



The Holidays are for fond memories
and fervent hopes

Bill, Mary, Allison, Will, Pallavi, Quin
...and Nellie Carroll

Annual Letter Follows

North Dallas Times-Armadillo

"All the news we can smash flat"

Dallas, Texas

December 2020

Volume 34

2020: Boring Carrolls regress to the mean as entire world becomes boring

Greetings again from the Republic. We're all pretty much fine, given what passes for fine these days, and thanks for asking. It's the Holiday season, in a year that seems to be equal parts Home Alone and Bad Santa, when Chex Mix is whole grain nutrition, and the world is on its annual re-toxing program.

I made two horrible mistakes last winter and I need to apologize to everyone for the first. This pandemic thing—well, it's all my fault because I bought a new

car. Given the make and equipment I wanted, the only one I could find was black. That was a problem because when I was in the family automobile business, my uncle was superstitious about black cars and never wanted to have one on the lot.

When I bought it, the idea of it being bad luck went through my mind, and damn—I was right.

Although I love the car, I apparently unleashed that bad luck on the world. And I'm really sorry.

My second error was declaring last year "I continue to be in the best physical shape of my life." That lasted three weeks until I attended a meeting in Nashville and tripped on an unseen sidewalk hazard in the dark. I fell, and my knee hit the pavement, cracking the upper part of my tibia. It might have been worse, but fortunately my face broke my fall.

I had a pleasant ride in the ambulance to the Emergency Room, which was bedlam. The policeman on duty there said the chaos and bizarre behavior I saw was because it was Friday night under a full moon. I asked if that wasn't just superstition. Thinking I was rather slow for a PhD he said, "Let me explain it this way. The moon causes all the tides around the world. A force that strong also affects human behavior. It's just sim-



The post-Virtual Turkey Trot virtual photo. We did walk the dog.

ple physics." Logically, I think that makes as much sense as using gummy worms to catch Swedish Fish, but I'm the guy blaming the pandemic on a black car, so what do I know?

The doctor noted that I might also have broken my nose, but there was not much he could do about that. Having not seen me before the accident he asked if my nose was my best feature. I said, "Sadly,



My spiffy new ride (1).



My spiffy new ride (2).

yes

yes.” So they put a band-aid on the scrapes and a brace on my leg and sent me back to the meeting.

They also gave me crutches, and I promptly did another face plant in the hotel bathroom that night. But recovery began when I discovered I could MacGyver my way around the hotel room by pushing myself backward on the desk chair like a squid. Putting my socks on with my leg fully extended in the brace was a challenge. Thank God I don’t wear panty hose or I might still be there.

When I got home, I exchanged crutches for a walker, on which I spent six weeks, which I do not recommend, but I was careful and good about rehab and healed up in about 12 weeks. When I was ready to go back to the gym in April, it promptly closed. I desperately needed to exercise, and I discovered Allison’s old kid bicycle. I rode it for a week or so, and decided I liked it—particularly since there were no other alternatives. So before the world’s supply of bicycles sold out, I bought one and have ridden it about 6 days out of 7 ever since for about 4500 miles.

Cycling is just like golf: there is an infinite aftermarket for clothing and paraphernalia. Even though I have a relatively conventional saddle, the road still can get bumpy. So I bought gel-padded bicycle shorts which feel like you have stuffed them full of mashed potatoes. The padding starts, as it were, about Buenos Aires and



Will and Pallavi in the Peak District.

goes all the way around Tierra Del Fuego.

Additionally, the shorts are quite compressive and all that compressed stuff needs to go somewhere, which is mostly out the top. With my father’s chicken legs I look like a stick man who ate a bowling ball.

As to the rest of the family, Allison is still in Washington as a lawyer for the Department of Justice, but she has moved from the Tax Division to the Civil Division, Fraud Section. It’s probably a good place to be; taxes come and go but fraud never goes out of style. She is still accompanied by her beloved, if aged, German Shepherd, Vee.

