



Nie Mój Cyrk, Nie Moje Małpy

(nyeh mooy tzeerk, nyeh moy-eh maw-pee)

I think I will get back to an old Christmas and letter tradition. When I'd grab the opening line from a famous novel, then weave that thin thread through the entire holiday narrative. Alas. Ran out of good one-liners. So instead, I grabbed a modern proverb that spoke to me this year and added it to the header. Just had to keep in the original Polish - rolls off the tongue so much better. But the page is short, my words are long. Go time!

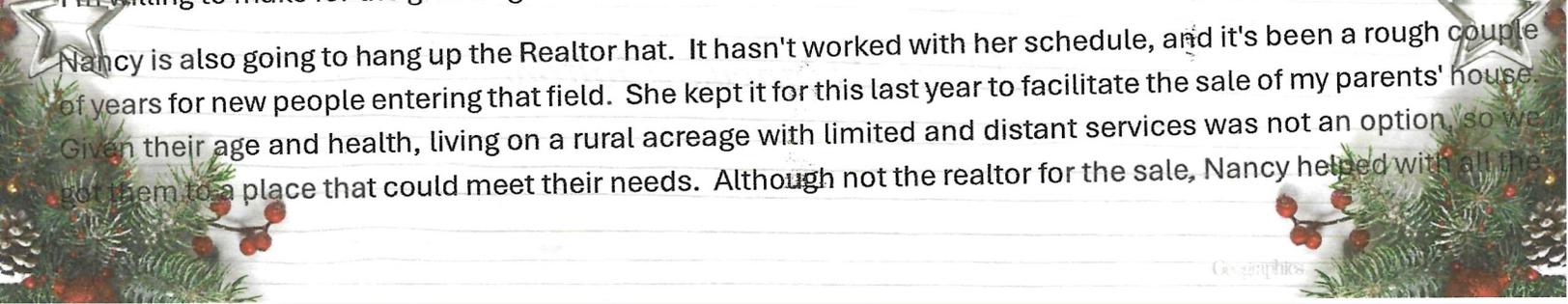
The Wing family is quite scattered these days, but we did a pretty good job with our collective global carbon footprint. Nancy clearly did her fair share, taking to the skies and pretending to be a 1960s jetsetter. Not doubling down in Dragonara or rolling the dice at Monte Carlo (yet). While the world's casinos are still safe, the international wine supply is definitely in peril. For my contribution, I continue to drive great big buses around in circles for a living. You can tell the season by the color - red in the summer, yellow for the rest of the year.

Mitch might make up for our excessive carbon by becoming a compact urban explorer. A city dweller. He certainly went BIG (NYC), and did NOT go home. An empty basement is a good basement. And then there's Jac. A first-time homeowner in a newer build with all that eco-green stuff. Also, with a long list that will never end. Now she understands why, throughout most of her childhood, I was always walking around the house with a clipboard and a pencil behind my ear. And last but not least, the newest member of the family. A scruffy mutt named after a rowdy but soooooo good-looking barroom bouncer. I pick up his carbon pawprint four times a day. Never would have guessed that unconditional love smells like ****, but I'm good with it.

*For those of you who hate to read and complain annually about my letter, **STOP HERE**. For everyone else, let's unpack some of the above in detail and see what we find! You won't be sorry (just disappointed)*

As I mentioned above, Nancy was off travelling again. I won't do that whole list thing. I find it boring, and more so for people trying to generate hate-likes on those annoying mind-static platforms known as social media. But it would be fair to say she spent the better part of three months bouncing around and in between the Big Apple, Cumberland Plateau, Apennine Peninsula, Swards Folly, New Spain, Glitter Gluch, and spent a questionable week uncomfortably near the country's largest Aryan Nations' headquarters. But hey, *nie mój cyrk, nie moje małpy*. She shows no signs of slowing down. Now, for about half of those travels, I was actually at home and not conveniently working seasonally out of state. But the demanding schedule and commitment of my second job, nurturing the Hearts and Minds of tomorrow's world leaders, just won't allow such freedom. It's a sacrifice I'm willing to make for the greater good of all of us. Sure, I may not be a hero, but I know what one feels like. 😊

Nancy is also going to hang up the Realtor hat. It hasn't worked with her schedule, and it's been a rough couple of years for new people entering that field. She kept it for this last year to facilitate the sale of my parents' house. Given their age and health, living on a rural acreage with limited and distant services was not an option, so we got them to a place that could meet their needs. Although not the realtor for the sale, Nancy helped with all the



paperwork and partnered with me on the move, clearing out the house, the prep, and the final sale. A LOT of heavy lifting (both physically and emotionally) with too few helping hands and too many stressful bumps during the closing. But we persevered and are done. *Nie mój cyrk, nie moje małpy.*

