

A Christmas Cobra

Volume 37

Now I've got a machine gun. Ho ho ho.

December 22, 2002

The Cobra's Notes...

The world is changed. I feel it in the water. I feel it in the earth. I smell it in the air.

But not much is happening at the temp site, and writing this at least sounds like work. Currently, that site is CD BancSoftware and the particulars of the job are too boring to relate. On the upside, it is Very close to my (new, see address on page 6) house and my cousin J. Verne works here. When I heard his job description, I almost wept. Even after temping for close to ten months I am amazed at what people will do for money. Aw, crap, I'll probably get nothing but cater waitering jobs from now until the new year for that remark. On the upside, they usually have pumpkin cheesecake at those affairs, so bring 'em on!

I am gratified to report an influx of news from friends getting jobs rather than being laid off from them. Here's hoping one of them rises to such prominence that they can afford to hire me to answer their phones and goof around. I'm looking at you, Pat. The reason is because Pat has started her own business making "Auto Rosaries" (see her website www.autorosary.com). When I first saw the prototype on her steering wheel, I thought it was some sort of abacus. Faithful Catholics could use the Auto Rosary to get prayer credit during ads, songs they don't like, or boring stories on NPR. Even non-Catholics might want to pray for sinners who do not turn off their turn signals over miles of highway rather than hurl insults or gunfire at them. You can move beads across the wire with the finger of your choice. You could buy two and give one as a Christmas gift.

Speaking of which, it is that joyous season of Christmas card and newsletters. Though I haven't received any myself, I understand that it is a crowded market and appreciate your patronage, provided you've made it this far into the text. If not, I say Up Yours!

Joik only, you know I love you Cobra non-readers.

Enjoy Volume 37, and see you on page six.



Sharon C. McGovern
Editor/Publisher/Cobra-in-Chief



That Dog

"Where is Partick?"

"He and Sophia went to get the dog."

"*&%\$#!."

But first a little background.

I am allergic to dogs; actually, to all animals with fur. Or feathers. Or scales. After some waxing and waning of the non-human population in our house, we had finally reached a comfortable pet level. The love birds, Sid and Nancy, had returned to Sophia's school and Partick's nasty iguana Adrian had finally passed away. All we had left were a couple of betas and a handful of snails. And life was good.

Then one day, Partick and Soph bought two "hairless" rats. They (not the rats) looked at me with their big brown eyes, and said they would return the rats if I insisted, but they promised to keep them on the porch and clean the cage (the late Adrian's terrarium) every week and the rats didn't have any hair and oh please. I relented and the porch became a toxic zone because those rats are not as hairless as advertised. Before long, they were joined by the hirsute "blue" rat, which they reasoned was no big deal as I was hardly ever on the porch these days. (cont. on page 4)

UNTIL US A CLUB IS BORN

Before she and Sophia left for church, Mom stood at the open front door and said, "Now remember, we'll be back at about twelve-thirty to go see the nativities."

Partick sat on the futon and stared intently into middle distance for a good twenty seconds. "That's today?"



"Yes! Today! You can't say you're surprised because I've been talking about it for..." Mom was interrupted by Partick's giggles.

Something like this happens nearly every weekend in my house. Partly because Partick really does forget dates and other ephemera that might threaten the place in his memory of a Hooters lyric he heard in the sixth grade. You can almost watch him delete recently acquired information during conversations, and not only with Mom, either. But that tendency is re-enforced by the laughs he gets at Mom's outrage—the ultimate pellet bar of family relationships.

So off they went to church, Mom and Soph, while Partick and I lounged and drank coffee and watched *An American Werewolf in London* until they returned. Then and only then we dragged our carcasses off the futon and made ourselves presentable enough to visit the Mormon church which housed an ever swelling collection of nativities.

Growing up, I did plenty of time in the big houses of worship, but in recent years my patronage has been limited to family funerals. That's

been alright. There is comfort to be had in the familiar, unlovely carpets and pews, and chapel floor plans from the last thirty years or so are so standardized that restrooms can be found with ease. And the buildings' regular inhabitants are reflexively generous and kind—of course they will bring a casserole or bag of chips, and set up the Relief Society room by noon. The mourners take refreshment then leave knowing the chamber will be put right by these folks who stand just outside the doorway with one hand on a vacuum cleaner switch, tapping their feet.