Will and his wife Pallavi are in the London area, having bought a house a bit outside town. When he was young, I dragged him along with me to the Home Depot countless times for various kinds of tools, supplies and sight-seeing, which bored him silly. He is now quite sure that when you grow up you turn into your parents, and the Home Depot trips seem quite riveting now, so to speak.

Quin is also in Washington working for a small political fundraising firm and elevating his ability to cook. He tried some recipes from Pallavi’s mom’s cookbook “India The World Vegetarian” (available at Amazon) but was dismayed to find there was no meat involved.

And they all have pandemic stories. Will and Pallavi knew marriage meant togetherness, but didn’t foresee lockdown in a small cage—er—apartment. The boys grew beards this summer with unequal success, and Allison has taken to knitting and crochet, producing woven stuffed animals at an alarming rate. Can you knit a respirator?

One of the biggest changes at our house, suggested by this year’s cover, is that our dog of 14 years, Georgia, went on to her next assignment. She was a very smart, sweet little dog and we miss her.

Turns out, in addition to a shortage of bicycles, the world was fresh out of rescue dogs. But we were ultimately successful in getting one. Our new



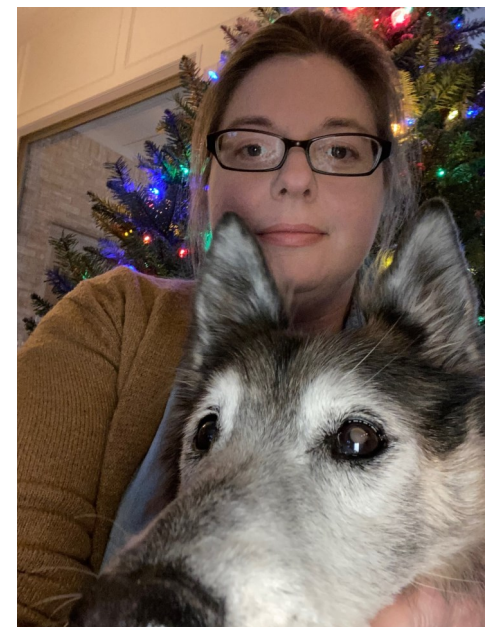
Pandemic hair: Will after abandoning beard attempt; Quin as GEICO Caveman, modeling 2020 office wear.

pooch Nellie is about two years old.

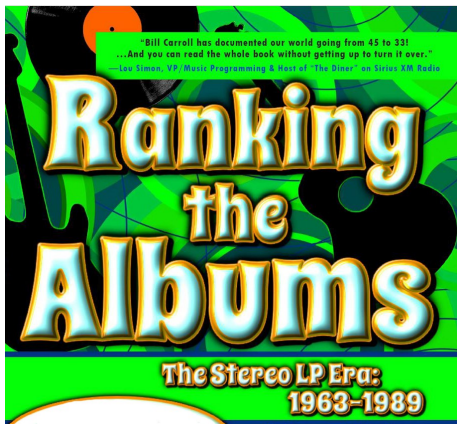
She looks like a lab, but with my obsession for family history, I had her DNA done. Sure enough, she’s about ¼ Lab, but is also ¼ Rottweiler, ¼ Great Pyrenees, and ¼ Odds and Ends.

Her dominant breed is Great Pyrenees. The book on the Pyrs is: “They aren’t necessarily eager to please. It’s not uncommon to ask a Pyr to sit, only to have the dog look at you, walk five feet away, and then slowly lower himself into a sit.” And perhaps the most correct statement: “Obedience is not a priority for them.” Thus, Nellie fits in well as a Carroll.

