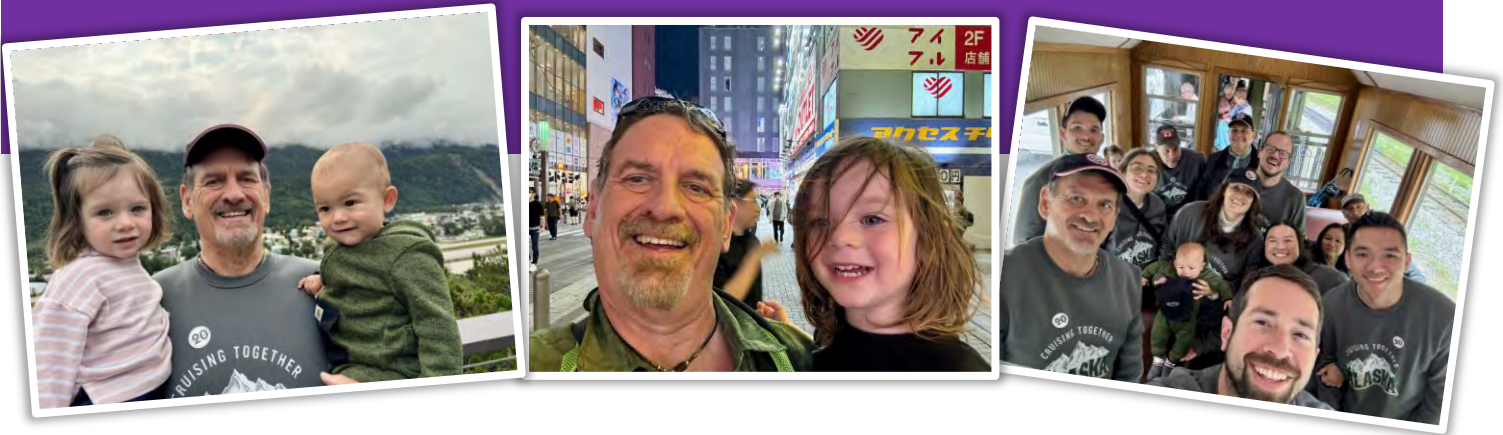


# 2024 Llorente Holiday Blog

Starring: Alex J. Llorente

Featuring: Bill O'Connor, Ariel Llorente, Adrian Llorente, Megan Llorente, Aurora Llorente  
and Ames Finn Llorente-O'Connor

Special Canine Guest Stars: Albie, Azabu and Schubert



Another year has gone by and once again, I hope this verbose note/blog finds you all well and in cheerful spirits. For me, Robert Burns' famous line, "The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry" succinctly describes my year as many of the plans I laid out for 2024 in last year's letter did not come to fruition due to unexpected health issues. Nevertheless, I had a pretty good year overall; the results of the love and support of an awesome family and great friends.

Having a grandchild that lives 400 miles away is a challenge and I made it a goal last year to get together with him at least once each calendar month. With Ariel's and Bill's help, I was able to accomplish that. I'll organize this blog as a chronicle of those meetings as well as other events.



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### January:

To see Ames this month, I drove up to the Santa Ynez Valley with Adrian, Megan and Aurora and met up with Ariel, Bill and Ames. We pattered around Solvang, Los Olivos and Los Alamos and visited the Sandstone Winery.



### February:

Bill and Ariel were attending a wedding in Philadelphia and asked if I was interested in flying up to babysit Ames. I flew up a few days early into Baltimore and took a short road trip to some historical sites I had not visited before: Gettysburg and Valley Forge. I also visited the Pennsylvania Amish Country before reaching Philadelphia. My brother, Oscar, also flew up to Philadelphia from Florida for the weekend to meet his new “grandnephew.” In Philly, we visited Bill’s alma mater, Wharton Business School at UPenn, the Rodin Museum and tried to find the best cheesesteak sandwich. I also re-visited the US Mint and Independence Hall on my own.