The chapel we visited in Mesa was different than those edifices, though, having been built before ward and stake center blueprints were divinely inspired and rigorously standardized. It has high, pretty arches, a courtyard, and is whitewashed throughout. I have no idea where the restrooms might be. In fact, you'd be hard pressed to identify the structure as a Mormon establishment if it weren't for the men in dark suits and women in fluffy dresses drinking bottled water whilst loitering near their SUVs—LDS tailgate party in full swing.

Also, the big nativities outside the building were a giveaway that this was the place. There were three or four just on the lawn, including one in wrought iron in which the Baby Jesus looked like Richard Nixon in profile. We got a few decent snickers in at that, which made Mom hiss, and no doubt wonder why she put herself through this sort of thing for the benefit of her infidel offspring. Which compels me to state I have no beef with Christianity in general or Mormonism in particular. I like Christmas, and welcome chances to contemplate a signal event in world religion and culture. And I don't know whether two millennia have fatigued the concept of the nativity, or (more likely) if there always is and has been a contingent of humans for whom the most devout expression ends up kitsch, no matter what. But let me tell you this, some of those nativities were out there.



That could be why they were so heavily guarded.

I don't know what may have happened in years past to have brought it on, but the ratio of supervisors (cont. on page 5)

A Question of Protocol

My manners aren't always the best, though I know enough to reflect on lots of situations and think I could have/ should have done better. Part of the problem is that I find some uncomfortable situations and chronically (or even periodically) socially maladroit people irresistible. Especially if I am the target, as I find slander much easier to take than compliments. For instance, ask me sometime to tell the tale of How Lauren Called Me Large, or of the Strange Journeys of the Collages I Gave My Mom.

Even better (I guess) are the slings and arrows flung at me by a friend of the Amazing Amy's. I think his name is Tim, but even if it's not, I'm sticking with Tim. I met him first as part of a small group celebrating Amy's birthday. We were headed to this joint in North Scottsdale called Barcelona, and everybody looked great except for me because I didn't realize what a swank joint Barcelona was. Amy, for instance, sported a black feather boa that looked fabulous in a completely non-ironic way. I was wearing a long floral print skirt, brown sweater, and my second best black flats (which at the time were the ones John's dog ripped the insole out of). Still, one of Amy's guests was good enough say I resembled one of the *Titanic* cast, though she couldn't recall the name.

Tim jumped in. "Was it Kathy Bates? Yes, I see it—I will call you Kathy Bates tonight."

Soon after when he learned I had seen several recent movie releases, he asked if I was some sort of nerd (sure, but most people keep it to themselves). Then he declared the gloves were coming off. For the life of me, I couldn't think what I had done to prompt a declaration of war. But whatever. He was just too gooney of demeanor to draw blood, sweat, or tears.

The next time he turned up was at a swinging affair at Michael and Bob's house, though we didn't speak. In fact, I had forgotten he was even there until the next time we met at a swinging affair hosted by Amy and Guy. So he reminded me.

"Remember?" he said. "You had just been fired. Did you ever find a job or are you still sucking off the state?"

There was more, but you get the point. Unfortunately, I was just too flabbergasted to throw out any witty rejoinders. Not that this is my strength, anyway. A friend of my cousin's, upon reading an old *Cobra's Nose*, remarked that based upon personal experience she would never have dreamed I was witty.

Still, I couldn't help asking Amy what was up with this guy. She said, "That's just how he is. One time, my friends were using colorful language describing the heat and he told them they'd better get used to it as they were all going to hell. They laughed because, being normal, they assumed he was being figurative; but really he thinks of hell as being an actual place

and that they were going there."

I assume he has virtues, because with the possible exception of your friend and cobra, Amy has excellent taste in people and an enormous circle of friends. And I will seek him out in the future to see what will come out of his mouth next.

No, my question today is about an odd farewell ritual that occurs at my temp job. You know, usually, when somebody leaves, they say "bye!" or "see you tomorrow," or something along those lines, to which you reply in similar language. And that's it. With this person, the exchange is more like:

"Goodnight!" (her)
"Goodnight!" (me)
"See you tomorrow!"
"Okay, drive safe!"
"I will! You too!"
"Alright! Ahhh...have a good night!"
"Pleasant dreams!"

