

# THE JEFF'S 55 COUNTDOWN

February 19, 2026

**#1 – Collide by Howie Day** – This is a bit of a lifetime achievement award for this song. It's been in my countdown for 21 years with 10 of those years being inside the Top 5. Now it finally breaks through and reaches the top spot for the very first time. That's a well-deserved outcome for a song I passionately mouth the words to every time I hear it played.

I dedicate my favorite song of the last year to my favorite person, my bride, the Padme to my Annakin, Cindy McCormick Rogers. Early today, Cindy wished me a happy birthday on Facebook with a Darth Vader meme. I thought that was appropriate, because I can often act ruthless and failure-intolerant. But, much like Padme was with Annakin Skywalker, Cindy has never failed to see the good in me. It's been 30 years since we first spoke on a cold and snowy evening in Ottawa, Illinois. A year or so after that, I used a Jedi mind trick to make her mine for life, and that had made my life complete. The Jeff's 55 Countdown is complete with this link to the video for this song:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ca9ub9rpNK4>

**#2 – What Goes Around... Comes Around by Justin Timberlake** – A seven-year run at the top of the countdown ended three years ago for this song with a drop to number 2. The following year it dropped to four, but some positive momentum was regained last year with a move to number 3. This year it moves up one more spot. This 2006 classic now stands at the precipice of countdown history with a chance to perhaps regain the top spot next year.

I dedicate this one to the late Catherine O'Hara. I love a good "what goes around, comes around" story, so I absolutely love O'Hara's sitcom, *Schitt's Creek*. It's the story of a wealthy family that owned a chain of video rental stores and ultimately ended up on the wrong side of Netflix's eventual domination of the industry. O'Hara's character, Moira Rose, is humbled by having to live in a cheap motel in the small town of Schitt's Creek, yet she redeems herself by learning to live a more common life. Most people believe that Justin Timberlake wrote this song about Britney Spears, who resembles Moira Rose in some ways. If you haven't seen *Schitt's Creek*, I recommend giving it a watch. I also recommend you watch the video for this song which you can do by following this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TOrnUquxtwA>

**#3 – Take Back The Night by Justin Timberlake** – I love this song for it's Michael Jackson, 1980s vibe, but more than anything I love the brass instrument outro, and how Justin calls out those horns in the lyrics. Now in its 12<sup>th</sup> year in the countdown, it moves

up two spots from last year, equaling its highest ever position. It also spent one year at number 3 in The Jeff's 49 Countdown.

I dedicate this one to Allen Iverson. Inch for inch, Iverson is one of the greatest basketball players of all time. He turned 50 years old last year, and despite his advanced age I think he could still beat half of today's NBA players with his crossover. I know he could take me. Iverson can also take back the night, much like Justin Timberlake does in the video for this song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DEzREJbln-o>

**#4 – Can't Find My Way Home by Blind Faith** – After finding its way to the top spot in The Jeff's 52 Countdown, this song remained at the top for three straight years, until dropping into its current position this year. I dedicate this one to former NBA basketball player, Kelly Tripucka, who was born on February 16, 1959.

I became a fan of Kelly Tripucka and the Charlotte Hornets in late 1988. Historically, my favorite NBA team has been the Philadelphia 76ers, but the Sixers 1987-88 season had been a frustrating one for me, as the team missed the playoffs for the first time since 1975. Julius Erving had retired the season prior, and guards Andrew Toney and Maurice Cheeks had clearly lost a step from their prime. I was not a big fan of Charles Barkley, or Chris Welp, that season's top draft pick. Like many people, I'm a bit of a fair-weather fan when it comes to my teams, so the fact I would gravitate to a new team probably isn't surprising, even if it was a bit disappointing.

The NBA was undergoing expansion in 1988, and the Charlotte Hornets along with the Miami Heat were the two new teams joining the league. The Hornets selected Rex Chapman in the amateur draft and traded one of the players they drafted in the expansion draft for Kelly Tripucka. I was a big fan of Chapman from his college days in Kentucky where he starred for the Wildcats. That led me to adopt the Hornets as my pseudo favorite team for a few years, until Chapman was traded away on my birthday in 1992. Tripucka was the elder statesman of an otherwise very young team, so I became a fan of his as well. He retired a Hornet following the 1990-91 season, and eventually found his way home to Boonton, New Jersey, not far from where I once worked in Oak Ridge, NJ. The video for this song has retired from the top spot in the Jeff's Countdown, but it's never far from being played on one of my electronic devices, and you can watch and listen to it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8L82II1Njo>

**#5 – Jane Says by Jane's Addiction** – After four years of strong upward movement in the countdown, this song retreats for the first time this year, but just by a single spot. The song was written about the band's namesake, Jane Bainter, but I dedicate it to another Jane, the late Jane Goodall. The English primatologist and anthropologist, died last year at the age of 91. I was always aware of Goodall's work with primates, but I didn't become a fan of hers until December of 2024, when she was a guest on Adam Grant's Rethinking Podcast. On the show, she discussed what she learned about leadership from watching primates behave in the wild. She noted that the individual primates that tended

to elevate to leadership roles were often the most narcissistic and selfish of the lot because they showed dominance and strength. That seemed to align with many of our modern-day human leaders. She went on to note that while the narcissistic leaders were the most common leaders of the primate world, the most successful leaders were the ones who humbly inspired others and guided their group toward achieving a common goal. I believe that is what leads to ultimate success in the human world as well.

I found Jane Goodall's conversation with Adam Grant extremely fascinating, and it led me down a rabbit hole where I explored much of her work and commentary on society, both primate and human society. I also grew to love the follow quote from her: "You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make."

Following Goodall's death, I came to learn that she had recorded an interview for the Netflix series, *Famous Last Words*. When I learned about this series, I thought it was an ingenious undertaking by Netflix. Essentially the production company has one single interviewer host a conversation with a famous older person, using a series of unmanned fixed position cameras. The interviewer is the only person to experience this interview, and the video goes into storage until after the person's death. After the interviewee has passed away, a production team then watches the video and pieces together a roughly hour-long program, which is released to viewers shortly after the subject passes away. I watched Jane Goodall's *Famous Last Words* episode shortly after she died and found it to be quite interesting and even moving. Jane Goodall had a lot to say in her interview, but unlike Jane Bainter, Goodall didn't have the opportunity to "kick tomorrow" like Bainter did in the video for this song: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i7Q\\_8q3XXrQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i7Q_8q3XXrQ)

**#6 – Don't You (Forget About Me) by Simple Minds** – With a jump of six spots, this song cracks the Top 10 for the first time. It made its debut in the leadoff spot of The Jeff's 47 Countdown and has improved its position in each subsequent year. This year, it was buoyed by the news that a *Breakfast Club* sequel was in the works. I'm not sure if that was real news or fake news, but it got me excited nonetheless and added to my passion for this song.

I also have a passion for watching the United States participate in Curling at the Olympics, therefore I dedicate this one to Rich Ruohonen. The 54-year-old curler is the alternate on Team Casper and the only Gen Xer on a team where the four primary curlers are all 28 years old or younger. Ruohonen made his Olympic debut on February 12 of this year when he subbed into Team USA's match against Switzerland. The Americans were getting blown out, so he came in late to get some experience on the big stage in case he's needed later in the tournament. When he entered the match, Ruohonen became the oldest American to compete in a Winter Olympics.

If the cast of the *Breakfast Club* were to reassemble for a sequel, they would be even older than Rich Ruohonen. Regardless, I would certainly watch that film, just like I often

listen to this song and watch the video for it, which you can also watch here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4gLVqjIvokc>

**#7 – Blurry by Puddle of Mudd** – This two-time number one song has never appeared any lower than the number 11 position in any of its now 24 Jeff’s Countdown appearances. After appearing at number 6 last year, this song drops a spot this year. I dedicate my former number one song to the world’s current number one tennis player, Carolos Alcaraz. While I don’t follow tennis as closely as I did when I was younger, I must give props to the Spaniard, Alcaraz, who recently won the Australian Open Championship. That win was Alcaraz’s 7<sup>th</sup> major title and gave him a career Grand Slam of tennis majors. At age 22, Alcaraz is on pace to challenge the all-time greats for tennis supremacy. And while the field of challengers Alcaraz will have to face over the next several years to cement supremacy in his sport is still a bit blurry, this song certainly is not: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJJsoquu70o>

**#8 – 25 or 6 to 4 by Chicago** – On February 13, 2018, I was watching two of my daughters, Allison and Courtney, play basketball at C.M. Wright High School in Bel Air, Maryland. The game wasn’t competitive, as the home school defeated our visiting Elkton Elks by the score of 56-38. However, I was still well entertained despite the difference on the scoreboard. During one of the timeouts, the C.M. Wright pep band played this song, and I found it quite appealing. I was probably humming it through the last quarter or two of the game.

Just over a week later, my family and I were in Baltimore to watch my niece, Lindsey, and her Hartford University Hawks basketball team play the University of Maryland Baltimore County. This time our team won, and once again, we enjoyed a dose of this song from the home school’s pep band. Once again I left the building humming right along. A few days later I found a YouTube version of a pep band playing this song, and the following year, the song debuted at number 47 in The Jeff’s 48 Countdown. It has remained in the countdown every year since and has moved higher each year.

I dedicate this one to the late Rose Leiman Goldemberg. The American playwright and screenwriter wrote the screenplay for *The Burning Bed*, which won 8 Primetime Emmy Awards. It was one of the first movies to highlight domestic abuse and it may have been the inflection point which raised awareness to the issue of violence against women. In recent years, broadcast channels, like Lifetime and Lifetime movie have dedicated a large portion of their programming to “women in peril” films which has led to significant increases to calls to domestic violence hotlines. The increased attention has helped many women escape abusive environments.

While critics, survivors, and media scholars often debate whether “women in peril” films should be viewed as entertainment or exploitation. There is no debate over the entertainment value of this song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7uAUoz7jimj>

**#9 – Piano Man by Billy Joel** – According to Gemini, the term “granddaddy of them all” was first seen in print in 1897 to describe a large raccoon. In 1966, legendary announcer Keith Jackson began calling college football games for ABC Sports. Shortly thereafter, he started using the term, “granddaddy of them all” to describe the Rose Bowl game played yearly on New Year’s Day in Pasadena, California. Jackson was essentially saying the Rose Bowl was the most respected of all bowl games. Similarly, I’ve used the term in recent years to describe this song. It’s because “Piano Man” is the only song to be included in each and every edition of the countdown, dating back to the Jeff’s 21 Countdown in 1992. On top of that, it has spent more years in the number one position, 11, than any other countdown song. That makes in the granddaddy of them all in The Jeff’s Countdown.