Nellie is a very sweet dog, and very food motivated. Chicken? O. M. G. She licks my hand to let me know it’s



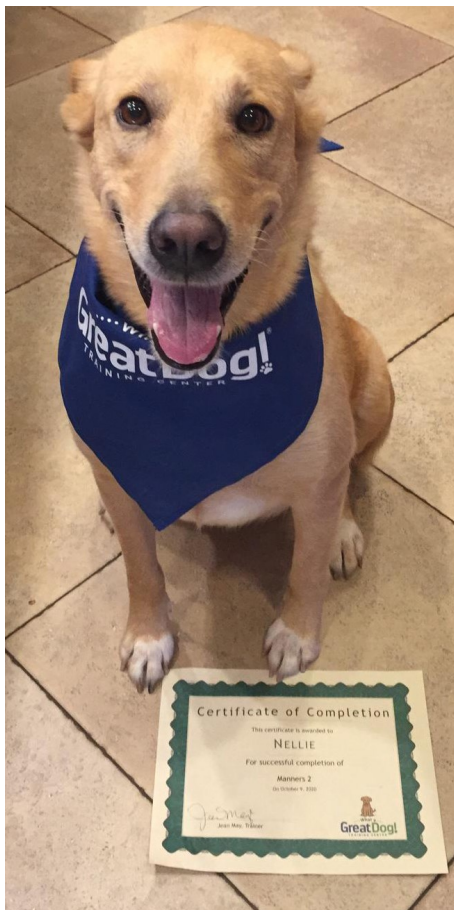
Allison and Vee



My latest book. See the video tour at <http://ranking.rocks>. It's also at Amazon.

time to pet her and also to see if I've handled any chicken. If she could talk, her favorite phrase would be, "Are you going to eat all of that?" She's also the only dog I've ever seen who will sleep on her back with her paws in the air.

Nellie is really Mary's dog. From the beginning, Mary has taken on the task of training Nellie with the help of a place called "What a Great Dog!" WAGD's approach to training is very



Nellie and her diploma.

reward-centric, which is JUST FINE with Nellie. As long as treats are involved, she'll eventually consider doing what you ask. Unless she doesn't feel like it. Then let's just have the treats and call it even.

Nellie and Mary have worked very hard together on "Lie Down." It's been difficult, of course, with lots of incentivizing, and repeat, repeat, repeat. But there is success--Mary will now lie down without needing a treat.

A walk with Nellie is an exercise in patience. She is intent on smelling every single blade of grass on the walk, so we don't go far but it takes a long time. Because of this, Mary enrolled her in NoseWorks at WAGD to see if she would learn how to sniff out more useful targets. This is difficult work and "high value" treats are recommended. So on the way to class, Mary picks up an order of boneless wings.

Unfortunately, Nellie wasn't that moved by the test kit of essential oils, so Allison sent us a bottle of Concentrated Rabbit Scent which is moderately more interesting. I discovered Mary files it on the shelf next to the aromatic Angostura bitters, and I am now more careful when I assemble my second Manhattan.

But we're very fond of Nellie, and I think she realizes that this is her forever home. We're just learning to live with our second strong-willed child.

While it's been difficult to stay home as much as we have, it's also been a learning experience.

Mary and I stay close by regular Zoom calls with one another from our respective offices here in the house. Also, I've discovered that ordering from Amazon after a couple of drinks preserves the joy of surprise when packages are delivered. They're almost like unexpected gifts.

On a more serious "note", I've been thinking a lot this year about the song "Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas."

*Have yourself
A merry little Christmas
Let your heart be light
Next year all our troubles
Will be out of sight...*

People of a certain age know that the song debuted in the 1944 movie

"Meet Me In St. Louis," sung by Judy Garland's character to her younger sister since they would soon have to move to New York. But not many people know the original lyric:

*Have yourself
A merry little Christmas
It may be your last
Next year we may all
Be living in the past...
Faithful friends who were
Dear to us
Will be near to us
No more...*

That lyric was softened to the one we all know at the request of the cast and director, but looking back at 2020 it now seems eerily appropriate.

*Through the years
We all will be together
If the fates allow...*

For many this year, there's a lot the fates didn't allow, with togetherness delayed until we occupy a different plane; but—

*Until then
We'll have to muddle through
Somehow...*

And muddle through, we do. Here's hoping that next year all your troubles will actually be out of sight. Have yourself a merry little Christmas, a happy little Holiday, and a wonderful little New Year that is a different and more pleasant kind of boring.

