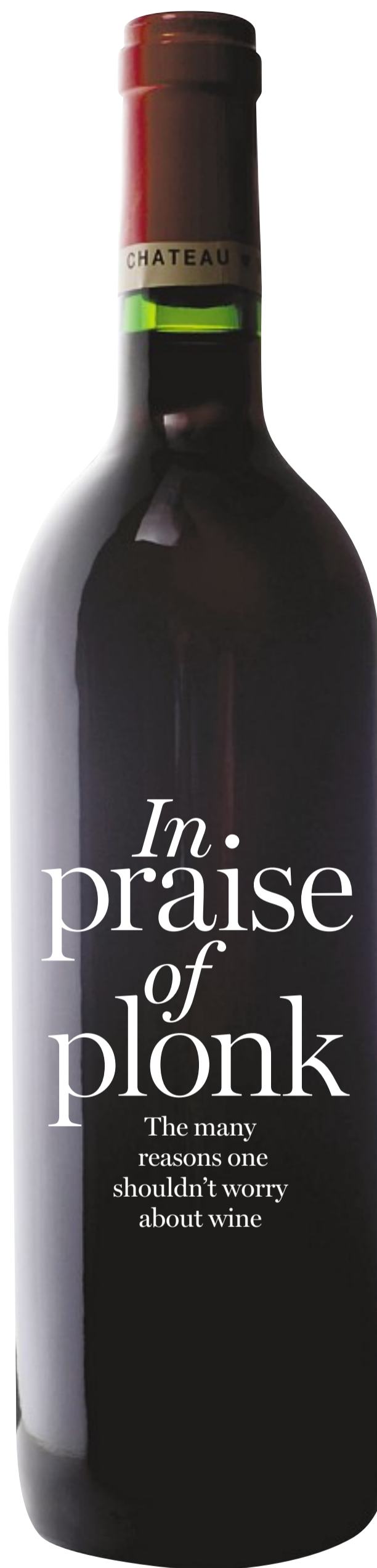


## life

NP

The National Ballet's Chan Hon Goh is hoping for a lovely dinner with her husband and a winning ticket in Lotto 6/49. To find out more about What Women Want, dance on over to [theampersand.ca](http://theampersand.ca)



# In. praise of plonk

The many reasons one shouldn't worry about wine



SONDRA GOTLIEB

There was a period in our life when we took wine very seriously. While we were at the embassy in Washington, we bought some fine wines for our guests and some to put aside for life after diplomacy. We soon noticed, after pouring the finest wines, that the glasses were left full to the brim when the guests left at 10:30 sharp — at every party. In those days, everyone drank cocktails, martinis, Manhattans and straight vodka. Nobody had the time or taste to savour good wine. So, although continuing to serve fine wine, only half a glass was poured and half a glass was left. But, of course, the fancy name was always printed on the menu and that impressed some people.

Life after diplomacy meant Toronto, where we eventually bought a house. Allan had even built a wine cellar in the basement for our maturing wines. It took us almost two years to get the wine from Washington into our Toronto cellar. Who knows what happened to it during this period? Did they bake in the back of a truck? Were the bottles stored in a place where the temperature went from 30 degrees below to 30 above?

We let the bottles sit a while in our cellar, and then Allan opened a sampling of the bottles one by one. *Pishachs!* — urine! — he exclaimed, and threw most of the bottles out. There were a few good crates, which we eventually drank or disposed of. After that, Allan didn't want anything to do with buying or keeping wine. In fact, he became so dubious about the wine he drinks at parties that his children bought him a small flask for his birthday. He takes it with him to those receptions and parties (there are many) that only serve plonk and appetinis.

Despite Allan's wine antip-

athy and my lack of interest, we have been to several wine tastings in our lives. One of the lot was very much different from the others. Four dedicated wine collectors donated the best of their cellars, wines of the finest vintages, Pichon Longueville, Chateau Lynch Bagues, and even a first growth Chateau Lafitte. The glasses were lined up and sparkling. The wine was decanted. After the third glass, I was so plastered I couldn't tell one wine from the other. Of course, only a tiny bit was poured out in each glass, and we were supposed to take a few sips and spit our mouthfuls out. I guess I didn't spit out enough. I noticed that a couple of other drinkers weren't spitting out, either. I think there were about a dozen wines to get through. It was all wasted on me.