In a year when the Winter Olympics are being contested, I dedicate this one to Summer Olympian, Katie Ledecky. She is the most decorated female swimmer in history and the most decorated American woman in Olympic history. She is the owner of 9 gold medals among her 14 total medals. Ledecky continues to reign as the queen of the 1500 m freestyle winning gold at the 2025 Worlds. She's catching up to Michael Phelps in terms of world championship medals. While I’m enjoying this year’s Winter Olympics, I’m also looking forward to the 2028 Summer Olympics and the opportunity to watch Ledecky increase her medal count.

When it comes to female swimmers, Katie Ledecky is the granddaddy of them all, or perhaps the grandmamma of them all. So this song is an appropriate one to dedicate to her: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCpIlowaNTU>

**#10 – Regulate by Warren G featuring Nate Dogg** – Now in its 10<sup>th</sup> year in the countdown, this hip-hop standard returns to the Top 10, moving up five spots from last year. In total, “Regulate” had now spent 3 of its 10 years inside the Top 10, with a peak position of 9 achieved in The Jeff’s 49 Countdown.

I dedicate this one to a man whose work has helped mankind regulate both time and position. Daniel Kleppner was an American scientist who studied atomic, molecular, and optical physics. His work enabled the development of highly precise atomic clocks and highly accurate global positioning systems. Kleppner passed away in June of last year at the age of 92. While Kleppner may have regulated time, it’s now time to regulate any stealing of his property via the video for this song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1plPyJdXKIY>

**#11 – The Rain Song by Led Zeppelin** – This song moves up two spots this year, but I fear it might slip going forward. Historically this is a song I listened to when I had to walk my dog in the rain. Sadly, my dog Bruno went end of life last year, and with no need to walk in the rain, I’m guessing it’s possible this song will lose some of its meaning for me. What will never lose meaning for me are the old episodes of *Cheers*, one of my favorite television shows of the 1980s. George Wendt was one of the stars of that show

and thus I dedicate this song to him. Wendt, who was a member of the Cheers cast for all 11 of its seasons, passed away last year. When coming out of the rain into the bar, Wendt's character, Norm, if asked by Coach or Woody if it was still pouring, always had a great answer to that question. "That's what I was about to ask you!"

If you're asking for the video to this song, here is my answer:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BeDylD8dV7U>

**#12 – Flagpole Sitta by Harvey Danger** – I began listening to this song during Covid times, so it makes sense that this year makes it six appearances for it in the countdown. The song was a quick riser, making it all the way to number 5 just two years ago. It's slipped a little off the pace each of the last two years but remains inside The Top 20 for the fifth of its six years.

I dedicate this one to lawyer and writer, John Grisham. In not a big reader of fiction books, but when I do read fiction, Grisham is often my author of choice. The first book of his I read was *The Firm*. I read that one shortly after it came out in 1991, and it led me to read several others. These days I read primarily nonfiction, but occasionally, I'll pick up a Grisham novel when I get tired of nonfiction. And when I get tired of reading in general, then I turn to music videos like this one:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wYsMjEeEg4g>

**#13 – Wonderwall by Oasis** – When you factor in all 35 years of Jeff's Countdown history, this song is a somewhat stealthy Top 10 song on an all-time basis. This year marks its 22<sup>nd</sup> countdown appearance. The last 21 of those appearances have come consecutively. Though it has never climbed any higher than the 7 position, it also has never been lower than number 35 in any of its 22 appearances.

I dedicate this one to Ed Smylie. The engineer and former leader of NASA's Crew Systems Division passed away in April of last year. *Time* magazine once called Smylie "an improvisational genius" for leading the NASA team that used duct tape to fix the scrubbing system on the infamous Apollo 13 mission's lunar module. The module was failing which was causing a loss of capacity to provide breathable air for the astronauts. Smylie was as much of a hero as mission commander Jim Lovell was.

While it is true that duct tape is almost never used to seal ducts, Smylie's idea to use it to fix a space vehicle was truly unique. The song "Wonderwall" by Oasis is a unique song with a unique video which you can watch here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bx1Bh8ZvH84>

**#14 – Counting Stars by OneRepublic** – With three songs in this year’s countdown, including two within the Top 20, OneRepublic is obviously one of my favorite artists. This song was the first OneRepublic tune to reach the countdown when it debuted at number 31 in The Jeff’s 44 Countdown. It climbed as high as number 2 in The Jeff’s 53 Countdown but dropped five spots to number 7 last year. This year, it drops another seven spots into its current position.

I dedicate this one to actor Tom Hanks. It's hard to believe that the man who played Kip/Buffy Wilson in *Busom Buddies* in the early 1980s will turn 70 years old later this year. The series *Busom Buddies* was one of my favorite shows of that period. Looking back, I think that the comedic range of Hanks to play characters of different sexes was quite impressive. Hanks extended his range as an actor even more, winning back-to-back Oscars for *Philadelphia* and *Forrest Gump* in 1993 and 1994. In year 2000, Hanks won Best Actor in a motion picture drama at The Golden Globe Awards and was nominated for Best Actor in a Leading Role at the Academy Awards for *Cast Away*. Those awards are just a sampling of Hanks’ achievements.

In a recent meeting at work, I evoked two Tom Hank's movies to exemplify two different points. One theme was how corporate leadership was once an "old man's club." I referenced the scene from *Philadelphia* where the partners at Hank’s character’s law firm were at their spa day, telling inappropriate jokes about women and gays. The other topic was how some people struggle to be alone while other people enjoy being alone, the extrovert to introvert continuum. To illustrate the extrovert end of that spectrum, I referenced Hanks’ character in *Cast Away*. To survive by himself on a secluded island, Chuck Noland creates a companion for himself in the form of a blood stained Wilson volleyball. Having a companion helps Chuck, who presumably is an extrovert, survive on his own. As an introvert, I’ve never had trouble spending time by myself, but then again, I’m not sure how I would do on a deserted island, where I wouldn’t have a laptop and YouTube to watch videos such as this one:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hT\\_nvWrelhg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hT_nvWrelhg)

**#15 – American Girl by Tom Petty and The Heartbreakers** – Unlike “American Boy” which spent only one year in the countdown back in the Jeff’s 38 Countdown, “American Girl” has staying power. It debuted in The Jeff’s 47 Countdown at number 44 and has remained every year since. This year it cracks the Top 15 for the first time.

Every once in a while, an American girl comes along that helps drastically change the course of history. Lucy Stone was one of those girls, thus I dedicate this song to her. Born in 1818 in West Brookfield, Massachusetts, Lucy decided there was more to life than just being someone's husband. She was an abolitionist, suffragist, and was a vocal advocate for women's rights. Lucy did marry in 1855; however, she decided not to take the last name of her husband, Henry Blackwell. She became one of the first women in history to break the long-standing tradition of taking on the husband's last name. While the practice of keeping one’s name is more commonplace today, I image it’s still a difficult choice for women who must balance losing a part of their identity with having to

explain why their last name is different than that of their husband. One thing that's easy to explain is the brilliance of this song which you can experience here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b2nbHpF7-qk>

**#16 – Natural by Imagine Dragons** – Making its seventh consecutive appearance in the countdown, this song continues to improve upon its position every year. It debuted at number 40 in The Jeff's 49 countdown and has moved up two or more positions every year since. This year it makes a big jump of 7 spots to land inside the Top 20 for the first time.

I dedicate this one to Nick Kurtz. Nicknamed "The Big Amish," the Lancaster, Pennsylvania native won the American League Rookie of the Year Award in 2025. He's obviously a natural athlete. On July 25, 2025, Kurtz became the first rookie in MLB history and the first Athletics player to hit four home runs in a game. While I'm not a fan of the Athletics, I appreciate the impact Kurtz has made so quickly, and I love his "churning butter" home run celebration. I also love this song, the video for which you can view here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0I647GU3Jsc>

**#17 – Hold Me Now by Thompson Twins** – This song reached the Top 10 in the Jeff's Countdown four years ago and after a short retreat to number 22 in the subsequent two years, it's moving upward once again. This is the 13<sup>th</sup> year of inclusion in the countdown for this song which debuted at number 30 in The Jeff's 43 Countdown.

I dedicate this one to former (I think) NFL quarterback Philip Rivers. The North Carolina State graduate and ACC Player of the Year in 2003 played 17 NFL seasons for the Chargers and Colts before retiring following the 2020 season. He went on to coach high school football in Alabama and appeared poised to join the NFL Hall of Fame sometime during the latter part of the 2020s decade. But then the Indianapolis Colts came calling three quarters of the way through the 2025 season. Daniel Jones went down with a torn Achilles tendon leading Colts management to call on Rivers. They were hoping the former eight time Pro Bowl quarterback could help them hold onto their lead in the AFC South Division and earn a playoff spot. Though he didn't succeed in leading the team to the playoffs, Rivers played well, especially considering he was a 44-year-old coming off a four-year layoff.

Following the season, Rivers interviewed to become head coach of the Buffalo Bills, one of the most attractive head coaching jobs in the NFL given their quarterback, Josh Allen. However, Rivers removed himself from consideration for that job because he didn't want to miss out on being a father to his 10 children. I applaud Philip Rivers for making the tough decision to walk about from the spotlight of an NFL coaching career and into the less visible but ultimately more important job of raising his children.

Rivers' decision to play in 2025 resets the clock on his Hall of Fame eligibility. He'll now have to wait until the 2030 decade for enshrinement. I guessing that Rivers doesn't

regret the decision to return to the field for one last shot to play in front of 60,000 fans. I know I get excited about the opportunity to play in front of 100 people on Finals Night of the Gore Volleyball League at age 54 so I can only imagine what it's like to play in front of 60,000 fans at age 44 as Rivers was lucky enough to be able to do last year. As Rivers now holds on and waits for his chance at the Hall of Fame, he can do so while watching the video for this song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TvzVTRK1nOY>

**#18 – Shape Of You by Ed Sheeran** – After a 7-year run in the Top 15, this song falls outside of the Top 15 for the first time since it debuted at number 21 in The Jeff's 47 Countdown. I dedicate this one to Ben Verreault, my Ping Pong Doubles partner of 2025. Despite having an albatross of a ping pong player as his partner, Ben helped me win the 2025 Cherry Hill Ping Pong Championship. For that I'm forever indebted. Since I released this song on Groundhog's Day, I'm hoping the dedication will lead to Ben being my partner again this year, so that we'll have the chance to defend our title. Whether it be by chance, or via my proposed new rule for the tournament. I'm proposing that the defending champions can remain partners and defend their title, as long as they both remain Cherry Hill associates, rather than be subject to the randomization process for assigning partners. As we await the tournament commissioner, who isn't me, to make a ruling on that proposal, I'll be getting in shape for the tournament like Ed Sheeran getting in shape for the taxi ride he takes in the video for this song:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGwWNGJdvx8>

**#19 – Kids by OneRepublic** – This is another one of those songs that harken back to an adult's younger years. The lyrics suggest the main character in the song prefers to look forward rather than back. Personally, I think we need to do a little of both. As I look back on the history of this song in the countdown, I see that it debuted at number 46 in The Jeff's 47 Countdown and that it reached a peak of number 9 in The Jeff's 52 Countdown. Since then, it's been on a downturn, dropping two spots both this year and last.

