

It's a small world:

I ran into Verl and Arlene the other day. You remember, the Torgersons, the folks who had that nasty run in with the little circus folks down at Rudy's Oyster Bar. It would not be at all remarkable, running into them, seeing as how we live in the same part of the world but we didn't run into them in Houston. We crossed paths in the beautiful Napa Valley of California. The same Napa Valley that produces a great deal of the table wine that Americans enjoy. Imagine my surprise to see our neighbors in the tasting room at Drowning Guppy Vineyards, sipping the '07 edition of the winery's signature Muscatel.

Seems that Verl and Arlene are out here visiting their oldest boy, Torvald, who has one of those Silicon Valley jobs doing things with computers that hadn't even been thought of ten years ago. Tor, that's what they call him, is a strapping fella', good looking and more at ease in public than his country upbringing might suggest. My guess is that his winning personality is Arlene's doing. Her smile has melted more stony hearts than Carter has little liver pills.

Some folks just seem to be at home wherever they are. The Torgersons are those folks. They've traveled quite a bit over the years, all over this country of ours. In the last five years alone they've been to Orlando and Anaheim. Of course, it's easier for them to get around since Verl's retirement from the feedlot. And Arlene is the senior forensic technician now at the La Crosse County Coroner's Office so she can pretty much right her own ticket. I'll tell you, she's seen more than a little water flow under the bridge, and not a lot of it drinkable.

Anyway, there they were sipping Muscatel and chewing those little crackers that they give you in wine tasting rooms, looking for all the world as if they were from the Hamptons on Long Island. Arlene has a way of wearing a sun hat that is mindful of some Hollywood star. I can't think of which one just now but a star nonetheless. And Verl, well let's just say that Verl is Cooperesque, with his nonchalant, aw shucks bearing and his ever present toothpick. Yup, that's exactly it. They remind me of Gary Cooper and Loretta Young. Classy but comfortable.

Arlene suggested we go to a little bistro that Tor told them about. It was no Rudy's mind you but it was reliable and not too costly. We spent a lovely evening dining on some excellent local game and taking in the sunset. There's no doubt, Napa is about as lovely a spot as

there is. What with the vines and the hills and the twisty roads and the deep blue sky there's nothing not to like. It's a little like the Root River Valley but with a lot more people and a ton more money. There are folks living here who bought wineries, after making fortunes elsewhere, even though they new winemaking was a money pit. It's just something about the thought of being in the Valley, in the Life. That sort of thing appeals to certain people.

But that's for them not for Verl and Arlene. They're here to enjoy the views, taste some wine and see their son. Tor's a great kid although at thirty-two I guess you can't call him a kid anymore. We still call our twins "the kids" even though they're thirty-seven and thirty-five respectively. It'll never change. Your babies are always your babies. Tor just smiles when his parents gush over him. Verl's the worst. He'll tell perfect strangers that Tor's his boy and that he just got a big fat raise and that he's buying a place in Sausalito and that his lovely wife and two children are just the greatest and that he still holds the Hurricane's record for scoring at least one goal in eleven consecutive games.

Oh yeah, I forgot to mention that the reason we call our two girls "the twins" is that they've both got red hair.

Tor doesn't have red hair, and he's not a twin, although from all his accomplishments and personality you'd swear he was at least two people. When he and his family arrive at the Elk's Hall together you know you're looking at a special brood. No doubt about it, when Tor, Terry, Tad and Tammy Torgerson enter the room there is not a head unturned. Makes Arlene and Verl so proud. It's great to see.

Well, here I was going to tell you about Verl and Arlene and Veronica and me getting locked out of our rental car out in the middle of nowhere with no cell phone service and that creepy couple peering out from behind their curtains but I got sidetracked. I'll save that story for another day.