### March:

I had booked a three week NCL cruise from Capetown, South Africa to Barcelona. I flew to Oakland and caught up with Ames three days prior to flying out to South Africa from San Francisco. In Capetown, I rented a car to hit some of the nearby points of interest. After boarding the cruise, our first stop was Namibia. I had arranged with another passenger and her daughter to charter a small plane for a low level flight along the Skeleton Coast. Marjorie found a couple other passengers to join, so we ended up splitting the charter five ways. From Namibia, we travelled to Luanda, Angola. From there, we went to Sao Tome, where our ship made international headlines after the Captain left behind several passengers that were late to port. We also visited the Ivory Coast and Senegal. A scheduled stop in The Gambia was cancelled due to tide conditions. I had mixed feelings about the cruise; on one hand it was an exotic itinerary and would have been a lot more difficult to visit these countries on my own. On the other, NCL did a poor job in coordinating with local governments and port authorities, and failed to openly communicate



with passengers when hiccups occurred. To be fair, this was only NCL’s second time sailing this itinerary, and this was West Africa, so delay and chaos are the rule, but the cruise line just seemed unprepared. On a positive note, there were 54 solo



cruisers, like myself, on this cruise and we formed a rather active social group. I made some new friends and found quite a few other passengers who were working on the same goal: trying to visit every country. A few were ahead of me, including an 81-year-old guy from Canada who was at 144 countries. After this trip, I was at 124 (all other countries visited in 2024, I had been to previously). In my blog last year, I mentioned that I had



hoped to hit 21 new countries in 2024. That proved to be overly ambitious due to health issues that arose towards the end of the cruise. After sailing around the coast of West Africa, the cruise made stops in Tenerife and Arrecife. Linguistically, Canary Islanders, speak Spanish with the same accent as Cubans and they use many of the same idioms; I was asked several times in the two islands if I was originally from there. We also stopped at Alicante and Motril, Spain before disembarking in Barcelona. The last three days I was violently sick and throwing up frequently.

#### **April:**

After flying back home, I felt much better most days, but was home for only a week before a planned 2 ½ day trip to Colorado. I had a sonogram which revealed that I had a number of kidney stones, including a fairly large one on my right kidney. Originally, I had planned to drive south from Denver to Colorado Springs and meet up with a friend then head down to Trinidad (near the New Mexico border) to look at some possible vacation properties. While I have intellectually given up on the idea of moving from Orange County or buying a rural vacation home, I still habitually like to look at opportunities. In my mind, I romanticize myself in a scenic country cabin in the middle of nowhere just sitting down and taking in the views. In reality, I go stir crazy after a single day and begin to look for places to go and things to do. In any case, the trip to Colorado was a bust. Luke had to cancel due to work and I started vomiting at the airport before boarding the flight. I flew to Denver anyway and shortly after starting to drive south, I had to pull off the road to puke. I gave up on driving further south and spent most of the time sick in a hotel room south of Denver. I did drive out to Aurora, CO (my granddaughter's namesake). From Denver, I flew directly to San Francisco to make sure I got to see Ames this calendar month. While I was very tired during the four days I was in the Bay Area, I was not sick.



#### **May:**

My health and medical saga got into full gear this month. I had a sonogram which revealed that I had a number of kidney stones, including a large one on my right kidney, which had been moving, which explained my on-again, off-again symptoms. I then had a CT scan in preparation for the kidney stone surgery, but that revealed a new issue: a growth on my left kidney, which I was informed had an 85% probability of being cancerous. A few days later, I suffered severe cramps in my right leg, which I did not deem related to the kidney issues. The urologist had ordered a second CT scan, this one with contrast. On May 10<sup>th</sup>, within minutes of getting home from the imaging appointment, I received urgent calls from my radiologist and my primary physician telling me to get to the ER because the scan had revealed perilous blood clots close to my lungs and heart, apparently emanating from my right leg. Megan was the first to suspect possible blood clots when the cramps began, but I just thought they were regular muscle cramps. For the first time since age 11, I was admitted for an overnight stay at a hospital. I spent four days at Hoag in Newport Beach and hated every minute. I was put on blood



thinners and told that the kidney surgeries would have to wait at least a couple of months. I was told this was not a big problem since kidney cancers were slow growing and the imaging showed mine was localized with little risk of metastasizing. In addition to the kidney issues, the CT scans showed I had several very large gallstones and a very enlarged appendix, neither of which was causing me any pain or trouble presently, but had the potential to evolve into more serious issues. The gallstones were old news and I had previously discussed with my physician the possibility of having my gallbladder removed since I had a high risk of having gallstones stuck in my bile duct and this could be extremely serious if it happened while travelling in undeveloped countries. In addition, the surgeon recommended removal of my appendix which was another ticking time bomb. Since I had to come off blood thinners before the three surgeries, it was decided that they should all be done at the same time and the two surgeons would coordinate a date in September. Ariel flew down with Ames to see me while I was in the hospital, so I accomplished the meet-up goal for this month.