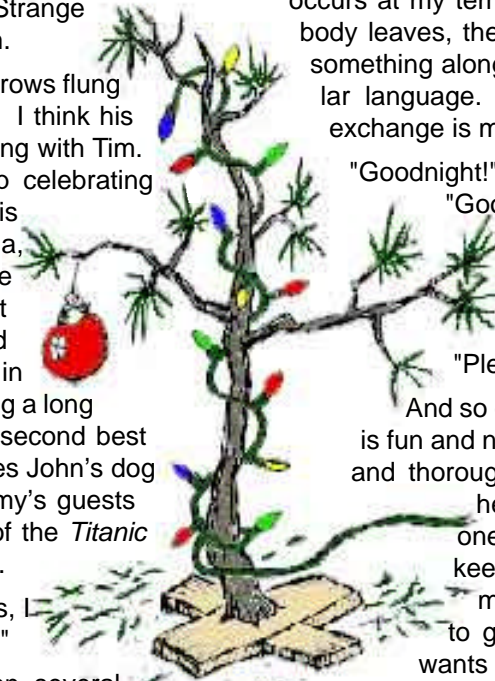
And so on. And on. Now I like this person. She is fun and nice. She listens attentively to questions, and thoroughly explicates answers. I have never heard her utter a cross word. But this one-upsmanship is weird. If nothing else, it keeps her from leaving as quickly as she might—I, after all have an hour and a half to go no matter what I say or don't. She wants the last courtesy? Fine! But it seems rude to just leave it hanging there, unanswered. A couple of nights ago, she said, "Goodnight." I said, "Goodnight." Then she said, "Have a pleasant evening." I didn't say anything and felt positively curt.

If any of you, and I realize this might be a stretch, have any experience or advice regarding the overpolite, please let me know.

The Pat Principle

There was a comedian—can't recall the name—who said that if you were going to have kids, you'd better have them young. Otherwise, you and your mate develop such a backlog of bad associations that you'd never be able to name your child. This isn't much of a problem in my life and likely won't be, but there are good camps and bad camps of names. Heathers, for example, are trouble. All of them. There is a reason that movie was named what it was.

Pats and Patricks, however, are wonderful creatures. I currently have about four of them in my circle and they are all swell. When I go on a temp assignment and **(cont. on page 6)**



More about that Ridiculous Animal

(cont. from page 1) That rat was followed by a tank of lizards and a couple of tortoises. That wasn't so bad, but this, this dog is a whole different ball of animal dander, and one I had specifically declared off limits in conversations such as these:

Partick: These people at work want to give me a dog.

Sharon: Don't get a dog.

Partick: It's just adorable!

Sharon: Don't get a dog.

Partick: You'll just love him!

Sharon: DON'T GET A DOG.

Or, when we were looking for a new place to live:

Sharon: This one has three bedrooms, two baths, and a carport.

Partick: Do they allow dogs?

Sharon: Don't get a dog.

Somehow, I had failed to communicate.

I was at the new place unpacking when Partick, Sophie, and Peggy drove up with an Italian Greyhound and a big hamper of its toys. If you're not sure what an Italian Greyhound looks like, but have seen Santa's Little Helper from *The Simpsons* or Dobby from *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, that's close enough. "Mojo," as it was newly christened, was dainty and frail and quivering up a storm, but he could stand up like a little Rory Calhoun and I had to admit that was sort of neat. We agreed that this would be an outside dog, and I began to cool down a bit.

About an hour later, in a desperate bid to gain indoor dog status, Mojo dashed in front of a moving car and had to be whisked away to the after hours animal hospital. It heard us talking.

At this point, you might think I am mean and nasty and horrible, and you might be right. But let me tell you something: Mojo is the biggest faker God put on this earth. True, it came home with some very authentic looking stitches in its back left leg, but I saw it, saw it standing up on its hind legs like a little Rory Calhoun the very night he returned from getting them. Naturally, it couldn't be expected to endure the brutal central Arizona night after that ordeal, and Partick installed him in his bedroom.

For the next couple of weeks, Mojo would limp around the house just as often as he remembered to, and would occasionally YIPE to let me know its injury was serious. I was getting all the YIPES. I would let it in the house and it would YIPE as it entered. I thought maybe it hit its hip on the way in, but no it didn't. It would whine and scratch, then YIPE when I opened the door to tell it to knock it off. I wouldn't even get to the knock it off part, it would just go



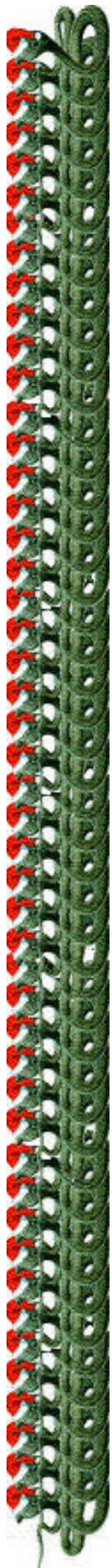
ahead and YIPE and skid across the porch as if I had given it a good solid kick before I so much as drew a breath. "All right then," I'd say, then wonder if Mojo was actually plotting to expose me as a villainess on that cop show on Animal Planet. I've seen it watching the program with Partick and Soph.

