



The Roland Merullo Newsletter

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December 2016



A note from Roland ...

Dear Friends and Readers:

Happy December.

I'm a city kid by birth and still love the grit and variety of urban life, but I've lived in the countryside of Western Massachusetts for the past 30 years or so, and I enjoy the quiet here, too, and the proximity of the natural world. Our house - half of which Amanda and I built with our own hands, and with the help of generous friends - is set back a hundred feet or so from a paved two-lane road that meanders through a valley with densely wooded hills to either side. The road is marked by a double-yellow line, speed limit between 25-40 mph, and if you follow it south for a few miles you end up in a small, picturesque town, just a bend in the highway, really, with a bank, a library, a couple of restaurants, a liquor store, a general store, a food market, a café, a pharmacy/hardware, a gas station/car repair, grammar school, regional bus stop - in other words, just about everything you need on a daily basis.

I've driven this road - which has two different names, depending on which way you're traveling - probably thirty thousand times over the years. On or near or alongside it I've seen black bear and deer, coyote, mink, turkey, one moose, hawks in abundance, owls, turkey vultures, great blue heron, salamanders, mice, moles, voles, snakes of various description, dogs, cats, squirrels, chipmunks, fox, porcupine, possum, skunks, raccoons (including a rabid one), and a variety of human beings running, walking, arguing, speeding, cycling, four-wheeling, drunk, sober, old and young.

It's an interesting study. Most days my wife and I manage to take a walk along this road, usually for two miles. The walk south is flatter and, on windy winter days, colder, because it passes a stretch of open farmland. The walk north is much steeper, with more houses on it, and even now on that stretch you can see signs for Hillary, Bernie, and Trump.

On a regular basis, travelers use our road as their own personal garbage dump. On the grassy shoulder it's common to find empty beer cans, fast-food containers, plastic one-gulp whiskey bottles, along with other assorted detritus. These people seem to do their deed in the middle of the night, protected by darkness, because on all these walks I've never once seen someone toss litter out the window of a passing car. There must be some shame associated with littering.

Once a year, usually on Earth Day, we walk the road with plastic bags and do a clean-up, and we have a neighbor who does this on a weekly basis, not to collect the five-cent refund on the beer bottles (he picks up everything) but because he seems to hold to the notion that he is part of a community, that he bears some responsibility to the people with whom he shares this earth.

That's what is interesting to me: that, even in our small corner of the woods, we have people who litter and others who clean up; we have neighbors who feel it's perfectly fine to toss their garbage onto the shoulder of this beautiful road, and other neighbors who are willing to put on a pair of gloves, grab a plastic bag, and collect strangers' trash.

It seems to me a nice metaphor for life in general, and for America in these days in particular. There are always givers and takers, always have been. Always bullies and oppressed, always greedy and generous, always kind and mean, always the power-hungry and those who simply want to be left alone to tend their own gardens and nurture their own loved ones.



My response to the divisiveness and anger in America now is a very simple one: I want to be one of the givers. Not in a soupy, obvious way (*Look at how wonderful I am. I'm picking up someone else's litter, I'm buying a cup of coffee for a homeless person begging on the street, I'm letting someone in line in traffic, I'm leaving an extra generous tip!*) but in the way our nearest neighbor goes about picking up trash. He makes no show. He doesn't brag. Never mentions it, in fact, in a monthly newsletter or anywhere else. Just quietly does his thing.

There are always going to be people who drive up the road drunk in the middle of the night (a year ago one of them obliterated a neighbor's mailbox and, of course, did not stop to offer reparations), always going to be haters and killers and cheaters and liars and bullies. Always going to be people with massive amounts of money who want more and are willing to pass laws or promote business practices that increase their own wealth at the expense of less-well-off working people.

