

The Story of Free Dog Wines

In 2009, I (Teresa) went to my first farm auction with Martin in Homedale, who was selling off the last of his farm equipment. We had been walking around a while, just looking at what was being auctioned off when Martin had stopped to watch his items that were coming up next. They had several auctions going at the same time and one of them further down the aisle from us was using a mic to help people to hear. It caught my eye when a man with an animal crate walked through the crowd and leaned in to talk to the auctioneer with the mic. The auctioneer nodded and handed the man his mic for an announcement that I couldn't quite make out, so I moved closer to hear. He was saying that he had a litter of free puppies to anyone that wanted them, "just come on over and take a look!" He opened the crate door and out spilled a bunch of black, brown and multi-colored puppies that awkwardly took off in every direction. I noticed there were a few still in the crate, hanging in the back, too scared to come out.

There were kids rushing over to pick up or pet the puppies, calling over reluctant parents that wanted nothing to do with it. I decided to put my finger up to the ones still in the crate and this little black one licked it. I asked if he could get her out so I could pet her and he happily obliged. She didn't struggle when he pulled her out but then she heard and seen all the commotion and began to shake. I held her closer to me and talked softly, trying to get her to calm down, which she did when I took a few steps away from the crowd. I walked back over to where Martin was so I could show him this adorable puppy to which Martin responded "yeah, she's adorable, but I don't think it's a good time to have a puppy right now." I totally agreed since we were still trying to get the winery up and going, as well as beginning our life together.

I began walking back to where I had gotten her, talking softly and looking mostly at her, then arriving at where I thought it was. I looked around but I didn't see the crate anywhere. I thought maybe I had gotten my directions mixed up, since I am directionally challenged, and kept looking for the man and his crate as I walked up and down different aisles. The man was nowhere to be seen. That's when I noticed quite a few people, looking very annoyed, with puppies in hand looking around too.

Apparently, as soon as his dog crate was empty, he bolted out of the auction lot, jumped into his truck and left. Suddenly, several of us were left holding puppies, who'd we had no intention of keeping, trying to decide what to do. Unbeknownst to me, this is a common practice that farmers and rural families used to get rid of unwanted puppies. I walked around the auction lot for the rest of our time with this little puppy inside my coat, who needed a bath and probably a nap. I just couldn't leave her there in hopes someone else would take her home or take her to the shelter, where they might just dispose of her. Martin shook his head, amused at the whole situation, and said "well, I guess you have a dog now!"

A few days later, we were having dinner at Martin's parents' house and Martin told them the story, laughing the whole time at my embarrassment of being duped. Martin's father, Barry, audibly laughed when I mentioned that we now had a free dog, to which he replied, "There is no such thing as a Free Dog!" Barry has told the story to multiple people and it has become one of the many running jokes in the family. Later that year, TJ came to us as puppy as well, who was just a couple of months younger than Tess.

Tess is an old dog now, who struggles with the many issues of becoming older, but still thinks she's a puppy when she tries to chase blowing leaves. She, along with TJ and Diesel (my first cat), have been a part of all our struggles and victories throughout the years. Diesel, a shelter kitten, came along 2 years after Tess and TJ, as a birthday gift from our daughter. And we just recently added Harley (short for Harlequinn), a shelter cat, to our family as a companion for Diesel.

We realized that they deserved to be the inspiration behind the new label after a several-years discussion of rebranding Lost West Wines and many different ideas of what to rebrand it to. They have earned recognition for patiently waiting every day for us to walk through the door when the long days became long nights, because of our business, to every house move we have ever made until we finally bought our current home. We decided to show our appreciation publicly for their steadfastness and unconditional love that no matter what the harvest was like that year or whether we had sold any wine that day, they were there.

Free Dog Wines was created to tell the story of how Tess wags her whole butt when you ask her "who's a good gurl?" or put something "pretty" on her. To tell how she chases her tail and growls at it when you ask her if her tail got her in trouble, and how upset TJ becomes when you laugh at that. A way to talk about TJ, whose bat ears and bug-eyes, focus in on any ball you have in your hand, like his life depends on it, and chases whatever you throw for him until he can't move anymore. A way to acknowledge Diesel who stares at you from across the room as if he is trying to decide whether he wants to eat your face and send your soul to hell or let you pet him, as it is your duty, while he loudly purrs so that you understand his namesake. How Harley is when she wants pets by throatily meowing at you and throwing herself against you repeatedly until you relent. I want to capture the unique spirit of our furry family members and tell the stories of how instrumental they are and have been through every step we have made as a business and a family. That is why Free Dog Wines exist.