I dedicate this one to Burt Meyer, creator of kid's toys such as Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots and Mouse Trap. I played with both of those games as a kid and always felt like those were relatively progressive for their time. Both were invented by Meyer in the 1960s, yet both games still seemed innovative when I played them in the late 1970s.

Burt Meyer passed away last year at the age of 99. I appreciate his inventions that helped kids like me have a great time growing up. I honor him with the video for this song which is also all about the kids: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y56lpXvXbs0>

**#20 – The Man Who Can't Be Moved by The Script** – In the 16 years this song has been a part of the Jeff's Countdown, it's been as high as number 8 and as low as number 31. This year it essentially splits that difference as it opens the Top 20 of The Jeff's 55 Countdown.

I dedicate this one to Ernesto Miranda who died on January 31 in 1976. June 13 of this year will mark 60 years since Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Earl Warren, released his opinion, in the Case of Miranda v. Arizona. Warren concluded that a person in police custody must, prior to interrogation, be clearly informed that he has the right to remain silent, and that anything he says could be used against him in court. He must also be clearly informed that he has the right to consult with a lawyer and to have the lawyer with him during interrogation, and that if he can't afford to hire a lawyer, one will be appointed to represent him.

At a time when law enforcement's adherence to the rights of U.S. citizens seems to be in question, this is a nice reminder of the rights we have as U.S. citizens, and that it's only been 60 years since we've had these Miranda rights. The Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution ensures citizens the right to due process and Miranda Rights are now a part of that process. Another right we have as U.S. Citizens is the right to peacefully assemble in protest of government actions. At this time, many citizens are leveraging that right, and can't be moved from where they are assembling, similar to how Danny O'Donoghue can't be moved off his corner of the street in the video for this song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gS9o1FAszdk>

**#21 – Hurt by Johnny Cash** – In its sixth year in the countdown, this song continues consistent progress in the upward direction. It debuted at number 42 in The Jeff's 50 Countdown, and has risen every year since, including this year when it moved from number 25 last year to number 21 this year. Of course, I like the Joe Biden version of this song best ( <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QAZTFuVVBeg> ), but similar to how an A.I. generated song isn't eligible to win a Grammy, it also shan't be included in the Jeff's Countdown.

On what would have been his 96th birthday, I dedicate this song to the late Gene Hackman. The two-time Academy Award winning actor and his wife, Betsy Arakawa, tragically passed away last year, when Hackman, suffering from Alzheimer's disease, was unable to arrange emergency care for Arakawa or himself over the course of several days. Hackman was always one of my favorite actors. I particularly love the movie "Hoosiers," one of Hackman's many great performances. In his later years, Hackman was hurt by the progression of Alzheimer's disease. Johnny Cash was hurt by autonomic neuropathy and diabetes in his later years, perhaps part of the reason he chose to cover this song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8AHCfZTRGiI>

**#22 – Something About You by Level 42** – It took a long time before this pop standard from the mid-1980s reached the countdown, but since debuting at number 42 in the Jeff's 43 Countdown, it's had staying power. This is its 13<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of inclusion. It spent the first 9 of its 13 years between the 35 and 42 positions, and each of the last four inside of the Top 30.

Trevor Lawrence has spent the last five years inside the Top 30 quarterbacks of fantasy football. Despite the success, he's been off and on the roster of my Cecil County Bayfoxes over those five seasons. Being grungy, I dedicate this song to him. This past season, I picked up Lawrence in Week 11, as a hedge against the injury suffered by Jayden Daniels. I was eyeing Lawrence's Week 13 matchup versus the Titans and his Week 15 matchup versus the Jets as potential smash spots. In the ESFFL, Weeks 13 and 15 are the first two weeks of playoff elimination games. The strategy worked well in Week 13. Lawrence was my top QB scorer with 20 points while Daniels rested on my Taxi Squad.

The fatal flaw in my 2025 season, however, was that I deviated from my original plan after Jayden Daniels was cleared to return in Week 14. With Jalen Hurts and Jaxon Dart also on my roster and the ESFFLs "potential points" scoring system resulting in me only receiving the highest score for one quarterback, I figured Lawrence had little chance to be the top scorer among that group of quarterbacks. At the same time, I wanted some protection against a potential late season injury to Christian McCaffrey so I made the decision to drop Lawrence and pick up McCaffrey's handcuff, Brian Robinson, for Week 14.

As it turned out, Lawrence balled out in Week 15, with 39 fantasy points. While Jayden Daniels was once again injured and languishing on my Taxi Squad, Jaxon Dart had a nice game with 21 points, but the 18 point differential was the determining factor in my four-point loss to the Willowstreet Cockapoos.

The unique rules of the ESFFL allow players to be on the roster of multiple teams, and it was Trevor Lawrence owner, Emma Sidoriak Gaskins, of the Beaverton Black&Blues, who was smart enough to hold onto Lawrence. She benefited from his big Week 15 game to win her quarterfinal match over the Bradford Shadowtalons. In Week 16's semifinal matchup versus the Mainline Maulers, she benefited from another great week from Lawrence to advance to Fantasy Bowl 00100000. In the championship game, the Black&Blues defeated the defending champion, and 3-time champion, Breckenridge Pinkslippers to win the highly coveted Johnson Cup Trophy. In the process, Emma became the initial second generation ESFFL member to win an ESFFL Championship. Evidently it was something about Trevor Lawrence they keyed Emma's win so perhaps she will want to celebrate by watching the video for this song:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbydKAFfJAc>

**#23 – How You Remind Me by Nickelback** – Three songs have had a run of exactly seven consecutive years in the Jeff's Countdown top spot. This is one of those three songs. It debuted at number 22 in The Jeff's 31 Countdown and quickly reached number 3 just two years later. In another three years it made it to the pinnacle to begin its 7-year run on top. Since its stay at number 1, this song remained inside the Top 20 until this year as it drops from 18 last into the 23 spot this year.

Before beginning his run as America's top investor, Warren Buffett purchased a 23% stake in the Sandborn Map company. The investment provided Buffett a 50% return in

just two years. Buffett continued making investments and eventually took control of a textile manufacturing company, Berkshire Hathaway. Over the course of time, Buffett jettisoned the textile mills and moved Berkshire into the insurance sector. It became a holding company and Buffett used his investing skills to grow its market capitalization from \$22 million in 1965 to over \$1 trillion at the time of his retirement.

Warren Buffett retired as CEO of Berkshire Hathaway at the end of 2025 at age 95. I dedicate this song to Buffett and, as an homage to him, I will announce here that despite my retirement eligibility on February 19, 2026, I plan to continue working, in some capacity, at least until the age of 95, like Buffett.

As I reflect on Buffett's career, I wonder how the employees in those textile mills felt as they were closed one by one and likely saw their jobs transition to someone in Asia. It reminds me of my father's career. He worked in radio and television manufacturing and ultimately experienced his job shifting to someone in Asia. While I admire and appreciate the career of Warren Buffett, I'm also humbly reminded of how often someone making money through investing often results in other people losing money, losing their livelihood. Here then is the video for the song which is all about being reminded:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aiay8I5IPB8>

**#24 – Breakeven by The Script** – After three straight years of losing ground in the countdown, this song literally breaks even with a second straight appearance at number 24. It's making a 16<sup>th</sup> straight countdown appearance and has a history that includes half of those years inside of the Top 5. It spent one singular year at the number 2 position.

I dedicate this one to Ryne Sandberg. The former manager of the Philadelphia Phillies passed away last year at the early age of just 65. In my mind, Sandberg will always be linked with the demise of the Phillies in the mid-1980s. Amid a very successful run of winning seasons that began with 101 wins and a division title in 1976, the Phillies traded away Sandberg. A minor leaguer in the Phillies farm system at the time, Sandberg was traded by the Phillies on January 27, 1982 for Ivan DeJesus. It may have been the worst trade in Phillies history. In 1984, Sandberg was National League MVP for the Cubs. That season started a run of 10 straight years for him as an NL All-Star. All were in a Cubs uniform. DeJesus was a replacement level shortstop at best for the Phillies who won their 5<sup>th</sup> division title in 8 years and reached the World Series in 1983, but who didn't sniff the playoffs again until 10 years later.

Sandberg returned to the Phillies in 2011 as a minor league manager and later as their third base coach. He was promoted to be the Phillies manager in August of 2013. He did not experience the same success as a Major League manager as he did as a player. His run as manager of the Phillies ended in 2015. He resigned as Phillies manager with a 119-159 lifetime record. Sandberg's success as a Cub and relative failures as a Phillie broke the hearts of many Philadelphia sports fans. But it's like Danny O'Donoghue sings in the lyrics to this song – when a heart breaks, no, it don't breakeven. You can watch the video for the song here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MzCLLHscMOW>

**#25 – Smell Like Teen Spirit by Nirvana** – Every once in a while, you miss something. For example, a few mornings ago I forgot to remove the Breathe Right® strip I wear to bed each night which helps me be less of a mouth breather. I realized my mistake halfway through my first meeting of the day, so I had to embarrassingly excuse myself during the meeting to peel my nasal strip. The Breathe Right® commercial claims it's okay to strip in public, but I'm still a bit self-conscious about it.

While my nasal strip issue was a recent fail, when it comes to the first 26 editions of The Jeff's Countdown, forgetting to include this song was a long-term fail. The grunge classic most people believe was the tipping point for the new genre going mainstream has always been a favorite of mine. The reason why I didn't include it in earlier editions of the countdown continues to escape me. I finally included as the number 28 song in The Jeff's 47 Countdown. That's less than ten years ago for this song which is about to turn 35. It's risen as high as number 14 and has never been lower than its debut position. It christens the start of this year's Top 25 following a drop of three spots from last year.