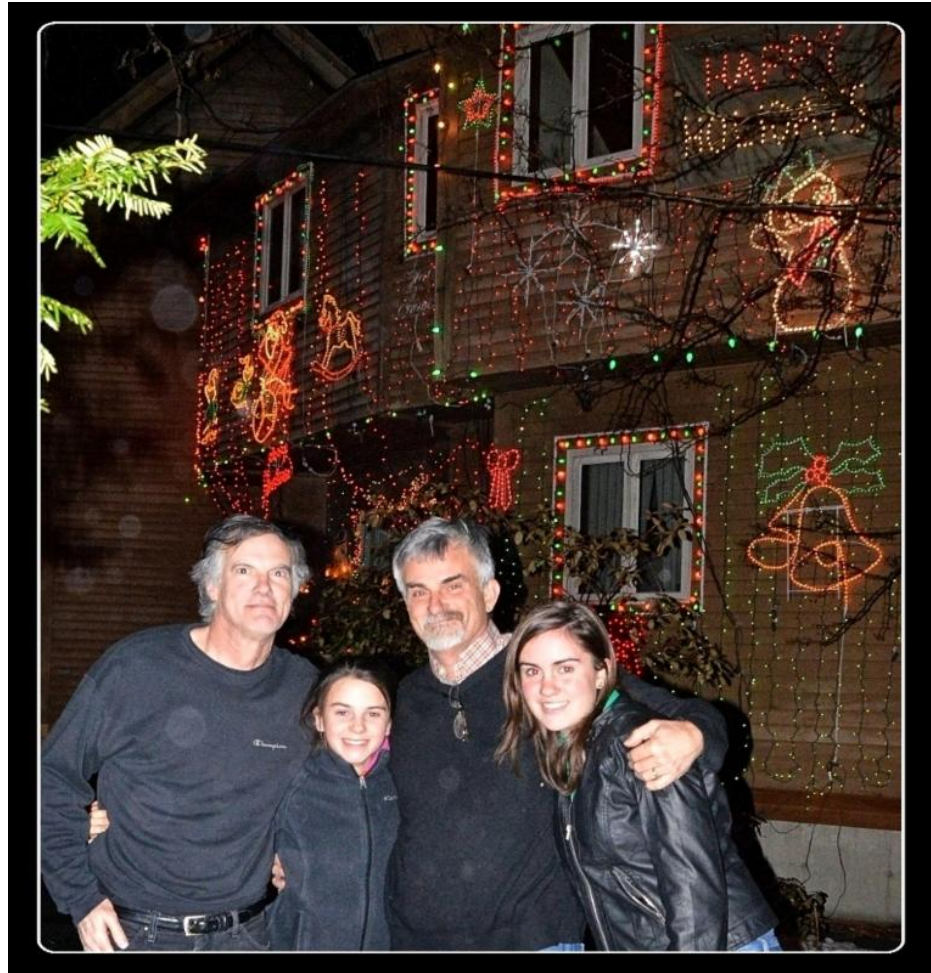
I can't do very much to change that.

But I can follow the example of a recent customer at the beer-and-wings place where one of our daughters works. There was an argument there one night last week, a menu error that led to a couple being overcharged. They got a refund and an apology, but that wasn't enough, apparently, so they stiffed the waitress, leaving no tip on a large bill. Another customer witnessed this, and after the couple walked out, he went over and left the waitress two twenties.

A *mensh*, I believe the correct term is in Yiddish, for a person like that. An example for all of us. A lesson in how to be.

Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, and if you celebrate Eid al Adha, Bodhi day, Kwanzaa or the winter solstice, or don't celebrate anything at all in this season, may you have peace and health in the coming year, and may whatever difficulties we face in 2017 bring out the courage and decency in all of us, whatever we drink, whatever sign we put out on our lawn, whatever we believe in and however we vote, and in whatever way we choose to walk down the winding road toward home.

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*Merry Christmas, Seasons Greetings
and Best Wishes for the New Year
from Peter, Juliana, Roland, Alexandra
and Amanda (who took the picture)*

(December 2013)

Behind the Book:
The Family Business: Memoirs of a Boston Private Eye



In addition to writing my own books, I do a very small amount of paid editing for other writers and the very occasional 'as-told-to' book or ghostwriting. I've done three of those, to be exact, two for the private publication of families, and one, John DiNatale's *The Family Business*, which was published by PFP.

(PFP, as many of you know, is the small publishing house owned by Peter Sarno, who puts together this monthly newsletter and who has brought out - along with the work of authors like Craig Nova, Suzanne Strempek Shea, Sterling Watson, and Askold Melnychuk - a number of my books: *Lunch with Buddha*, *Revere Beach Boulevard*, *The Return*, *Leaving Losapas*, *Revere Beach Elegy*, *Demons of the Blank Page*, *A Russian Requiem*, *Passion for Golf*, *The Italian Summer*, *Rinpoche's Remarkable Ten-Week*

Weight Loss Clinic and *The Ten Commandments of Golf Etiquette*.)

