

**Ball from 3**

According to the Irish Times, the average Polish immigrant mails almost 4000 Euros to Poland each year. Since 2004 when Poland became a member of the EU, more than 4.5 billion Euros were transmitted. But they send less and less as fewer Poles leave the country so I guess it is a positive sign. What was bad a few years back that led people to leave (economy and low paid jobs) actually turned good because Poland got a money boost that it wouldn't have gotten otherwise. This and of course some smart decisions on the government's side. According to the Ernst & Young report, Poland ranks 7th in the World in terms of investment attractiveness. Could this be the same money that US investors and Irish immigrants from the Boston area send to their homeland? The money that the smell of awoke the Celtic Tiger?

I'm not sure what contributed to it but Poland is now officially listed as the poorest of the richest. Better than the other way around, I think. For the first time it made the richest countries list. Surely it is not "Lifestyles of The Rich and Famous" Robin Leach style, but even the rich get sick of "champagne wishes and caviar dreams". They need to be reconnected with real life sometimes.

Reflecting back on our good fortunes, this year I'm also thankful for ...all my cars, over the time, for getting me where I needed although for some of my car problems I paid with wrinkles and migraines. Thank you Mr. Dulak from Dulak's Services who saved us many times, maybe except the time when after fixing my Ford Contour they dropped the engine... but I got it all back in one piece.

Cars play quite an important role in our life, without them there wouldn't be any trips, without our trips there wouldn't be any stories.

**Happy to share yet another one with you.**

For the last several years on Thanksgiving we watched the Macy's Day Parade on TV, remembering our last trip to NYC for that special occasion, after which we broke with our tradition of watching it live. That year, our friend Marion Remiszewski just passed away following her husband Stan's fate. For many of my displays I use Stan's panoramic pictures of a gorge on the Dunajec River. Stan, whose both parents were from Poland, visited the old country only a couple of years before he died. As a young man, he attended Yale University, but had to quit to support his younger siblings after the death of his own parents. I quickly prepared a "Polish basket" for Stan and Marion's daughter Lisa right before our drive to NYC.

It was Wednesday evening, I with my coffee cup, ready just as the turkey, stuffing and cranberry sauce, all packed in the cooler, kids tucked into the backseat, as many times before, took off and entered Interstate 84. The traffic was as expected, bad, but we had a nice place awaiting us in the city so at least we did not have to slalom around it to find a way to some hotel. We were staying in our friend's loft overlooking the Hudson River with a distant view of the Statue of Liberty. The loft itself was a major attraction, sometimes used for movies and music videos. The owners also set up a gallery, equipped with stage, projection room and rooftop terrace.

Bedrooms are strategically hidden. The faux crystal chandelier and authentic exotic plants decorate the bathroom that has a step in shower, bathroom windows are at least 6 feet tall and the view is incredible. Our (back then) teenage son had much pleasure ...mooning New Jersey, later I wasn't so sure standing there while sky-tour helicopters circled over the buildings. Jack took an option of soaking in the Jacuzzi on the rooftop with the Statue of Liberty, the entire 151 ft and 450 000 pounds of it, the size of his big toe. But all of this was to be expected

much later.

Some 1 hour into the trip, near Bristol, CT we were hit by an 18 wheeler that was taking an exit not seeing us on its right. The kids saw the truck first, and screamed "he's coming at us!" but it was already too late to do anything and he hit us from the left. The car smashed into the right rail and then spun on the highway twice, miraculously avoiding all the traffic. We ended up on the other side of the road, cars slowly passing us by, drivers asking if we needed help. The truck driver showed up scared to death, asking if we were ok. Someone called the cops. The police officer interviewed the driver first, who at this point changed his report and claimed innocence, blaming us. After a short investigation, we decided that we did not need any medical assistance; we were fine.

Technically the car was fine, the damage was done on the outside. Air bags did not deploy because we were hit from the side-not from the front. The driver's window could not shut completely. We duct taped it. But before we used Karolina's perfume to clear off the grease that spilled over the power mirrors and duct taped them as well. Back then I had a habit of not leaving the house with tape. You never knew when you're going to need it... Nowadays I carry band aids and a Phillips screwdriver for quick repairs, and old issues of Catholic Free Press for quick reading while waiting for repairs that last longer.