I was forced to cancel a trip to the “Five Stans” in Central Asia. While most of my travel is independent and I eschew most travel insurance as a waste of money (*I do maintain an annual international medical policy*), this was an organized tour and I had been forced to purchase trip cancellation insurance when I booked. This worked out well for me since I was able to recover most of the costs of the prepaid trip. In the future, I’m going to have to bite the bullet and get trip cancellation insurance for future trips since I’ve been made painfully aware of unexpected health issues.

### June:

In June, I took it easy and mostly stayed home with occasional outings to parks and local points of interest with Adrian, Megan and Aurora. On June 28<sup>th</sup>, I had an IVC filter inserted to prevent blood clots from travelling from my leg to my lungs. This was in preparation for the surgery to take out the obstructing stone on my right kidney the following week. Ariel, Bill and Ames came down on June 30<sup>th</sup>, so it came to the wire in meeting the objective of seeing Ames every calendar month.

### July:

I had arranged a friends and family group cruise to Alaska on Celebrity. In addition to my kids and grandkids, we were joined by Megan’s parents, Todd and Sherri, my brother, Oscar, the Rimlinger Family, John, Christine, Michelle and Matthew, and Michelle’s boyfriend, Jake. Including the two babies, we were a group of 15. The last two weeks in July are the busiest of the Alaska cruise season, but I had little



choice since finding dates amenable to the various employment, school, and personal schedules of all involved was a challenge. My first cruise had been to Alaska in 2008 with the kids on a similar itinerary and we had an outstanding time. I was a bit disappointed this time around, mostly due to the crowds, the limitations on excursions and the astronomical prices. At the end of our trip in 2008, I felt we had experienced a

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real adventure. This trip felt more like a visit to a theme park. However, I'm probably being a bit hypercritical. In any case, there were many enjoyable highlights, and the fact that I got to share experiences with good friends and family made it an especially great trip overall.

### August:

Coordinating a meet-up to see Ames this month was a bit of a logistical challenge, but Ariel and Bill agreed to meet me halfway, and we met in Bakersfield. We visited the county historical museum, had dinner at an overrated Basque restaurant and met up with Michael Salzle, who was finishing up his medical residency there, at a craft brewery. On my birthday, I flew to Wyoming and visited John and Christine, who have a second home there. We took an exciting ATV trek up an arduous mountain trail and I was impressed with myself after making it all the way up without falling, since this was far beyond my ATV riding skill level.



However, going back down was a different matter: I drove into a ditch and flew off. I suffered a lot of bruises in different places, but the most significant was a large hematoma on my upper right thigh. The ATV fall came back to haunt me a few days later when I traveled with Megan, Adrian, and Aurora to Japan for another Celebrity cruise.



We were joined on the Japan cruise by Michelle Rimlinger, Adrian's friend Spencer and his girlfriend Julia. I have generally stopped trying to plan every moment of a trip and for this trip I did no planning other than the initial flights, hotels and cruise ship bookings. I'd been to Japan before and there were only a handful of "must do" activities for me. Adrian's



friend, Spencer, is partly of Japanese descent, and some of his family had perished in Hiroshima in WWII. He prepared a detailed itinerary on Excel spreadsheets that put the trip calendars I used to prepare to shame. The weather in Japan was oppressively hot and humid, which I had not expected and my right leg hurt from the ATV accident while walking and standing, but the pain abated as the trip progressed.

We walked 13 miles on the first day's excursions and at night my leg was swollen and itching. I ended up seeing the cruise ship's doctor, whose name was Dr. Billie, for a 10-day course of antibiotics, which costed me \$300. The cruise ship made port in Kobe, Osaka/Kyoto, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Kagoshima and Jeju Island, South Korea.



After the cruise, we spent three days in Tokyo, one of which was spent at DisneySea. It's fascinating to note that my generation, so called "Boomers," gave birth and raised Millennials and GenZ. Apparently, the more recent offshoots have evolved to where they require a double espresso mochi chocolate latte to fuel any movement in excess of 1500 yards. I would also comment about the absurdity of grown adults hunting for Pokemon on their cell phones while touring Tokyo, except for the fact that on September 15<sup>th</sup>, while waiting at the airport for our return flight from Tokyo, I downloaded the "Pokemon Go" app

to my phone to see what the fuss was all about. I got some initial help and instruction from Michelle and Adrian and have been playing this ridiculous, but addictive game for three months now... “got to catch them all.”