Here's the story behind *The Family Business*:

Years ago I received a nice fan letter from a man named Bob Jasse. Bob had grown up in my hometown of Revere, Massachusetts and then, after service as a Navy corpsman and years as an entrepreneur, bought an orchard in Walpole, New Hampshire, Alyson's Orchards, and settled there with his lovely wife, Susan. Bob and Susan were locally famous for hosting large dinner parties, to which they invited a group of guests that would perfectly define the word 'diversity'. Amanda and I were invited to one of these parties, and decided to attend. There began a friendship that lasted until Bob's death in 2008. There are still apple trees on his land that are named for our daughters.

Over the course of our friendship, Bob kept telling me I should meet this friend of his, John DiNatale, who owned a private detective agency in Boston. I must have heard the name DiNatale a dozen times before John and I finally connected by phone.

In that call, John said that his father, Phil DiNatale, had been a Boston police detective, and had been the man who figured out that Albert DiSalvo was the Boston Strangler. Phil had resigned from the force and gone on to start his own detective agency, a business that John and his brother Rich eventually inherited. John and I talked for a while, then met for a round of golf, and then, after several more conversations, decided that the story of the hunt for the Strangler and the many tales from the detective agency would make a good book. John commissioned me to write it and, after a long series of phone interviews, in-person conversations, and research, his story, *The Family Business*, saw the light of day.



John DiNatale and Roland
***The Family Business* Book Launch - 2013**

The book begins with the thirteen killings that haunted Greater Boston in the early 1960's, and gives a sense of Phil DiNatale's work as one member of the four-man Strangler Bureau - an elite group tasked with solving the crimes. It's an amazing tale of the nitty-gritty of police work, a year-long struggle that ended with a checkmark beside the name Albert DiSalvo in the journal Phil kept with meticulous attention to detail.

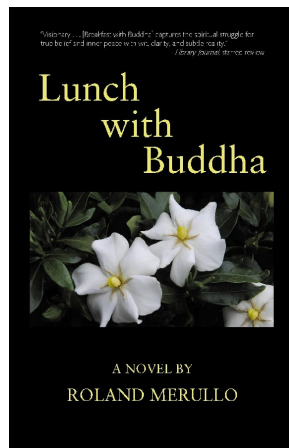
But *The Family Business* is, as the title suggests, more a story of the detective agency that was spawned by that first investigation. Phil, and then John and Rich, did everything from finding missing children to going undercover to expose the sale of illegally made Hummels, from freeing people from religious cults to tracking cheating husbands.

More than just a case-by-case account, the book delves into the personal lives of the DiNatale family members, the death of John's parents, moments of great tragedy and deep love, all of it circling around a profession that is nothing like what I'd imagined from watching TV series.

John and Rich are still at work, spending a bit more time on the computer now and a bit less time on the streets, but they're considered the best and best-known private-eye agency in New England, and this book gives readers a peek into their fascinating world.



Congratulations!



Congratulations to last month's winners of *Lunch with Buddha*.

Eilene from Tryon, North Carolina; Linda from Vancouver, Washington; Kaileen from Dorchester, Massachusetts; Katherine from Greenlawn, New York; Steve from Saline, Michigan and Rachel from Port Townsend, Washington won personally autographed copies of the book.

Thank you for your support of Roland Merullo and his work.

Enjoy!

Leaving Losapas AND The Ten Commandments of Golf Etiquette - This Month's Giveaway(s)



Leaving Losapas

Roland Merullo

In keeping with the spirit of the holidays, we will be giving away (2) personally autographed Merullo titles this month: *Leaving Losapas* and *The Ten Commandments of Golf Etiquette*.

The *Rocky Mountain News* called *Leaving Losapas*, Roland's first novel, "a wondrous, spiritually rich story...Merullo has created something of beauty...[that] will linger in your mind long after you close its pages."