I dedicate this one to former professional boxer, minister, and grill salesman, George Foreman. On January 26, 1967, Foreman won his first amateur fight. He turned pro two years later and won his first 40 straight professional matches. The 38<sup>th</sup> win gave him the WBA and WBC Heavyweight title belts. He would lose those titles to Muhammad Ali in his 41<sup>st</sup> match, and a few matches later he would retire at age 28. Ten year later Foreman launched a comeback which eventually netted him another WBA title belt and an IBF title belt. He won those championships at 45 and remained relevant until retiring a second time at age 48. From there he concentrated on his grill selling gig.

George Foreman died on March 21 of last year at age 76. While I was never a fan of George Foreman the boxer, I do appreciate his longevity in his sport and the way he tied himself to a very successful product in the George Foreman Grill. To such an influential personality, I dedicate this influential song:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTWKbfoikeg>

**#26 – Plush by Stone Temple Pilots** – This song has been included in 33 of the 35 editions of this countdown, making it the second most successful Jeff's Countdown song of all-time. While it has never reached the countdown's top spot, it has spent eight total years inside the Top 5 including three years at number 2.

In celebration of his birthday on January 25, I dedicate this one to one to professor, researcher, author, and public speaker, Jim Collins. This year marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Collins' book, *Good to Great*. I read the book a few years ago and consider it the best book on business I've ever read. It should be required reading for anyone at C-Suite level. Collins and his team of researchers studied several companies. Based on financial data and stock performance, they categorized the companies into two categories, those that were good and went on to become great financial performers, and those who were good and went on to become mediocre to poor financial performers.

Collins and his team then analyzed the heck of all the companies in each category. They interviewed company leaders as well as entry level employees. They interviewed customers, vendors, and people with other specific knowledge of the companies. They studied retention rates, benefit packages, pay rates, and other HR data. Collins then reported the data and his observations in the book.

I learned a lot from reading *Good to Great*. One thing that resonated with me was the finding that Good to Great companies featured leaders that were humble but possessed a strong focus on the success of the company. The leaders of these great companies gave credit to others for success and took responsibility for failures. These leaders were often quiet and reserved as opposed to flashy and boastful. Collins called these Level 5 leaders. Although I'm sure I fall short, I aspire to be a Level 5 leader.

Collins found that, when it comes to people, the great companies focus more on the who than they do on the what. They hire people based on how they will do whatever they are asked to do, not on what they say they have done in the past. They put the right people on the bus first, then figured out where to drive it. I liken this principle to a good football coach. The best coaches design their offensive and defensive systems to fit the players they have on the team. They don't force those players to fit the system they've already designed.

Perhaps my favorite principle Collins shares in *Good to Great* is the Hedgehog Concept. He defines it as simplicity through deep understanding and suggests CEOs should ask their leadership teams the following three questions: What can we be the best in the world at? What are we deeply passionate about? What drives our economic engine? The first question also comes with a bit of a warning. More concisely, great companies focus on what they do best, and don't get distracted by trying to be too many things to too many people.

A company not following the Hedgehog Concept at the moment is Aldi (Sud). Historically Aldi has been one of my favorite grocery stores for their efficiency, economy of space, and commitment to providing quality groceries at low prices. Earlier this year, I had to move Aldi from my Vendor Green List to my Vendor Yellow List (<https://esffl.com/jeffs-vendor-blacklist/>) Aldi is now on probation and in danger of being blacklisted. I put them on probation for multiple reasons: They added self-service checkouts not long ago which I of course despise, and their produce at the Elkton, MD store is not nearly as fresh as it once was. On top of that, a January 6, 2026, article by Deena Shanker and Tim Loh in Business Week reports that Aldi is trying to attract wealthier clientele. This has me concerned about their commitment to efficiency and thrift. Aldi has obviously become distracted by trying to do too much for too many. They are losing market share to Lidl in Europe, and I fear it's only a matter of time until the same happens in the U.S. For an interim period, we plan to stop shopping at the Elkton location and give Aldi in Christiana, DE, a try. We'll see what happens.

According to Jim Collins' research, true strategy is about choosing what not to do and committing deeply to what matters most. What matters to me during the first month and

a half of each year is sharing my favorite songs with my family and friends. So here is the video for my 26<sup>th</sup> favorite song of my 55<sup>th</sup> year. In keeping with the theme of this entry, I've chosen the simple version:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnWGJoPvQ5U>

**#27 – Castle On The Hill by Ed Sheeran** – I love songs that combine a great melody with the artist reminiscing about a time in their life they remember as being simpler, and more fun. This song checks all the boxes for a song in that category. It debuted at number 37 in the Jeff's 53 Countdown, moved up to number 35 last year, and this year it moves up again.

I dedicate this one to Iris Cummings Critchell who died on January 24 of last year. Prior to her death, at age 104, Critchell was the last surviving remaining American from the 1936 United States' Summer Olympic Team. Critchell did not medal in the Olympics, but she was the U.S. National Champion in the 200-meter breaststroke from 1936 through 1939. Following her swimming career, Critchell entered the USC's Civilian Pilot Training Program. She earned a pilot's licence in 1940 and eventually served for the U.S. in World War II. Following her time in the war, Critchell became a flight instructor and was inducted into the National Flight Instructors Hall of Fame in 2000. Perhaps the Hall of Fame nod was a nice consolation for not winning an Olympic medal. Regardless, I'm sure Critchell looked back on her time as an Olympian similar to how Ed Sheeran looks back on his time as a teenager watching the sunset over the castle on the hill. Watch 15-year-old Ed Sheeran in the video for this song here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K0ibBPhiaG0>

**#28 – Possum Kingdom by The Toadies** – When my oldest daughter, Allison, was starting kindergarten, we had a meet the teacher night a few days before the start of school. I'm guessing she was five years old at the time. We had our younger daughter, Courtney, with us and while we were speaking with the teacher, Courtney was having a look around the kindergarten room. Decorating the space were pictures of letters, bordering the ceiling around the entirety of the room. As we were speaking with the teacher, Courtney was saying each letter, one by one, and listing off several words for each letter as she went. This was background noise for Cindy and me as both she and Allison would do the same thing at home from time to time. The teacher, however, was amazed that Courtney knew her alphabet this well at three years old. As I thought about how that could be, I immediately realized it because the children watched the LeapFrog series of children's videos, which taught children phonics and reading skills. For parents, the videos made for great television babysitters, but it wasn't until this moment in the kindergarten classroom, that I realized just how effective they were at preparing the girls for school. All three of our girls were very successful in school and I credit the LeapFrog videos for setting the foundation for their success. I'm a big believer in the power of confidence. Having a strong foundation in phonics at the start of their formal schooling and having a head start over their classmates gave our kids confidence. Confidence that propelled them to successful academic success.

Mike Wood was the founder of LeapFrog Enterprises, and responsible for getting products such as LeapPad, which our girls also played with, and the LeapFrog video series to market. He passed away in April of last year following a battle with Alzheimer's disease. As I researched what I would write for this dedication, I learned that possums can leap, thus making this a great opportunity for me to honor Mike Wood with this song for the positive impact he had on my kids. I'm also sure you can find a few frogs which leap around Possum Kingdom Lake, which resides in Texas, the home state of The Toadies. Here is their video for the song:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EkwD5rQ-\\_d4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EkwD5rQ-_d4)

**#29 – Vehicle by The Ides of March** – With a song older than I am that has broken into the Top 30 of the Jeff's Countdown, it's weird to say that I didn't become familiar with the band The Ides of March until less than three years ago. It was during 2023 that I was listening to an episode of Tom Morello's *One Man Revolution* show, when I heard this song played. Morello mentioned that the album "Vehicle" was one of the first albums he ever purchased, and of course this was one of the songs on that album. After listening to it on Morello's show, I immediately became infatuated, ultimately including it as the number 45 song in The Jeff's 53 Countdown the following year. It moved up to 36 last year and this year it makes another nice sized jump.

I dedicate this one to the late Jim Lovell. The American astronaut, pilot, and mechanical engineer, who spent 29 days of his life in outer space, passed away in August of last year. Lovett commanded the Apollo 8 mission and, as part of that mission, became one of the first three men to orbit the Moon. He also commanded the Apollo 13 lunar mission and prior to the Apollo program he flew multiple missions as part of the Gemini program. Lovett is the astronaut who spoke the infamous phrase, "Houston, we've had a problem," while on the Apollo 13 mission in April of 1970, just a few weeks after the song "Vehicle" was released to the airwaves. Lovell successfully commanded the Apollo 13 vehicle back to Earth, making him an American hero. Over the course of his career, Lovell piloted several space vehicles. This song references more traditional terrestrial vehicles and a concert recording for it can be viewed here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOFxUM7aOzs>

**#30 – Money & Fame by Needtobreathe** – In many ways, last year was a pretty great year for me. I had another great year professionally, celebrating 25 years as a Gore Associate. I was able to enjoy my two older daughters at the beginning of their professional careers and experience the pride in watching them succeed at being independent and part of the working world. I thoroughly enjoyed, and most importantly survived, a skydiving adventure. I got to spend Thanksgiving at Virginia Beach with my family. I enjoyed some other great moments with my family including a trip to Hershey Park and a Pitbull Concert in Atlantic City. I even bought my first pair of Air Jordans and learned a new sport, paddleboarding. I won a Ping Pong championship, a volleyball championship, and two bracelet events on the Greater Oxford Poker Tour. Speaking of

championships, I got to celebrate The Ohio State Buckeyes winning a National Championship in football with my daughter Dani. She wanted to attend a college with a big-time football program and boom – in her freshman year she’s lucky enough to be part of a National Championship and I was able to experience it along with her. Despite being blessed with great success in 2025 I also faced a major disappointment.

In April of last year, I was on my yearly visit to Atlantic City for cards, cocktails, and karaoke, when I suffered a huge disappointment. It came during the karaoke portion of the night. After performing 2 or 3 of my standard songs, I went back to the counter at Planet Rose to peruse the song book in preparation for one final performance. I’m a horrible singer with a microscopic tessitura which makes my choice of songs rather limited. I thought “Money & Fame” might be something I could handle, so I looked for it in the book. To my utter dismay, the song wasn’t listed. I was devastated. Not only did I think I could perform this song without completely butchering it, I also liked how it is sung from the perspective of an older guy “preaching” to younger people about how they should live their lives. That’s something I’ve done a time or two in the past and something I’m relatively familiar with. Alas, I called it a night, leaving Planet Rose without a proper send off.

