactured a patented medicinal tonic called "Dr. Miles' Nervine." The tonic became popular as a treatment "for nervousness or nervous exhaustion, sleeplessness, hysteria, headache, neuralgia, backache, pain, epilepsy, spasms, fits, and St. Vitus' dance." In 1935, the Miles Medical Company changed its name to Miles Laboratories. Nervine remained on the market as a "calmative" until the 1960s. In 1979, Miles Laboratories was purchased by the German medical conglomerate, Bayer AG.

In 1923, the Elkhart Band Instrument Company was founded by Andrew Hubble Beardsley, a direct descendent of Dr. Havilah Beardsley. By 1940, Elkhart was home to sixty independent musical instrument companies, including Conn-Selmer (trumpets and trombones), E. K. Blessing (clarinets, euphoniums, flugelhorn, saxophones, and tubas), and Gemeinhardt (flutes).

In 1936, Wilbur Schult, a local promoter and retailer, bought the Sportsman Trailer Company from its founder, Milo Miller. Between 1940 and 1970, dozens of motor home companies—including Dutchman, Jayco, Kropf, Thor, and Winnebago—opened factories in Elkhart. Today, Elkhart is home to the RV Hall of Fame and bills itself as "The RV Capital of the World."

Elkhart's status as a manufacturing center made it a boom town during the Great American Bubble. However, the post-Bubble years have not been kind to northern Indiana's economy. In 2006, Elkhart had an unemployment rate of 4%. In 2009, its unemployment rate reached 15%. Elkhart's status as an economic bellwether has not been lost on American politicians. During his election campaign, Barack Obama visited the city twice. In February of 2009, when President Obama came to Elkhart to promote his economic stimulus package,

he told his mostly Republican, mostly working-class audience that, "Elkhart has been hit with a perfect storm of economic troubles," and offered his stimulus package as the solution. Last month, Elkhart's unemployment rate hit 18%.

Right now, Elkhart's future looks bleak. American corporations have developed an appetite for foreign workers and a pronounced distaste for the American worker, so it may be a while before Elkhart's economy revives.

On the other hand, in 2006, Elkhart's economic future looked bright, so there may be some consolation in the fact that economic expectations are often followed by the opposite of what they anticipate.

My obsession with Elkhart is based on my relationship with Volcano Pizza, a locally owned take-out establishment with three locations in the city. If you go to Urban Spoon or Yelp, you will come upon heated debates about the relative merits of Volcano's pizza. Those debates miss the point. People who like to eat do not go to Volcano Pizza for the pizza. We go because Volcano makes the best meatball sandwich in the world.

Volcano's meatball sandwich comes to you on a toasted bun, and when I say "toasted," I mean that both the inside and outside of the bun have that crisp, medium brown, marginally bitter quality that fresh bread acquires when it is toasted within a few hours of being baked. Inside the bun are pickled jalapeños, mushrooms sautéed with bell peppers and onions, Volcano's homemade marinara sauce, Volcano's homemade mozzarella, and Volcano's homemade meatballs. It is difficult to describe a world class meatball without resorting to words like "mouth-watering" or "epiphanous." Those words apply to Volcano's meatballs, but so do words like "humbling" and "solid." You do not eat Volcano's meatball sandwich as much as you allow it to stun you.

Great food deserves great wine, but there is something elitist about drinking a Dujac Echezeaux or a Cheval Blanc with the world's best meatball sandwich, especially in a city where the unemployment rate stands at 18%. What you want in these kinds of circumstances is a blue collar wine, a wine that does its job and gets out of the way without patting itself on the back. In other words, you want a wine that manages to be authentic, reliable, and delicious for less than \$20 a bottle.

Which brings us to the 2009 Allegrini Valpolicella.

In the glass, the wine is a clear, beguiling crimson with scarlet shadows at its edges. The bouquet is more evolved and more intricate than you expect it to be. On the palate, the 2009 Allegrini Valpolicella lays some—but by no means all—of its cards on the table. This is a wine of soul and substance, but it delivers that soul and that substance in a quiet way. The finish is like a New Mexico sunset. You keep waiting for the end, then you realize that the end came and went twenty minutes ago and that you are at rest in the darkness, wondering what you did to deserve such a charmed life.

One Bottle is dedicated to the appreciation of good wines and good times, one bottle at a time. The name "One Bottle" and the contents of this column are ©2011 by onebottle.com. For back issues, go to onebottle.com. You can write to Joshua Baer at jb@onebottle.com