All I remember was the main course, wild boar, which Allan hates, and the intimidating solemnity of the company. Our host and hostess were most gracious, but no giggling was allowed.

Another wine tasting was quite different. We were in Hungary well before the fall of the Berlin Wall and we were guests of the Canadian ambassador. A wine tasting had been arranged for us in wine country — the Hungarians wanted to sell the wines to Canada. The ambassador and his wife were old friends, and we were giggling from the start. I can't remember whether we were tasting Tokay or another sweet Hungarian white or both. All I know is that we went from one vineyard to another meeting with jolly fellows (party officials, of course), who plied us with identical-tasting wines. As far as I was concerned, they all tasted fine, even the stuff I drank before 10 a.m. This tasting was anything but solemn. No matter where we went, the ladies were complimented on their exquisite and regal appearances. Our hands were kissed. And glasses were always raised in our honour. At a certain point, we were all in such a good mood that one of us picked up the spit bowl and drank from it. The Hungarians followed suit. "That's the way a successful wine tasting should be," one of the Hungarians shouted.

I have not tasted Hungarian wine since, but I never had a better time.

There are good reasons not to drink plonk, but since reading a new book on wine fraud, in which several wine experts' reputations were destroyed, I'll think twice before I order that old Chateau Petrus at a restaurant (about a thousand dollars) or a case of 47 Cheval Blanc from a wholesaler (\$25,000?). Despite their prices, they could well be fakes. *The Billionaire's Vinegar*, by Benjamin Wallace, describes how Michael Broadbent, a famous wine expert at Christie's, was taken by a German fraudster who convinced him he was auctioning off bottles that had belonged to Thomas Jefferson. The same fraudster, Hardy Rodenstock, involved such wine celebrities as Serena Sutcliffe and even Robert Parker in their famous tastings of old wines. Old wine, it seems, is easy to fake. A forger can substitute the contents of cases — cheaper bottles for expensive ones — because the buyer won't open them till years later. How many cases are personally scrutinized by the buyer while they sit in storage? Who will notice if the cases are meddled with as they wait to be unloaded? A look of age is easily forged. One forger blasted one bottle with a shotgun to give it the pitted look of age, and stained labels with orange juice and tea. Rodenstock's partner in crime said, "Whoever says these great wines cannot be duplicated is not being honest with themselves."

I guess that's the reason the Gotliebs buy family and friends \$12 bottles of plonk from the liquor commission. If it weren't for the wine crooks, it would be an '81 Petrus for everyone who sits at our table.

Weekend Post

## The best 10 words a man can say today

### Or tomorrow or on any day of your marriage

BY ANNE-MARIE MEDIWAKE

This story is not on the front page, although it ought to be, as I am going to reveal the gift every woman with children wants.

Here it is: "You're an awesome mom, and you're doing a great job."

This is not to negate any massages/pedicures/flowers already purchased or planned. Those are also very necessary. I repeat: Do not think you can get away with just that line. But it's that phrase that will touch her heart and get you some good points.

You might be thinking, doesn't she already *know* she's a good mother? For moms, no matter the age or stage, you cannot say those words often enough. Even better, say the phrase when it's least expected. This is especially true when kids are young, as I told my friend Jeff, a new father with a wife who has gone back to work and had to leave their year-old son with a wonderful caretaker, one their son loves very much. It can be tough to see your child adore another woman. I know that feeling. When you don't know what else to say or do to help — just remember those 10 magic words.

Jeff ran an Ironman. He thinks all his wife needs is "a good pep talk." This is no Ironman, buddy. It's motherhood, and it's entirely different.

The catch with this line is that it's not self-sustaining. You could very well be asked the dreaded follow-up question: "What do you mean?" or "What do you think I'm best at?" My husband, dear soul that he is, hates those questions.

So you've been warned: Have an answer ready or the line could seriously backfire. This means you will have to think about it. What does your beloved do or what do you see that makes you smile? Is it how she cooks, schedules the family or makes your kids laugh? Just take a few minutes to watch and think.