Days later I searched Spotify for a karaoke version of the song. My search yielded no results, just more disappointment. So I asked Gemini why a karaoke version of this song doesn’t exist. According to Gemini, the song doesn’t elicit a high enough global demand for major karaoke producers to generate a karaoke version. They believe the profits on the distribution of a karaoke version of the song wouldn’t cover the licensing fees charged by the record label. That makes sense, but piss on them. What about customer loyalty? Shouldn’t businesses consider customer loyalty when making decisions as to which songs should get karaoke versions? What made this even more distressing is that I can’t really do anything about it. I can’t add “all producers of karaoke version of songs” to my Vendor Blacklist. That would just take away the most fun part of my yearly adventure. Evidently I’ll have to learn how to strip vocal tracks from audio recordings to ever be able to karaoke to this song. But I digress. Yes, this is a First World problem and I’m exceedingly lucky to live such a privileged life where this is my biggest problem of the year. I’ll take the nonexistence of a karaoke version of a song being my biggest disappointment any year.

I dedicated this song to Steph Curry who wears uniform number 30 for the Golden State Warriors. Curry has been one of my favorite basketball players since he heroically carried Davidson to the Final 8 of the NCAA Tournament in 2008. On March 1 of last year, Curry dunked versus the 76ers in Philadelphia. His previous dunk came six years earlier, and following the game he proclaimed it would be the last dunk of his career. Evidently no more Steph Curry dunks to go along with no karaoke version of this song. And while no karaoke version of this song exists and no music video exists either, you can still experience the “official audio” of the song by clicking here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G981YiiC26w>

**#31 – Steppin’ Out by Joe Jackson** – After debuting at number 32 last year, this song “steps” up one spot this year. A couple of days after the 2025 Buffalo Bills were eliminated from the NFL playoffs and a single day after they fired their current head coach, I dedicate this song to their former head coach, Marv Levy.

On January 20, 1991, Levy’s Bills destroyed the Raiders by a score of 51 to 3 in the AFC Championship Game. The win advanced the Bills to the Super Bowl for the first time in their history. They went on to lose the big game by a single point a week later. Over the following three seasons the Bills returned to the Super Bowl each year, only to lose each time. With the Kansas City Chiefs not qualifying for the playoffs this season, the Bills remain the only team in NFL history to have reached the Super Bowl in four consecutive seasons. It’s a bit of a dubious record given they didn’t win any of the four games. Despite the losses, Levy was one of the most successful football coaches of all time. In addition to his success in the NFL, he also coached and had success at the high school level, at the college level, in the Canadian Football League, and in the United States Football League. In the CFL, Levy twice led the Montreal Alouettes to Grey Cup Titles.

In 2001, Levy was inducted into the Professional Football Hall of Fame. He turned 100 years old last summer and celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday by Steppin’ Out and making an appearance at the 2025 Hall of Fame Enshrinement Ceremony in Canton, Ohio. It wasn’t quite the exciting New York night life Joe Jackson steps out to in the video for this song, but Joe Jackson wasn’t quite 100 years old during the filming of this video either:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJwt2dxx9yg>

**#32 – Little Guitars by Van Halen** – The Jeff’s Countdown began in 1992 and for the first 15 editions at least one Van Halen song was among the countdown ranks each year. Then, for the next 14 years, Van Halen was absent from the countdown. Unfortunately, it took the death of Eddie Van Halen in 2020 to fuel this band’s return. The Jeff’s 50 Countdown marked the return of Van Halen. They landed songs in both the 49 and 50 positions, with “Little Guitars” being the song at 49 position, making its debut that year. Since then, it has steadily climbed the countdown ranks. This year, it moves up one spot into its highest ever countdown position.

I dedicate this one to actress and inventor, Hedy Lamarr, who died on January 19, 2000. I didn’t know much about Lamarr until hearing the story of how she and composer George Antheil co-invented a radio guidance system for Allied torpedoes used during World War II. Her invention provided secure, jam-resistant communication for weapon guidance by spreading the signal across multiple frequencies. This technology is the basis for today’s secure wireless networking that makes Wi-Fi and Bluetooth possible.

Despite not having formal training in the sciences, Lamarr was able to invent through curiosity and application of knowledge across disciplines. At the onset of World War II, Lamarr was married to weapons dealer, Fritz Mandl. When making sales calls, Mandl would often take Lamarr to his meetings. It’s assumed that Mandl thought having his attractive actress wife with him would help his chances for completing sales deals.

During one of those meetings, Lamarr learned that navies needed a way to guide torpedoes through water. Radio control had been proposed but not used at that time due to the enemy's ability to jam the radio signals and set the torpedo off course.

Later, when mentioning the Allies' need to prevent jamming of radio signals to her composer and pianist friend, George Antheil, the two used the discipline of musical composition to solve the problem. Antheil shared some past work where he created "synchronized note-hopping" to create a musical score. The composition featured multiple synchronized player pianos. Antheil's idea in the piece was to synchronize the start time of four player pianos with matching player piano rolls, so the pianos would play in time with one another. Together, they realized that radio frequencies could be changed similarly, using the same kind of mechanism. A few years later, Lamarr, under her legal name of Hedy Kiesler Markey, received U.S. patent 2,292,387. Lamarr isn't the only entertainer to hold a patent, as Eddie Van Halen himself has several patents, primarily in area of guitar and amplification technology. I think Eddie's patents came after this song was recorded. As you can see here, the song was recorded prior to the proliferation of music videos: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRIZPh3B92Q>

**#33 – Girlfriend by Matthew Sweet** – For whatever reason, this song has really clicked for me going on four years now. It debuted at number 38 in the Jeff's 52 Countdown and rose to number 25 the following year. Despite losing ground last year and this year, this power pop standard remains in several of my playlists, and I listen to it frequently.

I dedicate this one to late actress, Diane Keaton, who passed away in October of last year. Keaton had a prolific Hollywood career, starring in many films over the years, several of which I enjoyed watching. In one of those films, *Something's Gotta Give*, she played the girlfriend of Jack Nicholson's character, Harry Sanborn. That film and *Father of the Bride* are probably my two favorite Diane Keaton movies. In today's Hollywood, those types of romantic comedies aren't typically made with high level actors and directors, which is a shame for someone like me who enjoys a good romantic comedy. Fortunately, we can pull films and music videos from the past and enjoy them multiple times, such as I have done with the video for this song:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n12OBlcHx9E>

**#34 – Alive Again by Chicago** – When I was much younger, the songs by Chicago played on the radio were those produced by David Foster. Hits such as "Hard Habit to Break" and "Hard to Say I'm Sorry" were what defined the Chicago I new and enjoyed back then. Many years later I began listening to songs from the pre-David Foster era of Chicago. Songs such as "Alive Again," led me to what I considered was a whole different genre of music. I was alive again in my appreciation for this band. Not only that, but multiple songs from this more distant era began appearing in The Jeff's Countdown, an accomplishment that David Foster's productions never achieved.

This song debuted at number 51 in The Jeff's 51 Countdown. It has steadily gained ground in the countdown each year since. I dedicate it to the late Muhammad Ali who was born on this day in 1942. He began life as Cassius Clay. After winning a gold medal in boxing for the United States in 1960, he turned professional in his sport and won the heavyweight championship in 1964. Shortly after that upset victory, he changed his name to Muhammad Ali, disavowing his given name as a slave name.

Ali continued his career as a professional boxer for many more years and won the Heavyweight Championship three times in total, becoming the first person in history to accomplish that feat. The only time I remember watching Ali box was in 1980 when he lost to Larry Holmes. Holmes was a favorite of mine due to his Easton, PA roots. Unfortunately, I was too young or too unborn to see Ali box in his prime. Despite that, despite being a fan of Holmes, and despite watching Mike Tyson destroy people in seconds when he was in his prime, I still consider Ali the Greatest Heavyweight boxer of all time.

On June 3 of this year, it will be 10 years since Ali died. No one quite like him will ever be alive again, and so I dedicate this song in memory of Muhammad Ali:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7FnrevX6C7g>

**#35 – Champagne Supernova by Oasis** – After debuting at number 15 in The Jeff's 26 Countdown and returning in the number 19 position the following year, this song went on hiatus for the next 23 years. As I aged and more spots in the countdown naturally opened, "Champagn Supernova" was able to re-enter in the number 39 spot of the Jeff's 51 Countdown. It has held on to a Top 40 spot every year since then. Although it hasn't reached the Top 20 as it did during its first run, it does appear to have staying power this time.

I dedicate this one to the late Bob Uecker. The former baseball player, sportscaster, and actor died on this day last year. I always enjoyed the humorous commercials Uecker starred in during the 1980s and the television show, Mr. Belvedere, which he starred in from 1985 through 1990. There is a Belvidere Road not far from where I currently live which I bicycle past and drive past quite often. Even though the spelling is different, every time I go past that road I think of Uecker's character on the show. And now that I've written this dedication, I'll probably also think of Uecker every time I watch the video for or listen to this song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tI-5uv4wryI>

**#36 – Stolen by Dashboard Confessional** – Back in the countdown for a 19<sup>th</sup> consecutive year, is this 2007 song which performed much better in the German pop charts than it did in the U.S. Perhaps that was due to the reworked version of the song which featured vocals from Eva Briegel, front woman of the popular German band, Juli. I became a fan of Juli after watching them perform on German television while I was visiting Oldenberg, Germany in 2005. I liked this song before it was re-released with the vocals from Briegel, and I grew to like it even more after the new version began

circulating. Over its 19 years in the countdown, it has climbed as high as the number 5 spot. Sadly, this year it moves into its lowest ever position.

I dedicate this one to actor Shawn Hatosy who starred in the television series *Animal Kingdom*. In this crime drama, inspired by the criminal activity of the Pettingill family, a lot of things were stolen. Cindy and I binged watched the show over the course of a few weeks last year and I would consider it my favorite series among those I watched last year. When I saw reports of the Louvre heist last October, it felt like I was hearing about an episode from *Animal Kingdom*. The great thing about this show was how Hatosy's character, Andrew "Pope" Cody, and his brothers were portrayed as "regular" people, with feelings and emotions, and a desire to do good in the world. All this despite the fact they were violent criminals. The writing and acting in this series were excellent, and Hatosy's performances were award-worthy in my opinion. Later in the year, we were watching the series, *Fire Country*, and Hatosy showed up again, starring as the unpopular interim Battalion Chief Brett Richards. By this point in time, the show had already jumped the shark, and at no point was the acting ever very good. When Hatosy joined the cast, his acting made it feel like a Major Leaguer had showed up to play on a Little League team. Hence my dedication of this song to him, which is completed with a link to its video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dxB0OT17KsU>

**#37 – Just Because by Jane's Addiction** – Here is another song that has been a consistent countdown riser. It debuted at number 51 in The Jeff's 53 Countdown and moved up to 43 last year. This year it moves up another six spots. I dedicate this one to the late James Gerald Leprino who died in June of last year. Leprino was an American billionaire businessman who was the chairman of Leprino Foods, the world's largest manufacturer of mozzarella cheese. Leprino Foods controls approximately 85% of the U.S. pizza cheese market. He started the business back in the 1950s following the closure of his dad's single location grocery in Denver, Colorado. Leprino, who had worked for his father, was spending his newly available free time hanging out with his friends at a pizza place near his father's store. As he watched the pizzaiolos their thing, he curiously noticed how much cheese went into the making of a pizza. He also marveled over how many pizzas were sold by this local pizza place. It was then and there that he decided he would good into the business of making mozzarella cheese "just because" a lot of cheese went into pizzas, and a lot of pizzas were eaten in the United States. Sometime "just because" is a good enough reason for doing something. Like right now, I'm going to share this link just because it will take you to the video for "Just Because": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sb3FJdRk-tI>

**#38 – I Lived by OneRepublic** – Continuing some positive countdown momentum is this pop standard from prolific songwriter and the band's front man, Ryan Tedder. After it debuted at number 46 in The Jeff's 52 Countdown, this song rose to 42 and 41 in subsequent years. For this year's edition of the countdown, "I Lived," enters the Top 40 for the first time.

