

A Different Kind of Year Requires a Different Kind of Xmas Letter

2020 has been the mother of all Negative Nelly's. From Biblical natural disasters and racial unrest, to a less than peaceful transfer of power and global health crisis. I yearn for prior years when all I had to complain about was Al Gore and his hanging chads, or David Hasselhoff's singing career. Then just cap it off with some random automotive facts, and ever so seamlessly segue into a grand family road trip full of campy shenanigans. Ah, but not to be. I refuse to waste my finely honed literary skills by piling a bunch of First-World complaints on the Boo-Hoo Why-Me bandwagon. This was a banner year of education for the Wing Family of Greenacres, and I want to share with you our positive personal intellectual triumphs of 2020.

Nancy learned that working from home (which she has done for years) is really cool and convenient, until you are forced to do so by law. Then it kind of has more of a house arrest feel, sans the ankle bracket. And your only social contact is spending a lot of time at the windows watching the neighbors with binoculars, hoping they are doing the same thing to you. It can be really expensive as well. All the money that you save from commuting (and then some) must go for a 65K BTU forced air natural gas heater for the garage. With the kids gone and no buffer, it is the only place you can put your husband to that will keep you from killing him. Damn you, COVID.

Nancy also learned that if you like your job and still have it, it might not be the best time to retire. Sure, the age is in the zone and the portfolio is bouncing back, but without the opportunity for fulfilling volunteer work, travel to exotic places (pretty much anything beyond the mailbox), and sharing social experiences with family and friends, it might be better to soldier on with the current career a little while longer. Plus there is a huge cost savings. Mainly by avoiding all the bail bonds, trial, and attorney fees when they find said husband in the garage with the power cord from the heater wrapped around his neck.

Nancy's biggest quest for knowledge has been studying for her real estate license. This is something she has always thought about and it would be a perfect part time job in the future. Not as though there isn't time to study these days. I think it is pretty cool when she starts to let her inner nerd out and goes on about property easements, contract law, and says some nifty Latin legal words. Although I do not know why she keeps throwing at me the more obscure real estate facts, like you don't have to disclose if a person actually died in a home unless specifically asked. A little weird.

Jaclyn learned that if you are getting hired for your first job out of college, it is a good idea to negotiate a delayed start date. That gave her time after her December graduation at MSU to visit friends and family across the county, while providing some post grad decompression before entering the 'real world' of office politics, 401ks, and selecting a health care plan. So when she walked into the building to start at Blue Origin in early March 2020, she got a little taste of the old corporate world, and then a great big juicy bite and of the New Normal. She likes her job and is learning to live in the big city (which, since nobody can go outside, reminds her of the open spaces of Montana).

Jaclyn has discovered how rockets are launched. Rolling them onto the launch pad, weather balloons, cryo propellant, aligning, a million pre-checks, up into space, sonic boom on re-entry, and then landing ever so gently on the original the launch pad. The most critical element of that entire sequence is when the company flies you to Texas to observe this event in person, **THEN** learning to fully utilized the rental car and free gas. Maybe by driving out and climbing Guadalupe peak (state HP). Visiting the famous migratory bat at Carlsbad Caverns NP. Or taking a little trek through the dunes of a unique desert known as White Sands NM. Maybe.

Jaclyn also learned how to change the oil in her car. Other than putting on a spare tire, it is the one automotive thing I think everyone should know. Of course, there are no abandoned gravel pits in the Madison Park area of Seattle, but she was able to find a level parking lot and use a catch bucket (she is so environmentally minded). And the Fumoto valve I swapped the

drain plug for is a total cheat, but she is a city dweller without a garage. Officially one less car in the stable. The first step towards downsizing.

Mitch learned the best thing about being a high school graduate in 2020 grad wasnot being a high school graduate in 2021. Probably the biggest life lesson from all of this is that better to have 50% of something than 100% of nothing. To always be thankful of those partial senior experiences you did have and not lament the could haves. Also best to keep in mind not to get too comfortable in your parent's basement. Your old bedroom was technically a subsidized month to month rental without a damage deposit, so when the boxes marked for the attic or landfill come out, don't be surprised. 😊

Mitch began his college education at EWU his fall. He's learning how to roll out of bed at noon to take his online only courses only, while staring at the walls of his single occupancy 70-year-old dorm room and trying to guess how many layers he'd have to chip thru to find the lead-based stuff. The bright spot is that being forced to sit at a desk with a keyboard and headset will help him decide if he ever wants to be a telemarketer. Or know what it would feel like to spend time in a medium security correctional facility (a really nice one - with free WIFI). Although it has been toned down a lot, there is still the first-year social aspect of living on campus. New people and new friends.

Mitch has learned a LOT about hair. He spent the last two years growing it down to the middle of his back (Trans-Siberian Orchestra style). Covering every inch of the bathroom vanity with bottles and tubes of hair products, emptying the hot water heater, and clogging the drainpipes with those luxurious Fabio strands. Then this fall, he shaved it all off. Suddenly we are looking at Walter White and he is taking three-minute showers. His friends thought it was cool and how the girls cried. Now it is growing out some, and he got some stiches from banging his melon on a weight bar at the gym. I'm hoping this new angry street-fighting Arian Nation youth look by will soften some before he returns to school (or attends any demonstrations).

I'm learning how to use a smart phone. I got an app that translates Japanese to English, so that I can read the shop manual for the Figaro. The Figgy is loving my free time, sporting a new top and tons of under hood upgrades as I replace 30-year-old hoses and bushings on a car that was never meant to leave Nippon. But I think I downloaded the military version, because when I went to translate a section on removing the transmission filter, it came back as "Me love you long time solider boy." Maybe I'm doing something wrong.

I learned that school bus driving in a pandemic has become a giant and overly complex math story problem. I am working twice the hours, driving three times the miles, and transporting one tenth the students. The student must sit in alternating seats, loading back to front, with every 3rd window open (weather permitting). I fill one quart spay bottles from 30-gallon drums of sanitizer, mix it 1:4, and wipe down high touch areas four times a day, but six times if students were transported for more than 30 minutes. Assigned seating charts must be completed and turned in immediately after each run for potential contact tracing, but kids like to move around and are hard to recognize with masks. So, buses are cleaner than they have ever been, but I still personally would not lick the windows or the seat backs. Well, windows for sure.

The most important thing I learned this year is that when my newest edition of Uncle John's Bathroom reader (an annual Xmas gift) finishes mid-year, DO NOT just grab something unread from that pile of books I feel I should read but never will. That is how I inadvertently got thru "A Complaint Free World", "Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning", and "The Five Languages of Love" this year. On the bright side, we had a pandemic. And the store shelves were stripped of toilet paper for a couple of months. And these books are no longer in my home. Call it the best unspoken win of MMXX.

So that is it. Remember this holiday season to count your fortunes and your blessings. Leave everything else in 2020. Most importantly count your toilet paper. The Greatest Generation had "A chicken in every pot and two cars in every garage". Our generation has "A quilted 48 pack in every closet and an industrial 96 pack in every attic". Here is looking forward to 2021, and the day I put a mask on outside of a bank and they DO ready the dye packs and hit the silent alarm when I walk in the door.

A true symbol of a return to normalcy.

The Wings