

2021 Christmas Blog

ALEX, ARIEL, ADRIAN, MEGAN, BILL O., ALBIE, AZABU & SCHUBERT TOO!

(“ALL THE CALIFORNIA LLORENTE GANG IS BACK”)

Happy Holidays, All!

- *In keeping up with the times, I've selected “all” as the most inclusive, gender neutral pronoun I could come up with without regards to age, race, religion, national origin, binary / non-binary status, political affiliation, mental health condition, or general level of bitchiness. For those of you who didn't think pronouns were important in school, your elementary school teachers are having the last laugh. Also by holidays, I mean Christmas, Chanukkah, Kwanzaa, Saturnia, Pagan Winter Solstice, Abject American Consumerism, or whatever else you may be celebrating on or around this time of year.*

Any time I try to reflect on 2021, the theme song from “Friends” runs through my head, especially the lyrics:

*It's like you're always stuck in second gear
When it hasn't been your day, your week, your month
Or even your year...*



It has not been a good year. Two clients/friends, both in their late fifties, passed away rather unexpectedly. One of them was a former student whom I had known for 30 years. He is survived by a sister with mental health issues, who pleaded with me to get her out of a nursing home she had been involuntarily placed in after Brian had suffered his first stroke. After Brian passed away a few months later, I was successful in getting her released, but quickly discovered that Linda required far more care than I anticipated. Without going into details, the first month after she returned home was a total nightmare. Linda has BPD and OCD; she can range from the sweetest person you've met to the most annoying and demanding human you've met. She is very intelligent and has an impressive memory, but often acts like a two-year-old having a tantrum. Because of her behavior, I was unable to get her

placed in an Assisted Living Facility, but I did find her an upscale Board and Care facility nearby, and hopefully can step back from the time I've been spending dealing with Linda during the last few months.

Most notably in June, my long-time friend, Jim Yates, passed away this year. He was 80 and had been suffering from lung cancer, but his decline this year was dramatic and unexpected. Except for some of my Florida friends and relatives, who have never visited me in California, almost everyone on this list had met Jim, and most of you received the obituary I wrote after he passed on June 4th. While I have several friends that I have known longer than Jim, I regrettably don't keep in touch with them regularly. Jim was someone who I seldom ever went more than 3 straight days without communicating. In fact, for the better part of 37 years, we communicated daily. Jim was politically and socially my polar opposite. He was an extrovert who made friends easily, as opposed to me, an aloof introvert. However, we are from a time when you could disagree on political, economic and social issues and still be friends. Jim's passing leaves a void in my daily routine, since I would generally call Jim to vent about daily frustrations I encounter. Since as I get older, almost everyone annoys or frustrates me, so we spoke a lot.

My ex-wife's husband also unexpectedly died at age 67 earlier in the year. Just a couple of weeks ago, I found out one of my first cousins, Elsit, has stomach cancer. It has been a sobering year in many respects with reminders of our mortality slapping me on the face.

However, 2021 has also been a harbinger of change for the coming year, which has just got to be better. I had been waiting to retire until the school district offered a golden parachute, but it doesn't look like that is in the cards soon, and I can't wait any longer. I'll be retiring at the end of the current academic year in May or possibly after the first summer session in July.



While my life has been “stuck in second gear,” that is not true for my kids... First, Ariel & Bill have a date for their wedding: 04/30/2022 (no, it is not a palindrome – *Ariel is just not into that*). We found a winery in Livermore and it should be a great event. I’m not sure if I’m allowed to say anything, since Ariel is big on surprises. Anyway, I’ve been doing some “father of the bride” stuff. On the job front, Ariel has had a roller coaster year. She quit her job at Tincare without having another gig lined up (*I learned some new lingo this year: kids don’t apply for jobs anymore, they audition for roles and land gigs*). Ariel worked part-time for a local school district before getting what appeared to be a dream job as an Executive Director, the sole administrator of a nonprofit childcare center in a state government building with a significant salary boost. However, immediately thereafter, she was overwhelmed with the demands of her new role, where everyone complained to her. In addition, finding competent childcare workers in the Bay Area within the budget the Board of Directors approved was challenging. It was funny listening to my 30-year-old daughter gripe about the work ethic of 20-year-old kids today. The downtown Oakland location was also not appealing. She’s landed a new role starting in January with less pay, but the possibility of stock options at a startup with a business model that seems to be somewhat analogous to her former gig at Tincare. Hopefully, this one will be it.