I dedicate it to my oldest daughter, Allison. The lyrics in the song include the statement, “hope when the moment comes, you'll say, ‘I did it all’.” I have that same wish for all my kids, but when I hear this song played, it’s Allison that always comes to mind. Perhaps it’s because she came first.

Allison had a great year in 2025. She took a step closer to becoming a professional architect by completing her work experience hours and successfully passing 3 of the 6 tests she needs to pass. She also won an Award from the Virginia Chapter of The American Institute of Architects in recognition of her accomplishments and contributions to the profession. I couldn’t be happier for her, and I couldn’t be happier to share the video for this song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0rxydSolwU>

**#39 – Fireball by Pitbull featuring John Ryan** – As each year passes, I become a bigger and bigger fan of Pitbull. My fandom originated about four years ago when I decided to see Pitbull in concert for the first time. He wasn’t on my radar as an artist I was anxious to see, but I noticed he was scheduled to play in Hershey Stadium in July of 2022. As a notoriously thrifty individual, this piqued my interest due to the generally low cost of concert tickets in Hershey compared the more populated venues I would go to for concerts in the greater Philadelphia area. After seeing Pitbull perform in Hershey, my fandom was cemented, and I especially enjoyed hearing this song.

Fast Forward to the Fall of 2025. After seeing him once, Pitbull wasn’t on my list of artists I desired to see perform live. My current concert strategy is to see the artists I really like but have never seen play live before, especially those getting close to retirement age or quite frankly, death. Obviously, Mr. Worldwide is in neither of those categories. However, I received an alert via Spotify that Pitbull would be appearing in Atlantic City on the day after Christmas. I immediately thought tickets to that concert for my entire family would make a great Christmas gift. Everyone in my immediate family enjoys Pitbull and everyone had seen him in concert once, but we hadn’t seen him together. I approached Cindy with the idea. It came with some trepidation though given my predisposition for thriftiness. We ultimately decided the idea was too expensive given the prices for tickets in Atlantic City relative to Hershey. It’s kind of like when I go to a restaurant for dinner and I’m craving a Coke, but I ultimately choose tap water instead. I can’t bring myself to order a coke for \$3 when I know I can get that same product for about 50 cents at Costco when I buy in bulk. I could of course get complimentary refills at the restaurant and ascertain that same value, but 72 fluid ounces of Coke isn’t the best thing for my general health. But I digress.

Fast Forward another few months. I received an email in my Yahoo Mail inbox which indicated I could use Frequent Flyer miles to purchase concert tickets. I’m not sure if that was fate an advanced algorithm used by marketers to separate thrifty individuals from their money or in this case, frequent flyer miles, but it worked. It made me re-think the day after Christmas Pitbull Concert decision. Cindy and I went ahead and procured the tickets with frequent flyer miles. We delta locked the decision by adding an entry on our family calendar coded “Rogers Family Holiday Event” for all family members on

December 26 and 27. We did that so the kids wouldn't make any plans for those two days.

Fast Forward another few days. We received a text message in our family chat from my middle daughter Courtney asking what was happening on December 26 and 27. Cindy was amused by this as she had accurately predicted that Courtney would be the first to ask about this "family event," given she has a propensity to peruse our limited social media and family accounts such as our Cozi calendar. Cindy and I decided to keep the event a secret, partly to make it a fun surprise and partly as a social experiment to see if the kids could figure out what the surprise was and to see how hard they would try to figure it out.

Fast Forward to Christmas Day. We managed to keep the secret until Christmas morning. We had plans to keep it a surprise until the following day to see if they could figure it out while on the drive to Atlantic City. However, we broke down and let them open the present wrapped in gold paper which was bald caps, moustaches, and dark sunglasses for each of them. Once that present was opened, the girls were able figure it out.

We enjoyed the concert the following evening and the overnight stay in AC. Pitbull was great as usual. The only disappointment was that New Jersey native Jon Bon Jovi didn't show up for "Now or Never." In fact, the number 54 song in this countdown wasn't even played. The number 39 song was played. It was great. Here is a live version of the song to simulate the experience: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YcXk7-gk414>

Fast Forward to the day I wrote this Jeff's Countdown entry. It's the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the day (January 12, 1971) that the sitcom "All In The Family" debuted on CBS in 1971, I dedicate this song to one of the stars of that show, the late Rob Reiner. He and his wife Michele were tragically killed, presumably by his son, late last year. Reiner was one of my favorite actors and directors and an overall good guy.

**#40 – Lose Yourself by Eminem** – This year marks 15 consecutive appearances in the countdown for this song. It's becoming what we call a countdown stalwart. It debuted at number 25 in The Jeff's 41 Countdown and reached a peak at 17 just two years later. Since then, it hung out in the 17 to 40 range until it dropped out of the Top 40 last year, when it checked in at number 42. This year it finds its way back into the Top 40, albeit at the outer reaches.

I dedicate this one to actress Tatum O'Neal, who at the age of 11 starred in the original *Bad News Bears* film. This year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> year since that film was first released. It was a story about a team of losers who turned their season around, still lost in the end, but had a great time and received many life lessons along the way. I remember it being a favorite movie of mine growing up. I also remember O'Neal going on to marry John McEnroe, one of the more entertaining tennis players of his generation. Eminem is one of the more entertaining rappers of his generation, and although I think he's jumped the

shark with some of his recent work, this one is, as I said above, a countdown stalwart:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7YuAzR2XVAM>

**#41 – Escape by Enrique Iglesias** – Back for a second straight year in the countdown is this pop tune from the early Aughts. As I did last year, I dedicate this one to Dani Rogers, my youngest daughter. As I write this entry, I'm just hours away from leaving home with Dani to return her to college for the second semester of her sophomore year. For me, this song has come to symbolize the change in Dani's life from living at home under the close supervision of her parents, to living 400 miles away and on her own.

While I value the college experience for the education it provides, I also think it provides an important transition for young adults to be able to live on their own with the classroom structure and services of the university system to support them. Of course, the occasional care package from mom helps reinforce what Enrique sings about in this song: you can run, you can hide, but you can't escape my love.

It's not easy to experience your youngest child returning to college, leaving behind an empty nest. However, it's vitally important to allow kids to challenge themselves with new experiences. Being away from home is a great life experience for Dani as it was for my two older children as well. Knowing this experience will help her grow and become a responsible, well-adjusted adult is all the motivation I need to let her escape, at least for another semester. Enrique Iglesias letting Anna Kournikova escape is completely different story. You can watch the following video to see if Enrique lets Anna escape or not: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9mQJaXwGPlg>

**#42 – You Make My Dreams by Daryl Hall & John Oates** – It appears as if Hall and Oates will never again play together following their recent feud. They battled over the conditions of their business arrangement, their Whole Oates Enterprises joint venture. Their long feud ended last year in an agreement, but they also vowed never again play music together. At least we have their recorded works to fall back on, one of them being this song which has been a part of the last 9 countdowns, including this one. It debuted at number 40 in The Jeff's 47 Countdown, climbed as high as number 14. It now drops into its lowest ever countdown position at number 42.

I dedicate this one to actor Val Kilmer, who passed away last year at the age of 65. I enjoyed Kilmer's acting in several films with my favorites being *The Doors* and of course *Top Gun*. The Gore League Volleyball Team I've played on since 2014 is named Top Guns as homage to the famous volleyball scene in the movie. Kilmer played the Iceman character and he along with partner Slider, faced Maverick, played by Tom Cruise, and his partner Goose. Kilmer passed away in April of last year, and with the volleyball season starting in May, it was a no brainer that we would dedicate our season to the memory of Kilmer.

The 2025 season was a rocky one for Top Guns, the volleyball team. We were defending champions but struggled during the regular season as we finished just third in the standings. I personally struggled with a knee injury, missing three straight weeks during the middle of the season. There was also a night during the regular season where the team went 2-4 versus two opponents lower than us in the standings. The kicker was that we were 2-0 in the two games I sat out, leading me to question if I still had what it took to contribute to this team at a high level at age 54. The answer to that question was a profound, yes! As the health of my knee improved and we moved into the latter stages of the regular season and playoffs, the team really came together. We breezed through the playoffs for a second straight year, and I felt like my play down the stretch and in the championship game was a strong contribution to the team. For the second straight year, we won three straight playoff matches without dropping a single game. My dream of a second run of back-to-back A Division championships came true. Now it's on to the next dream, a four-peat which would equal the Appleton Central run of 1993 to 1996 and the Elk Creek run of 2013 to 2016. We have to bring home another championship next season to make a four-peat even possible, so before I get any further ahead of myself, here is the video for this dream maker of a song:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EErSKhC0CZs>

**#43 – Folsom Prison Blues by Johnny Cash** – I will continue to tell the truth. A big reason why this song remains a part of the Jeff's Countdown is due to the Johnny Cash, A.I. generated cover of Aqua's "Barbie Girl"

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAFdzBTe2lg>) which I love so much. Of course I do really like the song proper as well. It debuted at number 47 in The Jeff's 53 Countdown and retained that same position last year. This year it moves up four spots into its current position of 43.