And Tom Ward, of the *Sports Page Weekly* said *The Ten Commandments of Golf Etiquette* is "a fun, quick read..with colorful illustrations. This book offers a great refresher course for the golfers who may have forgotten some of the basic rules and customs associated with the game. If you're a newcomer to the game of golf,

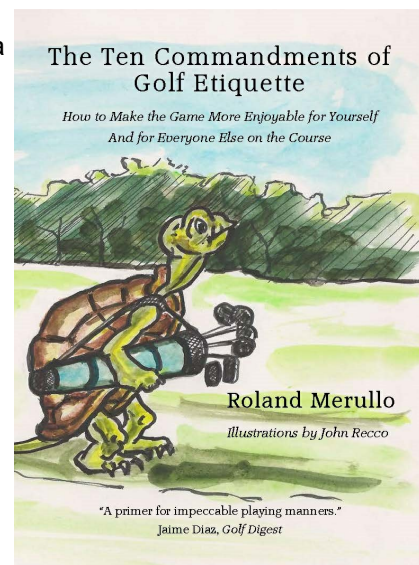
this should be required reading. Golf instructors and coaches should alert their junior players to the value of owning this book."

(5) lucky winners will receive a personally autographed copy of both books.

Good Luck!

To be eligible email:

publisher@pfppublishing.com





Roland working on the draft of his next novel.

(image used by permission)

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REMEMBRANCE OF DECEMBERS PAST

BOOKS

Woman impelled by spirituality

Vatican Waltz
By Roland Merullo
Crown, 304 pages, \$24

Reviewed by Elizabeth Eisenstadt Evans

In the acknowledgments at the end of this quietly but intensely ambitious novel, author Roland Merullo thanks his wife for her support over a period of years as he wrote and revised *Vatican Waltz*. She lifted his spirits, he writes, "in those hours, days, and weeks when it seemed I could never be able to tell this story the way I wanted to."

Edifying novel wonders: When does faith become extremism, delusion?

Readers who venture more than a few chapters into the novel will soon realize how formidable a task Merullo has set himself. In this increasingly skeptical and secularist age, he has dared to write a story of spiritual quest, set in a world that may seem not only archaic but frankly foreign to many of his readers.

Illustration by David Smith

vere, couldn't be more ordinary. A solitary soul with few friends and almost no experience of romance, Cynthia has settled into a life of routine: nursing school classes, subway rides, the occasional walk on the beach, a hot meal made by her taciturn Italian immigrant father, long chats with the parish priest.

But the writer soon introduces an element of mystery, one that reveals this young woman has a parallel, interior life as rich as her exterior life seems drab. In a walk on the beach, a mere mile or so from the unremarkable home she shares with her father, she stares out at the water and feels intimately connected to the ineffable inner workings of the universe.

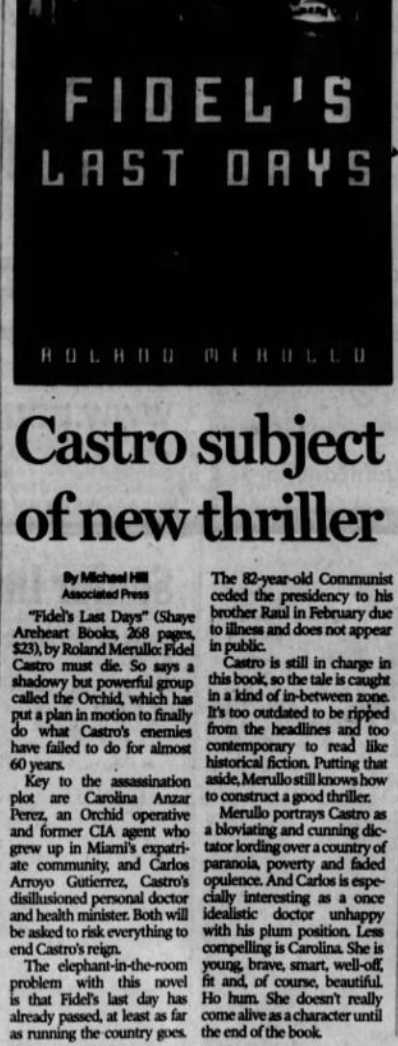
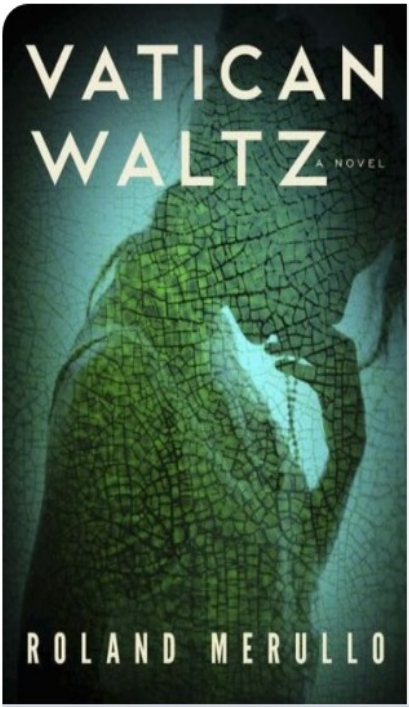
And for the first time in my life, that mystery took over the place, in my mind, where the man-shaped God had always stood. God — that word — could hold the shape of a person, but it could not possibly hold the vast, seething, spinning dimension of the world I was touching then. For the first time, no word stood between me and that mystery, no word, concept, or image.