Ariel’s fiancée, Bill, seems to be the most chill in his job. I don’t get to talk to him much, but he seems to generally like his job (i.e. role), co-workers, and is always willing to give a positive shoutout to his company, Alation (*I now actually know what they do... I think*). Anyway, Bill generally appears the least stressed about work, seems to like his peers, and the success and positive press that Alation has garnered in the past year has likely upped the value of employee stock options, which promotes a content workforce.

Adrian and Megan have also had a whirlwind year. First, they had all but decided to move out of Orange County to seek the “holy grail” of all Californians: affordable housing. While they steadfastly claim that the thoughts of moving were original, many of their prospective destinations were proposed by friends, including Georgia, Arizona and Texas. A couple others were influenced by me, since I was considering them for retirement, including Southern Washington and Colorado Springs.



I took a couple of trips during the year to survey potential retirement locations, but soon realized that living out in the country is more of a romantic notion that plays in my mind than a practical reality. I spent five days in a remote cabin near the real South Park, Colorado, during Labor Day weekend. I quickly realized I need all of the “hustle and bustle” of metropolitan life, even though I bitch about it all of the time.

Anyway, I digress... back to Megan and Adrian... by September, they had visited Texas and had settled on moving to the north Dallas suburbs. Despite my reservations about Texas (*been there, done that*)... there is considerable appeal to cashing out and moving to a place where half a million dollars buys a new 4,000 sq. ft. McMansion. Megan and Adrian were ready to buy and scheduled another trip to Dallas for the week before Thanksgiving. I was going to tag along, ready to buy a place north of Dallas, if they bought one. I was so sure that moving was imminent and started to pack some of the collectibles that I display at home and advertised excess furniture on Offer Up.

However, within a few weeks, the appeal of moving lost its luster. Megan started considering the implications of moving so far from family; Adrian had assumed he would be able to keep his Orange County salary if he transferred to EY in Dallas, but that wasn't a certainty. Those cheap Texas McMansions often come with 2.5% property tax rates, which abates the mortgage payment savings, and of course, there is the sobering fact that you will wake up every morning to the realization that "Oh my God, I'm in freaking Texas." Property prices in Orange County have skyrocketed, but to cash out, I will have to recognize both federal and state capital gains taxes. California does not have a reduced income tax rate for capital gains; thus, the state tax is almost 75% of the federal tax. So in addition to great weather, beautiful scenery and loads of things to do, I'm pressured to remain in OC due to the vagaries of the tax code.

In any case, Adrian decided to start looking at other prospective employment opportunities. His job hunting was really difficult; he had to let a couple of recruiters know he was looking to leave EY and offers and interviews started trolling in. Within a couple of weeks, he was torn between a position with another Big 4 accounting firm, offering a 30% raise, or a private energy company looking to bring its books GAAP compliant, offering him a 50% raise. Being the shrewd negotiator, Adrian revealed that he had a lower pay offer from another Big 4, but was thinking of staying on in public accounting to gain a bit more experience. In turn, the energy company offered him an effective 65% raise, now going to 85% after a 4 month probationary period. In summary, in 120-days, 2.5 years out of college, Adrian's base salary will be almost 90% of my base salary at the college, which took me 38 years to attain. At the college, the faculty union and district spend months negotiating raises (we got a whopping 1% this year), while kids today negotiate double digit raises with the proven tactic of "Let me think about it." Adrian started his new job on December 6th and is a bit overwhelmed as he has zero experience in solar leasebacks. However, Adrian's bosses consider him an accounting "rock star" and he is a hard worker and fast learner.

Adrian's wife, Megan, just graduated from the nursing program at Concordia University. She already has a job offer from Mt. Sinai in Los Angeles, but she's not going to accept because she doesn't want to commute to L.A. She has also started a new business, www.wraparoundbabycare.com. Although the audience here is unlikely to be looking for her services (Let's face it, most of the recipients of this letter are well seasoned).

Usually, I revel telling you about trips taken, but COVID has had an obvious chilling effect on travel. Adrian, Megan and I did go to Cabo San Lucas for a week, but it was late June, right after a hurricane, so snorkeling wasn't great and we didn't even try to scuba dive. We did drive up to La Paz on the Sea of Cortez, and I would love to visit that area again at another time of year, when the whale sharks are migrating and water clarity is a little better. In August, I finally visited Jim's home town, Flora, Illinois to deliver some of Jim's WWII family mementos to the local museum.



The changes in the kids' lives and the prospect of more free time to travel (if we can just get over this COVID thing) help me suppress a general feeling of malaise and the realization that I'm entering twilight years, as simultaneously in the political world, we appear to be headfast plunging into the "Twilight Zone."

All in all, Happy Holidays... of what the heck... Merry Christmas and Saturnia....

Love,
Alex