I dedicate this one to John Allman Hemingway, who served in Britain's Royal Air Force during the Second World War and commanded the Number 43 Squadron RAF, flying Spitfires. Hemingway took part in the Battle of Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain, the Allied invasion of Italy and the Invasion of Normandy. He survived being shot down four times during the war. Hemingway died in March of last year at the age of 105. He was the last surviving airman of the Battle of Britain. Hemingway was a courageous hero in a field of work that's slowly being eliminated – the pilot of a battle aircraft. Drone warfare is probably better for the safety of our armed forces. It also eliminates the chance for military secrets to fall into enemy hands after a pilot's plane is shot down. However, it also takes away the opportunity for many of our best pilots to become heroes. In today's world those skilled pilots looking to become battle tested are left on the inside looking out of a figurative prison. They may have similar feelings to those shared by Johnny Cash in this song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIL73DK20Dc>

**#44 – Psycho by Puddle of Mudd** – A staple of the Jeff’s Countdown since the Jeff’s 38 edition, this year marks the 18<sup>th</sup> consecutive appearance for this song. After debuting at number 28, it climbed as high as number 8 in the Jeff’s 43 Countdown before it began a slow fall into its current position. This is the first year outside of the Top 40 for this song.

I dedicate this one to the late, great Hulk Hogan. On this day in 1984, the Hulkster became the first person to escape from the Iron Sheik’s dreaded “Camel Clutch.” Once free of the Iron Sheik’s infamous finishing move, Hogan gave him his typical running leg drop to secure the first of his 6 WWF/WWE World Championship Titles. That first title reign of 1,474 days is the third longest run in that title’s history. Although Hulk Hogan was never my favorite, that was Randy Savage, I still respect how he helped make professional wrestling a mainstream form of entertainment. He even appeared on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* in April of 1985. To date, Hogan is the only professional wrestler to appear on the cover of the physical magazine.

When Hogan left the WWF and joined the WCW in 1994, he had to change his name since the WWF had purchased the rights to the name “Hulk” from Marvel Comics. WCW didn’t want to pay the licensing fee, so Hulk Hogan became Hollywood Hogan, a villain who was quite the opposite of his WWF persona. The video for this song was filmed in Hollywood, on the set used for the famous “Psycho” movie. Give it a view here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDdeOncpD5E>

**#45 – Apple by Charli xcx** – In the Fall of 2024, I heard Charli xcx interviewed on the Howard Stern radio show. I enjoyed the interview, but as I listened, I couldn’t recall having heard any of Charli’s songs. So, when this kind of thing happens to me, I always do the same thing. I go to Spotify, search for the artist, find the song of theirs with the most listens, and listen to it. In this case, “Apple” was the song I identified. I gave it a listen, and I immediately liked it. I added it to several of my playlists including my Top Guns playlist and my Summer playlist. A few weeks later, I found the Extended Workout Remix 128 BPM version of the song, and I liked that one even more. I replaced “Apple” proper with the extended mix in all my playlists.

Evidently my daughter Courtney peruses my Spotify playlists because a few days after adding the “Apple” remix, I received a message in our family’s group chat saying that having this song on my playlist was, and I quote, “so brat.” I’m not going to lie, I wasn’t sure what “so brat” meant so I consulted A.I. I was pleased to learn that it means being confidently messy, unapologetically bold, and playfully defiant. I feel I identify with all three of those definitions, so once I determined this song would be a part of The Jeff’s 55 Countdown, I decided I would dedicate it to Courtney. In addition to being appreciative of her comment, Courtney is also a figurative apple which hasn’t fallen far from the tree of Jeff. To watch a video of another apple not falling far from a tree, click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VGIPAKwkWKE>

**#46 – Don't Bring Me Down by Electric Light Orchestra** – This is another song I frequently listen to while on my ride to work. In fact, according to Spotify Wrapped, it was my most played song of 2025. It helps put me in a frame of mind where I'm less likely to be brought down by people who may be having a bad day. I had a rough day on November 28 of last year as I watched my Philadelphia Eagles get pummeled by the Chicago Bears. I really needed this song following that game which came just one week after the Eagles lost another mood killing game. That one was to the Cowboys. Had the Eagles won either of those games, or yesterday's game for that matter, they would be the number 2 seed in the NFC playoffs right now rather than the 3 seed. That's not a huge deal, but that could mean the difference between one playoff home game and potentially multiple playoff home games.

Despairingly enough, the Bears are the number 2 seed thanks to that Black Friday win over the Eagles. That's despite the fact that they also choked and lost their game yesterday. Given how much I'm referring to the Bears in this countdown entry, it only fitting that I dedicate this song to the late Virginia Halas McCaskey. The principal owner of the Bears franchise since 1983 passed away on this day last year.

Halas McCaskey was the eldest child of Bears' founder and original owner, George Halas. Coincidentally, she attended Drexel University in Philadelphia where she earned a degree in Business Management. She worked in the Bears organization following graduation and until her death last year. She died at age 102. Sadly, she didn't get to witness the Bears making the playoffs this season, their first playoff appearance since 2020. She did get to witness the famous "double doink" in 2018, a play that always brings me back to a positive state, much like this song does:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FuiMQPc5aKA>

**#47 – I Feel Good by Pitbull** – There is no other song that can quickly improve my mood quite like this one can. I often listen to it on my ride to work in the morning to make sure I'm bringing positive energy into the building. It debuted at number 51 in last year's countdown, and this year it breaks into the Top 50.

Perhaps no hockey player in the history of the Flyers made Philadelphia fans feel good as Bernie Parent did during the mid-1970s. Back then, he was a brilliant netminder who led the Flyers to back-to-back Stanley Cup Trophies. Parent, who died last September, set the record for most wins by a goaltender in a season with 47 in 1974. He held that record until Martin Brodeur surpassed his mark in 2007. I've only ever been a peripheral hockey fan at best, but regardless I know how good he was and what he meant to the city of Philadelphia. For sure he was good, and you could even say he was a grand-Parent. Yeah, that joke was no good, but this video is good:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JmU16BbDmNM>

**#48 – Safari Song by Greta Van Fleet** – Being the thrifty individual that I am, I typically use the fitness room at work or the great outdoors for my morning exercise rather than pay to belong to a gym. For a large part of last year however, I needed to alter that strategy. I couldn't go to work early because my dog, Bruno, developed a kidney issue which required someone to be home at least every 5-6 hours so he could be let out. I ran the numbers, and it was less expensive to join Planet Fitness, which is a mile from my house, than it was to drive to work and back in my gas guzzling truck one additional time per day. The money saved on gasoline easily offset the gym membership. So, my morning routine became to drive to Planet Fitness for my morning workout, drive home, check my work emails and do some prep for work, let the dog out, and then drive into work mid-morning.

One of the unforeseen benefits of exercising at Planet Fitness was the top-notch playlist of songs they played in the men's locker room. They also had a video screen in the locker room which gave the title and artist of each song. Over the course of time, in which Planet Fitness was a part of my morning routine, my personal playlist of great music grew substantially. Included on that list was this song, which I had never heard previously. In fact, it's only been recently that I've heard this song played outside of Planet Fitness or my own playlist. At first, I thought this was a Led Zeppelin song since the lead singer definitely exudes a Robert Plant vibe. Regardless of the artist, who I never knew of previously, the vibe of this song is enough to make it the second highest debut song in this year's countdown. Given the safari reference in the title, I dedicate it to Robert Irwin.

Son of the late Steve Irwin, Robert is a wildlife conservationist who is carrying on the tradition of his father. In 2025, he also carried on the tradition of his sister, Bindi, by winning the 34<sup>th</sup> season of Dancing with the Stars. Several years prior, Bindi won the 21<sup>st</sup> season of Dancing.

To some extent I protested Robert's win. I was on Team Whitney Leavitt, who along with Robert was clearly one of the two best celebrity dancers in the contest. Leavitt didn't even reach the finals, however, as she faced backlash from call in voters who disliked her on-line antics. To me that indicates the system of judging the victor is grossly ineffective. My beef is with the scoring system for allowing such a travesty to occur. It's not with Robert Irwin who was a deserving winner, but didn't have to face his toughest competitor in the final. So yes, my dedication to Robert stands as it wouldn't be fair to punish him for a system he had no part in creating. So then, let's go on safari: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lfBC6S9qVM>

**#49 – Southern Cross by Crosby, Stills, & Nash** – Back for a second year in the countdown is this song which details the healing power of sailing the open seas and taking in nature at its finest. I've spent a lot of time reflecting on the power of nature recently, and what it can do for us in terms of helping us recharge our figurative batteries. I'm a regular listener to the *Hidden Brain* podcast, and one recent episode titled "The Reset Button," detailed the dilemma of how many people rush through life chasing goals

and spending way too much time in front of computer and cell phone screens. While reaching goals can be satisfying, overworking ourselves and being busy all the time can strip us of the simple joy of experiencing what is around us, especially the many awe-inspiring wonders of the natural world. Studies show that when we stop and spend time enjoying nature, it makes us happier and more productive.

When I hear of such studies linking one's time spent enjoying nature to increased productivity I'm reminded of the story of the two lumberjacks. My condensed version of the story starts with the understanding that two lumberjacks start and end their workday at the same time each day. The first lumberjack works the entire time, without stopping for as much as a snack. The second lumberjack disappears for an hour during the middle of the day, each and every day. Despite working one less hour each day, the second lumberjack always ends up with a bigger pile of wood than the first. Frustrated by being outperformed at his job by someone who seemingly doesn't work as hard as he does, the first lumberjack asks the second where he disappears to each day for a full hour. The second lumberjack answers him quite simply, "I go home and sharpen my axe."

Whether your tool is an axe or your brain, it needs frequent re-sharpening. When it comes to your brain, multiple studies show that rest and getting your mind off the task at hand helps you be more productive. A great way to get your mind off the task at hand is by being in nature and simply appreciating what's around you. A boat ride to the southern hemisphere certainly qualifies. Another means of getting your mind off the task at hand is through experiencing humor. Since this song is Southern themed, I dedicate it to Southern comedic actress, Polly Holliday who died in September of last year. The native Alabamian played the character Flo in the 1970s and 80s sitcom, *Alice*. The show was one of my parents' favorites, so I watched it often growing up. I don't remember much from that sitcom, but I do remember Flo telling her boss, diner owner Mel, to "kiss my grits," at least once per episode. I guess that was part of her Southern charm.

So whether it be taking a walk through the forest, watching a sitcom from the 70s, or watching the video for this song <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHpLEW0MW4E>, don't forget to take a break every now and then and take your mind off your work or whatever is troubling you at the moment!

**#50 – Cumbersome by Seven Mary Three** – This song, which became relevant for me during the Covid-19 pandemic, returns to the countdown for a sixth consecutive year. It debuted at number 48 following a turbulent 2020 in which the pandemic forced me to abandon many of my typical routines and adopt new ones. One of my new routines was to take a walk outdoors over the lunch hour. I often listened to the Lithium channel on SiriusXM while those walks and they played this song rather frequently. I eventually created a pandemic playlist, made this song a part of that playlist, and thus heard it being played even more. The frequent play created a momentum which led to it rising in the countdown each of its first five years. It peaked at number 34 last year. Despite the retreat this year, it remains of my favorites. Whenever I hear it played, my mind drifts back to 2020 and I remember those many solo walks I took over the Noon hour.