At this point, some men might be tempted to skip out. Too much work required. They'd rather just spend a few dollars than have to think outside their regular thought boxes. And they might seriously strike out on Valentine's Day ... and Mother's Day ... and birthdays.

So again, stop your wife/girlfriend. Look her in the eye like you did when you were going to ask her to marry you, or say I love you for the first time. Tell her: "You're an awesome mom and you're doing a great job." See what happens.

Oh, and you're welcome. ■ Anne-Marie Mediwake is a co-anchor of Toronto's *News-hour* on Global.

Weekend Post

## ADVICELADY

**Dear Ms. Smart,** I fear that a man I met at a fundraiser is going to ask me out on a date sooner or later. It was fun chatting and flirting with him while we were at the event, but dating is something else altogether. He's just not my type. I don't like to hurt people's feelings, but I don't want to go out with this man even once. What shall I do?  
*Not Stirred*

**Dear Not Stirred,** Many dating mavens would advise you to simply tell him that you're "taken" — that you have a boyfriend, significant other or whatever. This works in theory — it lets you off the hook neatly, allows him to save face and does work wonderfully well (when it's true), but making up such an excuse is ethically suspect and not without its pitfalls. There's always the possibility that a "white lie" will come back to haunt you! Better to be straightforward and specific. Say that although you're flattered by his invitation, you're not interested in dating him. Being asked out on a date is a compliment, no mistake, so be polite and thank him for the invitation. If your admirer is considerate and socially adept, he'll accept your negative response without question.

*Darcey Smart,*  
*Weekend Post*

SPECIAL MARKETING FEATURE



## Ontario asparagus comes out on top

It is time to celebrate Ontario asparagus. Those slender, elegant green or white stalks are now known to contain high concentrations of a natural anti-oxidant called rutin, a natural disease fighter and a chemical compound even linked to longevity.

"Rutin in asparagus is thought to be one of those disease fighting chemicals," says Dr. David Wolyn of the department of plant agriculture at the University of Guelph. "And, as it happens, a study from Japan showed the Guelph Millennium Variety, developed right here at the university, had the highest concentration of rutin of any variety of asparagus sampled."

Scientists there looked at varieties of asparagus grown around the world and Guelph Millennium, the kind most often planted here, came out tops.

Dr. Wolyn is now applying for grants to take that study even further. His goal is to investigate if soil or environmental conditions and a host of other factors make a difference in rutin concentrations.

"It may eventually lead to looking at ways to optimize that rutin concentration during cooking and processing," he says. "The end result can benefit all Canadians."

Brenda Lammens knows all about the health benefits of Ontario asparagus. She not only grows 50 acres of the vegetable on her Spearit Farm, about 14 kilometres south of Tillsonburg, Ont., she is also the chair of both the Ontario Asparagus Growers' Marketing Board and the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association.

"We always suspected as much but now

we know it is a wonderful vegetable that not only tastes great but delivers terrific natural disease fighting protection," she says. "What we are doing now is investigating new ways to promote asparagus and to find other uses for it as well."

About 106 Ontario farmers currently have 2,600 acres under cultivation dedicated to asparagus. The two most popular varieties are Guelph Millennium and Jersey Giant. The bulk of the crop, which starts popping above ground in late spring and is available for only six weeks a year, goes to fresh vegetable counters at food stores.

"We have begun shipping Ontario asparagus to a Michigan plant for canning as well," Ms. Lammens says. "Last year, we sent 1.4 million pounds for processing. This year, we hope to double that."

The growers are also sponsoring pilot projects to quick-freeze individual spears and to turn the trimmed and discarded butt ends into a form of flour. "You get all kinds of pizza crusts these days, so why not a healthy asparagus crust," Ms. Lammens says.

Her advice is that if children turn their noses up at asparagus imported during the off-season to try them this spring on fresh Ontario asparagus. "They will be amazed by the difference. Our fresh Ontario product is so crisp and crunchy, it is a special taste treat," she says.

For more information, visit [www.growourfarms.ca](http://www.growourfarms.ca)