Roland Merullo sets himself a formidable task. AMANDA S. MERULLO

It is possible for a young woman to board a plane for Italy (her first time in the air) and the Vatican without ever having gotten explicit encouragement to do so from church authorities.

In many ways, the strengths of *Vatican Waltz* are also its weaknesses. Many modern readers will find the insular world of the Roman Catholic hierarchy less fascinating than puzzling strange. Although it is wonderful to see someone attempt to describe the inner world of the mystic, there are reasons the inexpressible is not often expressed. There are times when the writer's language sings with the echoes of great Catholic writers like St. Teresa of

Vatican Waltz published December 2013



Fidel's Last Days published December 2008

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Some Lunch with Buddha Book Tour Stops
December 2012



Misty Valley Books - Chester, Vermont; *Bass Rocks* - Gloucester, MA;
Broadside Books - Northampton, MA; *Toad Hall* - Rockport, MA

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UPCOMING EVENTS



Sunday, January 8th - 6:30 P.M.

Lesley University
Marran Theater
34 Mellen St.
Cambridge, MA 02138

* Open to the Public *

Reading Groups / Book Clubs:

If your group would like a Reading Group Guide for one of Roland Merullo's books, please contact us and we will try to locate one for you.



"Most people wouldn't wantonly eat the hors d'oeuvres if they hadn't read the book."

(image used by permission)

December 15th:

Portland Library - Portland, TN - *Lunch with Buddha*

December 21st:

Morning Book Group - Exeter Library - Exeter, NH - *Dinner with Buddha*

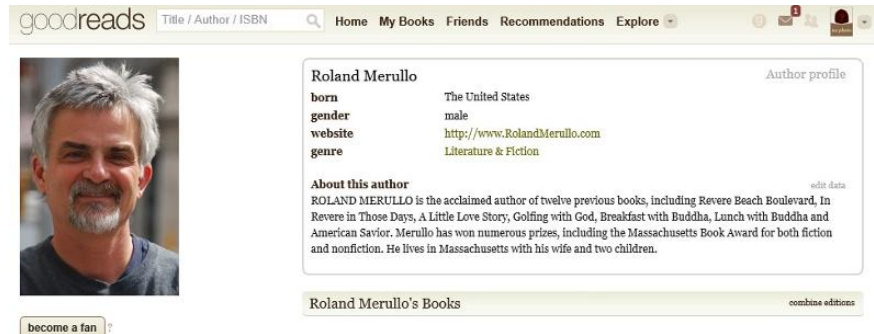
January 20th 2017:

Friday Morning Book Group - Lincoln, MA Library - *Golfing with God*

May 8th 2017:

St. Lawrence Church - Libertyville, IL - *Breakfast with Buddha*

Link to: [Roland Merullo's GoodReads Page](#)



The screenshot shows the GoodReads author profile for Roland Merullo. On the left is a portrait of a man with grey hair and a goatee. To the right, a box contains his bio: born in The United States, male, website at <http://www.RolandMerullo.com>, and genre Literature & Fiction. Below this is a paragraph about his work, mentioning books like *Revere Beach Boulevard* and *Golfing with God*, and his awards. At the bottom, there are links for 'Roland Merullo's Books' and 'become a fan'.

Workshops, etc:



Roland presents workshops and presentations in both corporate and academic settings.

If you think your organization may benefit from an event of this type, please contact: peter@pfppublishing.com

From the Archives



We have received several positive responses to prior newspaper articles and essays written by Roland that we have included in recent editions of the monthly newsletter.

As a result of these messages and requests, we've reserved a section for these pieces. We welcome your comments and look forward to hearing from you.

* * *

This section of the newsletter is normally reserved for essays from Roland's archive. However, this month, I chose a column from the archive of Barbara Anderson. Originally published in the *Salem News* and *Eagle Tribune* newspapers in December 2008 - I thought it would be more than appropriate.