Later this year, the *Rocky* franchise will celebrate the 50-year anniversary of the release of the original *Rocky* film. Given that, I dedicate this song to Sylvester Stallone the man who both wrote the story of Rocky and starred in the series. Each of the first four *Rocky* films reside on my Top 50 Movies list, with *Rocky II* occupying the top spot. In addition to his role as the “Italian Stallion,” Stallone starred in a slew of other films, particularly action films. He is one of only three actors in history to be nominated for Academy Awards in both the category of Best Original Screenplay and the Best Actor category. Additionally, Stallone and Harrison Ford are the only two actors to have starred in a box-office No. 1 film across six consecutive decades. Those are some serious accomplishments that would be cumbersome for any of today’s actors to match. Perhaps they could get some inspiration from the video for this song:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjNn4bbbgSw>

**#51 – I’m Free by Soup Dragons** – I wrote about freedom in my dedication for song number 55, and I’m writing about freedom again for this song which appears for a second consecutive year in the countdown. I dedicate this one to the late Bill Gore. The one-time scientist for DuPont founded W.L. Gore & Associates with his wife, Vieve, in 1958. One of my favorite quotes from Bill Gore mentions freedom. About the enterprise he created, he said that, “when people operate in an environment of freedom with a minimum of restraints, their potential for creative innovation and productivity is released and spectacular achievements result.”

Since October 2, 2000, I’ve been an associate at Gore, learning from other associates, many of whom were lucky enough to have worked with Bill while he was still alive. Over my 25 years, I’ve seen Gore grow almost 20 times larger in terms of share price. Like almost any growing business, we’ve added restraints in the form of policies, practices, standards, organizational structures, and intercompany contracts. While these examples of corporate bureaucracy were all added with good intentions, they do limit associate freedom, and when associates aren’t operating in an environment of freedom, then they are not reaching their full potential. So, in recent years, it’s become a passion of mine to do as much as I can to create freedom for other associates. The last thing I want to see happen is for Gore to become the company that Bill Gore left. So I will continue promoting freedom, perhaps using the video for this song as an advertisement: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIjbcRu3tiU>

**#52 – You Wreck Me by Tom Petty** – Last year’s countdown opening song returns for a second year. It reached the countdown last year because it was my top played song of 2024 according to Spotify Wrapped. This year, it didn’t reach the Top 5 of my Wrapped, but perhaps it’s a good thing that I didn’t overplay it and therefore I still enjoy it enough to have in my Top 55.

I dedicate this one to the late William Shakespeare. The English playwright, generally regarded as the greatest writer in the English language, died at the age of 52. In April of

this year, it will be 410 years since Shakespeare died. He is amazingly still as relevant now as he likely was back then. I haven't read Shakespeare since it was required reading for me in high school, but I do remember enjoying both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Julius Cesear*. I also look forward to seeing the new movie *Hamnet*, which is a fictional portrayal of William's life retrospective of the tragic loss of his son at age 11. The film debuted at the 52<sup>nd</sup> Telluride Film Festival last summer. I may have missed my opportunity to see it in theaters, but I plan to catch it on Netflix sometime soon. While I wait to watch that, I can join you in watching the video for this song:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3aGZZueg08>

**#53 – Crazy by Seal** – After a 16-year hiatus from the Jeff's Countdown, this song makes a triumphant return for this year's edition. It debuted at number 23 in the Jeff's 29 Countdown and despite a 10-year run of countdown inclusion it never ascended any higher than the number 23 spot.

This song returned to my stream of consciousness several months ago while I was attending a meeting as part of my normal workday. The meeting was centered around an exciting new opportunity for my team to provide materials into the rapidly developing eVTOL industry. An eVTOL (short for electric Vertical Take-Off and Landing) vehicle is a new type of electric-powered aircraft that can take off, hover, and land vertically like a traditional helicopter but uses electric motors which make it quieter and emission-free unlike traditional helicopters. If broadly adopted, eVTOLs have the potential to revolutionize transportation by reducing urban congestion and providing faster point-to-point travel. This sounded like an exciting new opportunity for us, yet when it came time for us to discuss how manufacturing was going to support this new opportunity almost everyone in the meeting was focused on minimizing risk. We were unable to make an important decision because every potential option we identified for a specific manufacturing operation involved risk. One option was to continue running an old and suboptimal piece of equipment and risk that it could suffer a critical failure. Another option was to risk using a similar but new piece of equipment that wasn't yet validated for the application. A third option was to invest in upgrading the old equipment and risk that the investment never pays off because the eVTOL vehicle is never broadly adopted.

As I sat in the meeting thinking about how I could influence people into selecting the option I favored, the words in this song, "we never going to survive, unless we get a little crazy," came into my mind. I was sure that from the perspective of a few others in the meeting, my option was the crazy one. I also thought about eVTOL technology and what a colleague had said about its adoption. He said that broad adoption could make us uber successful. He said that initial use would be from wealthy individuals commuting from one event to the next during the Olympic Games or World Cup Soccer matches. This made me think about the line in the song, "in a world full of people, only some want to fly, isn't that crazy." After that meeting I added this song to my regular playlist and now it's back in the countdown after a 16-year absence.

Speaking of the Olympics, I dedicate this one to Ágnes Keleti, the Hungarian and Israeli artistic gymnast and coach who won multiple Olympic medals. Prior to her death on this day last year, Keleti was the oldest living Olympic Champion. While representing Hungary at the Summer Olympics in 1952 and 1956, she won 10 Olympic medals including five gold, three silver, and two bronze. Keleti is among the most accomplished Jewish Olympic athletes ever.

Keleti was able to compete in the Olympics in the 1950s only because she survived World War II and the Holocaust by purchasing and using an identification card of a Christian girl while she worked as a maid in a small village in the Hungarian countryside. It was a crazy scheme but it allowed her to survive, much like how Seal advises us to survive via the lyrics to this song:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Fc67yQsPqQ&list=RD4Fc67yQsPqQ&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Fc67yQsPqQ&list=RD4Fc67yQsPqQ&start_radio=1)

**#54 – Now or Never by Pitbull featuring Bon Jovi** – Since watching the debacle that was the Super Bowl LIX halftime show last year, I’ve been on a quest to convince the powers that be that Pitbull is the perfect musical artist to perform at halftime of the Super Bowl. It won’t happen this year, so my quest continues in 2026. This debut song in the Jeff’s 55 Countdown is a prime reason why Mr. Worldwide is the perfect performer for center stage at the Big Game. The song spans genres and generations as most of Pitbull’s music does. Hey NFL, do you want to attract more women in the 50 to 64 age range? You’ll be able to literally hear the Depends undergarments dropping as Jon Bon Jovi and Richie Sambora appear on stage to sing the chorus to this song. Do you want Millennials? You’ll have them intently listening when Usher joins Mr. 305 for “DJ Got Us Fallin’ in Love.” Do you want my daughters and their Gen Z friends? Just have him play “Hotel Room Service” and you hear a thousand or more Gen Zers signing, “hotel, motel, Holiday Inn” in perfect unison. Want to draw the Spanish speaking faction without turning off English speakers? Just have Enrique Iglesias join Pit on stage to sing, “I like It.” It’s time to make this happen NFL! Dale!!

It’s my understanding that Jay-Z has a say in who performs at the Super Bowl Halftime Show, so I dedicate this song to him. Here’s what we could be experiencing Jay:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tit\\_16Jha0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tit_16Jha0)

**#55 – "I Can’t Wait” by Nu Shooz** – When I was a kid, and I was anxious for a future event like Christmas or my birthday, my mom would always tell me not to wish my life away. She was 42 when I was born, so when I was 12, and at that age where I wanted life to come at me faster, she was the age I am now. So I can understand now why she would want me to value each and every day, and in recent years, I’ve come to adopt her credo. That’s been a little more difficult of late though. As I approach my 55<sup>th</sup> birthday, and the opportunity it brings, I’ve been anxious for the date to get here. In just 49 more days, I’ll be retirement eligible. While that doesn’t mean I can stop working, and in all honesty, I actually want to continue working, it does mean I will that option, at least with

my current employer for whom I've worked more than 25 years. I'm looking forward to having that option, whether that means another 25 or more years working for Gore, or pursuing something new, I'm just looking forward to having options. So, as I've spent the last few months being anxious for this milestone birthday and playing the waiting game, this song has become a bit of an anthem for me.

I dedicate it to former Philadelphia Eagle, "Big Play" Darius Slay, who was born on this day in 1991. Less than two years ago, just about everyone thought the Eagles were going to release Slay prior to the 2024 season. The Eagles bolstered their secondary by drafting Quinyon Mitchell and Cooper DeJean, but they held onto Slay to be a mentor of sorts to his new teammates. While it was evident that Slay had lost a step himself in 2024, I give him a lot of the credit for the success Mitchell and DeJean have had since they became Eagles. That success has lived on into the 2025 season, despite the fact the Eagles cut Slay prior to the start of the new league year. He moved on to the Pittsburgh Steelers and played several games for them before he asked for and was granted a release from the Steelers on December 2. Rumor has it Slay asked to be released so he could re-join the Eagles. If that was his plan, it was thwarted by the Buffalo Bills. The Bills claimed Slay off waivers, and since they had waiver priority over the Eagles, the now 35-year old cornerback is property of the Buffalo Bills. Slay chose to retire from football rather than play for the Bills. While I question Slay for signing with the Steelers only to leave them while they were in the middle of a playoff race, I do love the fact that the team I follow has created a culture that makes top players want to play for them. And I love the fact that Slay's influence led to both Mitchell and DeJean earning Pro Bowl invitations this season.

As I think about the path Darius Slay has chosen for himself in recent weeks, I continue to reflect on my own professional journey and what lies ahead for me. I love what organizational psychologist, Adam Grant, says about professional success. He says that the most important measure of success is not status, power, or wealth. It's how much freedom you have, and true success is the freedom to stop caring about anyone else's definition of success. In 49 more days, I'll receive a small amount of additional freedom. It's not yet important what I'll do with that freedom. What matters to me most is that I'll have it. And I can't wait. Sorry Mom! Here now is the video for this song:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJ1tBVtYOBC&list=RDUJ1tBVtYOBC&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJ1tBVtYOBC&list=RDUJ1tBVtYOBC&start_radio=1)

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