

Book of the Week

***Pappyland* by Wright Thompson**

Book Review by Lynn Reinschmiedt

Wright Thompson is a senior writer for ESPN.com and *ESPN the Magazine* and is also a native of Clarksdale, Mississippi. The first time I remember hearing of Pappy Van Winkle bourbon was in one of Craig Johnson's Walt Longmire mystery novels. Walt's former boss and one-legged sheriff Lucian Connally, a nursing home resident and a recurring character throughout Johnson's book series always drinks Pappy Van Winkle bourbon. I have never tasted it and my knowledge beyond that is pretty much what one reviewer of Thompson's book, Mark Gillespie remarks. When one mentions Pappy Van Winkle to a bourbon drinker, three things come to mind:

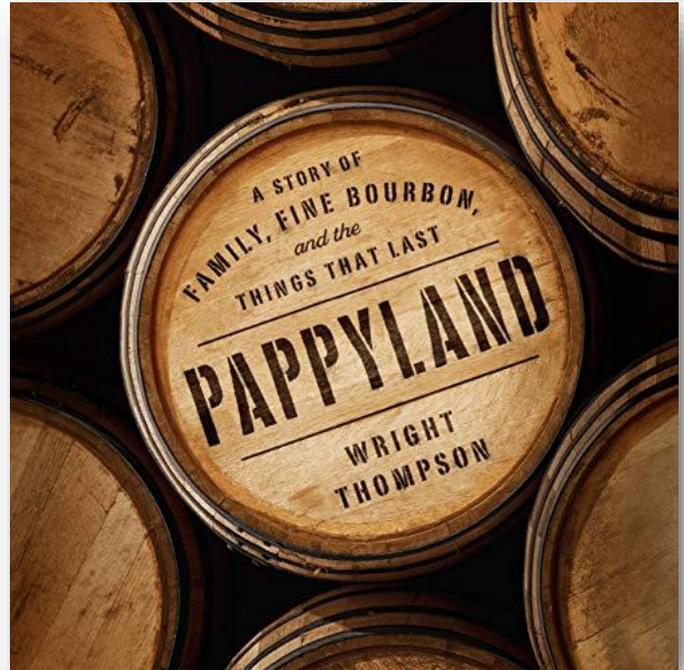
"My God, that's the best whiskey ever made."

"It's good, but there's no way in hell I'd pay THAT much for any whiskey!"

"Do you know where I can get my hands on a bottle?"

A bottle of the 23-year old Pappy "starts at around \$3,000 on the internet." From what I understand you'd be lucky if you could find it for that price.

The legacy of the Van Winkle legend began with Julian P. "Pappy" Van Winkle began when he bought out the Weller family's whiskey business in Kentucky in 1935, then merged it with the Stitzel family's business to form Stitzel-Weller Distillery. He turned the distillery's flagship Old Fitzgerald wheated Bourbon into a legend. His son, Julian P. Van Winkle Jr. took over when Pappy died in 1965. The family had to sell the distillery in 1972 and started sourcing whiskeys to bottle under the Old Rip Van Winkle



brand. Upon his death in 1981 Julian Van Winkle III took the reins and strived to preserve the taste of grandfather Pappy's heritage. Fortunately, Julian was able to buy hundreds of barrels of his grandfather's whiskey from the Van Winkle family distillery that had acquired it. From this base Julian has strived and essentially been able to blend the whiskey that captures the family's legacy. As Julian readily acknowledges, things have gone completely nuts.

In many respects the book takes on the flavor of an assortment of stories resembling an autobiography of sorts between the Van Winkle and the Thompson Mississippi family histories.

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