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New book posits Jesus as presidential candidate

By last weekend, I'd mailed cards to family and friends I won't see to share greetings this Christmas. Their cards for me have already filled my card sleigh.

Some of those cards contain holiday newsletters. I love getting the 2008 news. Learned that my childhood friend, Michele, and her husband, who live in Maine, vacationed this year in a state with which I am presently fascinated because I'm reading James Michener's novel, *Alaska*.

It is a very long novel, which I started during the election when Sarah Palin made me realize how little I knew about her state - though I knew more than the geography-challenged liberals who laughed at the notion that Alaskans can see Russia from parts of their western shore.

It's a wonderful book, but I occasionally set aside the historical fiction to read something else, like Roland Merullo's *American Savior*. A media mention about a novel in which Jesus returns to run for president caught my attention, since I was looking for a gift for my son, the Obama voter. I had joked with him (in the tentative way that family members on different sides of the political spectrum "joke") about it

being my fault because I hadn't raised him in any organized religion; so now, at age 44, he is looking for a Messiah.

So I thought if I gave him *American Savior* for Christmas, he'd get my point.

Of course, I read it first, trying to keep it pristine except for underlining the part where a Navajo woman, Jesus' mother in his new life, tells the media that *"Respect for one's mother is a central tenet of Native American life, and it pleases me greatly that my son has remembered this..."*

The book is so good that I gave it to my partner, Chip, to read; and when he couldn't finish it in time for me to mail it to Nevada for Christmas, I ordered another copy for us.

Until I finish converting my home office back to a living room, there is no room for a real Christmas tree, but I've been happy over the last decade with the little toy tree that sits on my bookcase and flashes many colors. Next to it is the Bethlehem manger-in-a-bottle that a very patient uncle created when he took a break from building tiny ships.

Unlike my son, I was raised in an organized religion. To paraphrase the Jesuits, *"give me a child for seven years and she will celebrate a traditional Christmas forever."* So as I still believe, like Virginia, in Santa Claus, I also still believe in the baby Jesus, sing the carols, and give the proper holiday greeting - *"Merry Christmas!"*

The rest of the Catholic Church I left for various reasons, ranging from its prohibition on birth control to the ongoing problem of evil: How can a loving God allow the terrible things that happen?

Merullo's narrator, a *"more than slightly cynical young TV reporter"* named Russ, tells Jesus: *"If I was setting up the world, I'd set it up... no rape, no cancer, no kids hit by cars, no Alzheimer's, no war. That would be my idea of loving my created ones. Sorry if that sounds arrogant or something, but that's what I'd do..."*

And Jesus responds in a way that I found strangely satisfying.

This is not to say that Merullo has all the answers, but he comes up with enough of them to make his Messianic candidate, well, worth voting for.

I don't agree with Merullo's Jesus on everything, but I was surprised how closely His political philosophy resembled mine. Somehow I'd always thought that Jesus would be a liberal - though I suppose that evangelical Christians think He'd be at least a social conservative.

We know from the Bible that He didn't get involved with tax issues, aside from rendering unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, whatever that meant.

I look forward to discussing *American Savior* with my son; thanks to Merullo, there may soon be peace on my little piece of Earth, anyhow.

I gave my daughter-in-law the English-language Mexican cookbook that my Mexican mama sent to my mother when I was an exchange student in Mexico City; although we differ on illegal immigration, we share a love for Mexican friends and food.

This year my grandtwins were given my father's N-scale electric train set. When I learned that he had wanted one as a child, but was too poor then to celebrate Christmas; I sent him first the train with track and then, each year, pieces of a potential railroad village which he planned to build in the basement after his retirement. The year before he died I found a train store in Germany and added tiny Bavarian folk dancers and an oompah band.

My dad didn't get a chance to build the village, but his grandson and great-grandchildren are enjoying the train now, which I'm sure makes him happy there in heaven with Jesus, for whom I have a new appreciation thanks to *American Savior*.

Merry Christmas.

(Ms. Anderson, a longtime columnist, passed away in April 2016 after a battle with leukemia.)

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This newsletter is produced by Peter Hallet Sarno on behalf of AJAR Contemporaries, a division of PFP Publishing.
We do NOT share email information.

Roland Merullo's

Web site: www.rolandmerullo.com

FaceBook Page: www.facebook.com/rolandmerullo