For Jaclyn, you can just cut and paste from last year's Xmas letter. But it has been fun watching Jac's story arc. Student. Engineer. Long-term love interest. Pet owner. And now a homeowner. Not sure what is left (other than something that's going to cost me a lot of money). I'm sure the narrative will have a happy ending. She actually reaches out to me more now with all of her home projects. It usually starts out as "Hey, I just discovered this," followed by "Can you believe they did this," and after a lot of research and a lot of digging, she sums it all up with a very complex but meaningful solution that may or may not include a genocide with the local ladybug population (it was their fault). I giggle when she uses ChatGPT to take a photo of a smoke alarm to figure out why it's not working correctly (that stuff actually works!). In my day, you'd have to go down to the hardware store, where the old chain-smoking store clerk of wisdom would ask you what you were working on. And before he would help, you had to sit through ten minutes of him saying how stupid you are for not knowing how the flopper in the toilet tank works. At the end of the day, I'm glad she shares. And with a bit of luck, their house won't have too many gremlins to chase. Just glad *nie mój cyrk, nie moje małpy!!*

After Mitch worked at Glacier Park the summer before last, he went straight to The Big Apple (NYC) to become a city mouse. It has been a year now. I don't know if that makes him a newcomer? A resident? Tried to find a Polish saying for 'he who rides the subway underground, dodges night rats on the sidewalk' to no avail (must not have rats in Poland). I guess he is your quintessential New Yorker now. Paying too much rent for too little space, taking public transportation like the other 5.5 million people every day, working a job he doesn't like for people he doesn't like, all along just wanting to be an actor. And he is serious. He got accepted into the Stella Adler Conservatory of Acting. It's more than an acting school. It's an intensive three-year training program for serious actors to develop their craft and build careers. Its approach emphasizes imagination, deep text analysis, and even personal truth. To basically see and understand acting as a lifelong commitment. To yourself, humanity, and the arts. It's not cheap. I can now tell you EXACTLY what it costs to have (and keep) my empty basement. Not sure if he will make it through all three years given how intensive the studies are. Regardless, he'll walk away with things I could never have taught him. And at the end of the day, come out the other side as close to his true self as he can be. But in reality, I'm just thankful *nie mój cyrk, nie moje małpy.*

His name is Dalton, and he's the world's most glorious mutt. His mom was mostly Chocolate Lab, with a good dose of Weimaraner in her (spooky golden eyes). His dad was mostly a French Beauceron Shepard, mixed up with the unknown creature that loves to fetch balls. Our boy got all of mom's color and face, with all of dad's flowing curly locks. I originally wanted to call him Bodie. But Nancy vetoed that. Hmm. Because?? Our old neighbors (who have moved) had a dog named Bodie (who died years ago). I didn't know that rule was out there. So I went with my second pick, Dalton. And if that didn't fly, I was going to resort to Nomad. Ever play Connections in the NYT puzzle section? All these names have something in common :-). I look forward to many long walks as he grows up. Great disposition. Amazing expression. A bark that will shake paint off the ceiling when something spooks him (which is currently EVERYTHING). And he doesn't snore like a drunk sailor on a three-day shore leave. But he's still young.

And just like that, I'm done. That's it. Finis. Or is it?? Is this *nie mój cyrk*? Are these *nie moje małpy*?

Merry Christmas to All from the Wings

Dave, Nancy, Dalton

Welcome to the after party. If you are getting this page, well, you made the cut. Because if you didn't, you would never know there was sooooo much more to my holiday tome this year. Continue, but remember this is all on you. Actions and consequences, just like I teach on the school bus. That's why little Johnny keeps his head inside the window because I will break his ***** fingers so he can't pick his nose until he's 30.

Yes, I work two jobs that basically roll into each other every year (and are starting to overlap). But I love what I do. Three months of all-consuming summer work. Literally. Mind, body, and soul often work five-plus days a week. Driving and talking on a narrow mountain road in a 90-year-old vintage motor bus for a hundred days in the summer heat takes a toll. I reach a point where I actually enjoy getting back into the routine of the school bus. Then after nine months of dealing with those kids in a 35000-pound vehicle, trying to keep my eyes on the road and yelling at little Johnny to keep his head in the ***damn window. Argh. That also takes a toll. It makes my thoughts turn back to the mountains of Montana. This is my Ying and Yang. My Cycle of Life. And I just renewed my CDL through 2031, so I might cruise right thru 65 without noticing. Just watch my hair get a little grayer and hope I don't find out what gout is. At least that is the plan for now.

Every year, driving the Red Bus at Glacier is different. Really? How can that be? Same mountains. Same lakes. Same roads. People have been recreating there since the Great Northern Railway built those ornate Gilded Age lodges over 115 years ago. My bus has been in service continuously every season since 1936, with the exception of World War II and the Pandemic. But it IS different. I see something new every season. I reunite with what are now old friends and share what I can only call a feeling of community. A sense of belonging. I meet and work with new people. From all walks of life and all ages. Many of whom my path would have never crossed outside of the seasonal world of employment. And yep, some I never want to see again (and those are the ones that always come back!!).