### September:

We hosted Aurora’s 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday party six days after returning from Tokyo, and Ariel came down with Ames. Two days after that, I had a stent surgically inserted in my right kidney to



abate scarring in preparation for the big surgery in case I lost my left kidney. This was to ensure the right one would be operating without obstruction. The big surgeries were on September 30<sup>th</sup>. Two separate surgeons operated on me; one removed the kidney tumor and another my gallbladder and appendix. The last 2 surgeries went without a hitch. The renal oncology surgeon was able to remove only 40% of my left kidney, leaving me with 1.6 kidneys when healed. While the pathology confirmed the tumor was cancerous, the margins were clear and all signs are that I’m currently cancer free. Complication arose post-op: I ran a consistent low-grade fever, and some small amount of urine was leaking from the

reconstructed kidney. The renal surgeon went back in and installed a stent and catheter in my left kidney to direct all urine out of the bladder. After 11 days in the hospital, I was finally discharged

### October:

I spent most of the month in hospitals. Ariel and Ames were here the first few days of October after the initial surgeries. A few days after my discharge from Hoag in Newport Beach, I ended up going to the ER at Hoag Hospital Irvine and being admitted for another five days after my blood pressure had dropped precipitously and my white blood cell count had shot up. My body had apparently become resistant to many antibiotics; I was discharged again, but within a week was back in the hospital. This time, the doctors decided I had been off blood thinners too long, and I had another surgery to remove the blood clots from my right leg. They took out the IVC filter. I was very anemic after the surgery and they gave me a blood transfusion. I was still hospitalized on Halloween.



### November:

I left the hospital, hopefully for the last time, the first week of November. Ariel and Ames had come down to see me, and Ariel and Adrian started the process of putting up the Christmas trees. I was extremely weak after I made it out of the hospital. I felt really old and they even gave me a walker. The first few days it was hard to get up from bed or the recliner, but then was able to do more and more each day, and within a week was working on tree decorations. After 8 ½ years, I replaced my Hyundai Genesis with a Kia Telluride SUV, so the current entire California Llorentes contingent can travel in one vehicle, at least until the next franchise expansion. The SoCal Llorentes did Thanksgiving at home, while the NorCal offshoot went to Boston and celebrated with Bill’s family there.

## December:



I drove to NorCal for Ames' first birthday celebration the weekend of December 7<sup>th</sup>. Ariel had arranged a party at a local park that seemed like a near perfect venue for such events. I'm currently getting ready for our annual "Noche Buena" party which will be on December 22<sup>nd</sup>, since Christmas Eve falls on a Tuesday. Got some lab results last Friday. I'm still anemic, but improving. Most numbers back in normal range, but most importantly, while not at 100%, I'm feeling pretty good overall.

\* \* \*

The kids continue to do well:

- (i) After 10 years at Alation, Bill started a new job at Anyscale, an AI infrastructure startup. He's continuing the Llorente "A" tradition with the companies he works for. He's excited to help build another company in an emerging field.
- (ii) Megan continued her studies in the Nurse Practitioner's program at UCLA. She anticipates graduating in June of 2025.
- (iii) Ariel provides full-time childcare for Ames, but still works remotely and part-time for the Hayward Public Library and Seek Collective. She and Ames go everywhere together!
- (iv) The investor group that funded Adrian's employer, Valta Energy, terminated the entire department ten days ago. However, Adrian was offered a position at the parent company with a slightly higher salary and a signing bonus. He has some trepidation since his role has a less prestigious title and he will have to effectively do more work to fill the gap created by the departure of members of his team that were not offered positions.

Aurora is 26 months old now. She walks and talks now. Boy, does she talk...and talk. Physically, she is petite and in the lowest 10% of toddlers her age, but her conceptual reasoning and speaking abilities are well advanced, and she's utterly cute when she tries to tell a story. She's relatively good natured, but does manifest some "terrible twos" tantrums on occasion.

Ames had a productive first year: he traveled to 8 states and one foreign country (Canada). He also went on his first cruise and has 6 teeth now. Most significantly, he got to see grandpa at least once every month. Still not walking, but he can crawl around at nearly warp speed. He's a big boy in height and weight (top 10%) and a bundle of energy. He's extremely happy and go lucky, unless he's strapped to a car seat.

Once again, our best wishes for an awesome Christmas and fabulous New Year!!!

Love,  
Alex J. Llorente

Dec-17-2024