Long after the stitches came out, I kept getting the YIPES. To everybody else, Mojo was charm incarnate. Even the vet was taken in ("All the other Italian Greyhounds bite me!" she said). The dog roamed freely in the house. I coughed and wheezed and shut myself in my room.

At some point, Partick made the mistake of teaching Mojo something. Who knows what—to get one of its toys or something. The important thing is, the trick drove potty training right out of its tiny brain. But it was not my problem. Allergens? Yes. Urine stains? Nope. Nope, nope! Then one memorable Saturday, I was in my bedroom listening to a Helen Reddy cd with Soph when we heard the sounds of a dog being tortured. Not that I believed for a second that a dog was actually being tortured. For one thing, Partick just doesn't torture dogs. But more important, I was onto Mojo and his cheap melodrama. Turns out, Mojo had committed an indiscretion the carpet and Partick was evicting him.

Since that time, very few YIPES have been directed at me, but Partick's bottle of pet stain remover is nearly empty and the effect of Mojo's whines and screams is wearing him thin. I have to admit I think less of our neighbors for not reporting us to the ASPCA. Or maybe they did, but as soon as the operator heard the words "Italian Greyhound" told the caller to relax, that's just what the breed is like. I don't actually care as I am no longer the target of this Machiavellian pet. I think we will get along fine.

Better once he moves outside.



(cont. from page 2) to viewers was about 1:2.5, and they were a serious impediment to our F-U-N fun. Not that anybody in our group had any large, or small, scale vandalism planned, but it seemed every time one of us was building up to a full throated chortle or wisecrack, a man in dark suit and tie or woman in lace collar would step forward and intone, "Nice, isn't it?"

I didn't have the guts to say, "No—it's weird. Why would somebody depict the nativity on a rug? And don't tell me it's a 'tapestry,' because it's laying right there on the floor. Though I know full well you'd go nuts if I wiped my feet on it." Maybe a third of the way through, I decided enough was enough, and asked Mom, "At what point are we allowed to consider these things blasphemous?"

She considered for a moment, then pointed to a display which depicted the Holy Family and their attendants (angels included) as little stuffed bears. "Right about there."

Lest you think the bear nativity was an aberration, let me tell you there were at least three that depicted the Holy Family as the family Ursidae. There were also nativities made of penguins, of wooden kitchen spoons, of bowling pins. We passed one made of beeswax, and I joked that the only thing less useful would be a nativity made of beeswax with wicks coming out of the figures, because what sort of apostate would create/buy/burn a candle in the shape of Mary or Jesus? heh heh. Then we passed a nativity made of beeswax...and each figure sprouted a wick.

To be fair, many of the nativities, and there were hundreds in the collection, were tasteful and interesting. I have no problem whatsoever with, say, a Pueblo or Indonesian interpretation, complete with native items like coconuts. On the other hand, when angels are caught wearing glasses—and not fashionable ones, either—well, that just flies in the face of what an angel is. And I was more than a little surprised that Mom, who had objected so vociferously when Partick and I suggested "seraphim" when Mad Lib was looking for an animal ("Seraphim are not animals!"), could sanction the event. Toward the end, however, she did loosen up enough to put a flip "oy to the world" in the mouth of a particularly weary looking Joseph, but by that time, we had already had another disturbing encounter.

Growing up, there was a family in our ward famous for two things: being intellectual, and not owning a TV. Surely, the two were connected, because when you take away all those television hours, you are left with plenty of time to do homework, read books, and become either an awkward introvert or insufferable snob, depending upon the hour. In the family was a daughter, one year younger than me in age, light years ahead in everything else. She was even a Miss Mesa runner-up. But let the record reflect, she totally ripped off my story for the National Scholastic competition in high school, but mine ("Chihuahua Television Blues") was way better.

Well, her parents were on the nativity security detail. I didn't realize who they were for a while, all I knew is that they were paying me an unusual amount of attention though I wasn't doing anything threatening to the display at all. Mom clued me in and I scrambled for names and details. Their younger daughter, Amy, rescued a document for me from a bent four inch floppy disc one time at university tech support (yes, I really am that old). That I remembered, except for her name. And the older sister, the plagiarist, is now a professor of communications at BYU. Presumably she's getting academic credit for catching up on all those Gilligan's Island episodes that were withheld from her in childhood.