Behind the wheel, this was my best summer ever. I gave tours to over 1000 people for the first time. I logged over 6000 miles for the first time. My narratives are getting better, I'm changing up my stories to fit the crowd, and I've finally learned that sometimes people just don't want to listen to anything you have to say. So let them enjoy the view and ask questions. My Red Bus #94 (I've had the same one for the last four seasons) is not in optimal shape. Every year, a few are sent out for 250k in refurbishments (mind you, they are worth 6x that and earn their keep, plus some, every summer). Mine got a partial in 2021 because of post-pandemic supply chain issues. Since it is partially done, it is at the back of the line to be completed after all 33 in the fleet have been done. So I'm probably looking until at least 2029 when I will have an engine that can climb the mountain at over 45 mph or a transmission that can keep me coasting down the mountain at under 25 mph without burning up the brakes. But if you come on my tour, I'll tell you what I tell everyone else. Yes, my bus is safe. Enough. Like a small-town carnival ride, that packs up and vanishes in the dark of the night, never to be seen again.

I probably climbed two peaks this summer and logged around 50 miles on trails. In comparison to 2022, when I bagged 24 peaks and hoofed over 450 trail miles (of course, I was trying to kill myself). It's almost embarrassing to have a license plate on the Delica that reads "GOATBOY". But this summer was different in a way I wasn't expecting. I found what I call The Way of the Water. Late last year, in early winter, I bought an inflatable kayak. A sport that I've never really done, which goes against my innate fear of deep water from a near-drowning event when I was a child. I'm at the stage of my life where I should be letting stuff go and not accumulating. I do not need another 50 pounds of gear to take to Glacier every summer. But apparently I do. There is an entire ritual of getting that thing blown up and onto the water, as with all things worth doing.

When I glided out onto St Mary Lake for the first time, I was forever taken. I couldn't imagine how this had not been a part of my life all of these years. Upper St Mary is 10 miles long, 2 miles wide, 300' deep, and in the heart of Glacier Park. Very few people paddle it because the wind can come up at any time (which I can personally attest to!). Every chance I got last summer, I would put in and paddle for hours. I logged over 150 miles and 100 hours on just St Mary alone. My last paddle of the season was 17 miles over nine amazing hours.

When I get my blog caught up, you will be blown away by the photos.

Being on the Lake is like going back 100 years. Before there was a road in the Park. Before there were 3.4 million people crushing and trampling the place annually in just three short months. Picture being in those amazing mountains and forests, with 4000 acres all to yourself to explore without another person in sight. Over 30 miles of shoreline in the most pristine wilderness you can imagine. At best, you might have to share it with a tour boat or two, and an occasional fisherman. The noise of the road doesn't reach you. The sun burns your shadow onto the rocks at the bottom of the lake through the clearest water you have ever seen. You can quietly watch bears and moose forage on the shoreline, while bald eagles and belted kingfishers swoop their prey out of the shallows. You can pull up to any of a hundred private beaches to explore. Hidden coves too far from trails and roads for anyone to bother you. Yeah, I've been going to this park for 40 years, and never experienced the peace I found this summer.

The Delica did quite well, too. I have the one with the Chamonix winter package, which means the transmission and differentials are geared for the mountains. And Glacier Park has its share of mountains. It handled the steep climbs up and down the road like a champ. Saw a couple of other Delicas in the Park this summer as well, but they were all from Canada. They are much more common up there in the states (mainly because CA can import at 15 years, while in the US we have to wait for 25). I've never had a van before. Because the seats are so comfortable and configurable, it was great to find a nice spot to park and relax. Lots of views in Glacier. Roll open the sliding door, prop up my feet, throw on some music, and do a little reading or journaling. I really should learn how to sketch, but I think that ship has sailed.

But I'm easy to approach, and I talked with a lot of strangers just interested in the strange Japanese automobile in the crazy little corner of Montana. Big bonus: it fits all the gear and supplies I need for my three months of work, and I designed the roof rack platform to support my fat ass x2. I've pulled up the schedule for the summer meter showers. Next season, I'm looking forward to spending some time atop the old Deli and seeing if stargazing is as good as people claim. There is a lot to be said for those clear, dark Montana skies in August!

And I'll be safe from lions, since I hear they can't climb ladders. 😊

I think that is enough for now. I applaud all of you who made it this far. I'll dig into the details of the school bus and Glacier stories I have queued up to publish on my blog over the next couple of months. I hate working on a retrospective backlog. I tend to lose a little of the edge and nuances that come from drafting in the moment.

Until then:



Check out my new GoatBoy splash page. I have this QR code on the Delica, and it got quite a few hits last summer