

Nineteen Ninety-Nine

by Bill Menke, January 2, 2026

This is an edited version of a story that I included in a letter, dated June 7, 2021, to a university colleague who had suffered an injury.

In the summer of 2000, Dallas Abbott and I and our teenage children attended the Abbott Family Reunion in the resort town of Ouray, Colorado. It was my first big outing since my accident in Iceland, in which my colleague Bryndís Brandsdóttir and I accidentally drove a field vehicle off a cliff into Grímsvötn volcano.

Dallas' side of the family is pretty outdoorsy, and we did many hikes in the Rocky Mountains. I really enjoyed myself.

Around the dinner table one night, I made the happy comment that I was so glad to be up and around and recovered from last year's accident. Dallas looked at me a little oddly, and gently said, "Bill, that's not right".

My mind flashed over our activities of the past week. Though some of them had challenged my abilities, I thought that I had done very well. I was particularly proud of my performance on our Bear Creek day hike. Dallas had encouraged me to join the hiking party, saying that it was a beautiful hike along a sparkling mountain stream, and that it ended at some picturesque mining ruins. And all this was true—except that she had not mentioned that we traversed several miles of narrow ledge five-hundred feet above the stream, or that I was expected to supervise a gangling teenage cousin who kept tripping over his own feet. But the day went well and both my charge and I (and everybody else) had a terrific time. I looked across the dinner table at Dallas, puzzled.

Again gently, Dallas said, "Bill, your accident was *two* years ago".

And, of course, she was right. Bryndís and I fell on May 13, 1998 – a date now chiseled into my memory. It was now August, 2000. The whole year of 1999 had gone by with my being able to remember it, with my having done nothing.

Well, not really *nothing*. I know that I was going to the gym almost daily, working out on the weight machines and sitting in the Jacuzzi. I know that I went on numerous afternoon hikes in the woods near out home. I know that I must have taught several courses at the university, for I was not on leave. Consulting my CV, I see that I even wrote two scientific papers and contributed to two more.

But somehow, I had not noticed that a whole year had passed by.