Perhaps I have let a note of bitterness creep into my prose? Yeah, but I've never quite known how to deal with these people in person so distain in absentia seems sort of reasonable. I asked Mom if she knew what I meant, and she said, yes—they seem to have practiced friendliness for so many years that now they can genuinely fake the affect. They aren't hiding an unfriendly aspect because that side has been ruthlessly eliminated from their psyches. What remains is nice, but strange.

Which makes them the perfect human counterparts to the nativity display. They contentiously stamped out alienating characteristics from their personalities and as a result became, well, alien. Likewise, the perpetrators of the exhibit were so on guard against blatant sex-drugs-rock n' roll offenses that weird indignities like portraying the Son of God as an animal or kitchen tool slipped right on through. If Jesus as a bowling pin were featured on *South Park* the Relief Society would go nuts. Featured in the Cultural Hall, the same blasphemy was honored and presented for the benefit of the Relief Society. Heck, the thing may well have been created in the Cultural Hall by the Relief Society.

So remember this season, when you hear pious laments about godless capitalists plotting to take the Christ out of merry Christmas, that some of complainers may already have beat them to it. And replaced Him with a penguin. You may miss the Christ, but will get double the merry.



Yep, that's Chocolate



Yep, those are Candles

(cont. from page 3) see a Pat or Patrick in the employee lists I am warmed by the sight. There is one where I'm working now, and so far the job has gone swimmingly. At the last place, there was a "Ptryk." Close enough! I thought, and looked forward to a lovely, lovely working relationship.

Then I saw him and noted he had a slick prettiness to him that was so like Muffin I shuddered. Still, I was thinking this was a Patrick and Pats and Patricks tend to be really, really good looking, though usually not in such a girly way. Alas, he also had Muffin's ingratiating manner that Pats and Patricks are typically too self-possessed to bother with.

Still, I chose to be optimistic, and remained upbeat through the first dozen or so meetings and e-mails from Ptryk, in which with breezy politesse he tried to modify my behavior. "Please stop screwing up," they said in essence, "for you are making

my life really difficult." The thing is, he insisted his cases be handled differently than every other consultant. The differences were not consistent, however, so I was forever in the wrong and his "formatting" was forever at risk. Furthermore, since I became infected with Ptryk's paranoia about his formatting, I became protective of the other consultants' formatting as well and ended up mishandling everybody's cases.

And what is formatting? Something about e-mails being infested with a bunch of code. When the consultants' supervisor asked why I suddenly was e-mailing everybody instead of just altering case files, I tried to paraphrase the complaints I had been getting from you know who. She told me to knock it off, then turned on her heel sputtering the words "Ptryk" and "formatting."

I never did figure out how to satisfactorily handle Ptryk's calls, though I did become immune to the limp sorrow and fey outrage with which he responded to my many errors. And I added a big fat amendment to the Pat/ Patrick Principle: they will be cool unless they spell their names in a precious way—like with a y—in which case they are likely colossal ninnies and should be shunned forever. Beware.

End Nose...

So, here it is--the end of 2002. And what a year it's been! I've tried to think of the usual nice things to say about it. For instance, coming up with a top ten movie list. The result is as follows:

**Lilo & Stitch*

True, this is the season for the big holiday releases, and I may as well pop *Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring* onto the list as I saw it after I created last year's list and was captivated. After a forced march through *The Hobbit* in eighth grade, happily wrote off the entire fantasy genre and assumed that of all varieties of geek in the world, a LOTR geek is one I would never be. But the filmmakers sweated the annoying details so the audience doesn't have to read page after page about large hairy feet, and can pretend that these are not characters likely to burst into song at any given moment. And can relate to the story in any way you prefer. For example, the Amazing Amy, whom I didn't expect to like it, said, "Are you kidding? It's all about *jewelry!*"

Because this is the end of the year I and I don't want to admit to my real favorite part, I choose as my favorite moment in the film the point when Frodo, considering all that was lost and all that was at risk, wished "none of this had ever happened." His friend tells him, "So do all who live to see such times." It's the perfect blend of sympathy and what are you going to do? So here comes 2003 with its promise of loss and disruption and sorrow, commercials with Carrot Top in them. Karmic quirks, like my former boss fretting about the unfairness and uncertainty of her future with Cosmodemonic. You'd have to have a heart of stone not to laugh yourself sick over something like that.



Which is to say, since you can't stop it, enjoy the trip as you twirl, twirl, twirl into the future.

Best of luck to Bryce and Jennifer. See you next year.



SANTA'S LEGION