

2021 Holiday Greetings from Laurel and Brian

This year it's been tough for us to honestly answer the oft-heard question from store employees, "How're you doing?" It just seems like an asterisk should accompany our usual reply, "Fine, and you?" But that's what a Christmas Letter is for! Adding the asterisk: Fine*

* Fine, aside from the ice storm in February that decimated many of the trees on our property and left us without power for 12 days. On the bright side, we came to love our Honda generator, which led to Brian becoming friends with the guys at the nearest gas station where he'd fill up several five gallon cans every couple of days.

* Fine, if you don't count the record-breaking NW heat wave in June when Salem hit 117 degrees. On the bright side, we came to love our heat pump's air conditioning. Plus, even though this year Oregon experienced the damaging ice storm, deadly heat wave, and massive wildfires, we haven't had a plague of locusts yet. (Probably coming in 2022).

* Fine, notwithstanding Brian needing a hernia operation in May. On the bright side, the anesthesiologist looked at his medical record and said, "Hey, you're in good health." That got the reply, "Unless you count sitting in Salem Hospital about to be operated on." Then In October, Brian got a glaucoma diagnosis from his eye doctor. The chance of going blind is very low, but on the bright side, he'd get great handicapped parking spots if that happened. Downside is, he wouldn't be able to drive.

* Fine, leaving aside our dog, Mooka, developing a strong aversion to having her nails trimmed. Laurel is patiently working to desensitize Mooka's PTSD after apparently having a painful nail trimming experience by a groomer or vet assistant. On the bright side, at the moment we've in good shape if our can opener breaks, since Mooka's nails are long and sharp enough to cut through metal.

* Fine, despite our anxiety about the ever-increasing likelihood of our nation's democracy being overturned in 2022 or 2024 by the Trump-addled Republican Party's schemes to overturn Democratic victories in the next elections, aided and abetted by a complicit Supreme Court. On the bright side... um, we can't think of one.

We don't want to leave the impression that 2021 has been all bad news for us, though. This year we finally escaped the hell of 7 Mbps CenturyLink DSL, thanks to being accepted as beta testers for the SpaceX Starlink satellite internet. Now we've got 50-150 Mbps speed, which enables us to enjoy the finer things of life — like obsessively streaming all three seasons of Succession without the dreaded spinning ball of a crappy internet connection.

Laurel continues to manage her Salem Atheists Group, otherwise known in religious circles as the Godless Heathen Fast Road to Hell Group. They meet every Sunday to discuss how to live free of superstition and enjoy some food and drink.

Brian's Tai Chi class has returned to meeting indoors, albeit with everybody wearing a mask. This is his 17th year of learning Tai Chi. A nice thing about Tai Chi is that traditionally you can be 80 or older and still be highly respected in this martial art, which definitely isn't the case with the Ultimate Fighting Championship.

We continue to enjoy living on our ten acres in rural south Salem. It's tough to think of moving, since nature is such a good friend in these Covid times. We recently started getting together indoors with vaccinated friends at our home, though, which feels *great*.