So, we had two options - turn around, go home and spend the next four days in mourning thinking about the accident, choking on turkey and watching the parade on TV or... we could continue with the trip and have fun for the rest of the holiday and enjoy time in the big city.

As we arrived on the West Side and parked on the street below, we had a feeling that other drivers were staring at us, then we realized that it wasn't actually our car's appearance that caught their attention. Many cars in NYC looked like ours; they were actually circling the building hoping to take over our parking space.

As we entered the loft, someone turned the TV on and on the local news we heard that this evening two elderly women were deep frying their turkey and burnt their house down and are both in the hospital with second degree burns. We looked at each other; none of us had even a scratch. Just one cup of spilled coffee that could be easily replaced.

We stayed till Saturday morning and had the greatest time watching the parade, skating at Central Park, checking out the Christmas Tree at Rockefeller Center, admiring window decorations on Fifth Ave, seeing Manhattan from the top of the Empire State Building (that was long before the bedbug scare) and at night lining up... to moon New Jersey.

After we arrived in Mass, I read that two people were killed in different accidents on interstate 84 that evening.

Then I knew that the "sacrificing" basket that I brought to the Remiszewski family was accepted and it was Marion and Stan that watched over us.

The damage to the car was estimated at more than the value of it so I had to let it go. That day, I drove my son to his early hockey game, some 30 miles away, came back, unscrewed the plate, cried a little and watched the technically good car be towed away. The irony was that some six months prior I had the transmission replaced; I got a rebuilt one that didn't work and had to be replaced with another. Then it took some time for it to finally set in, got a set of 4 new tires for the trip and then the accident happened...

I had one weekend to find a replacement and to make it more adventurous, a heavy snow storm fell over central Massachusetts. Jacek's idea of getting an old "new" car was to go to some miles away place called "Helping Hands" where for little money you can drive off with a decent car or... a total lemon, only if you

dig it out first from under the pile of heavy snow. After a day of lurking around the snow-covered parking lot, guessing what brand of car could hide under each snow pile... the second day, of our car search, we ended up on a supermarket parking lot driving a '93 Volvo. The owner was a young family man, Jewish from Belarus. We paid \$3000. That's all we had. If the court ruled it was the truck driver's fault, I was to receive another \$500 later.

I remember thinking "Oh God, please let this "new" old car last till Fran finishes college, some 5 years ahead of it. And it did.

The A/C stopped working a year after I bought it, same as the sun roof. Once when we were driving back from Borders bookstore during a heavy rain, I had to cover my head as I felt water pouring every time Jacek took a sharp turn when "Rain drops are falling on my head" by Dionne Warwick popped up on my cd player! The leather seats were killing me in the summer, and in the winter I stopped using the heated seat feature when it started burning my behind. But the trunk was so big you could fit the entire crew of the Sopranos in it. Later the fuel pump broke and after repair, the fuel indicator stopped working so I had no idea how much gas I had. After two tries, that little thing kept going back to the same not working mode, I gave up. So I often had to calculate the miles driven to know how much gas there was left.

Exactly some new transmission, several major leaks and head gasket fuel pump later, 5 1/2 years later to be exact, we drove to the dealership to buy, this time, a brand new car. I drove there and I prayed for the Volvo to make it, as I did each time when I was trading other cars in. It made it and I got \$200 for it. (I miss it, just as I miss my Ford and Chevy before it.)

It was a major relief for me, after buying a new car, to be able to check the exact fuel level without guessing it. Isn't that something? I opted for a Subaru this time because, after all, I live in snow country not some Malibu.

To add to our car collection over the years, an old Buick Skylark took us on our first trip to Niagara Falls, back in 87. Jacek's Ford Bronco took us on most of our family Canada trips, all the way to Quebec City, the Ford Contour to Prince Edward Island, '89 Saab to Washington D.C., Chevy van to Orlando, a surprise

trip for the kids on Karolina's birthday. We told the kids that we were going to Atlantic City and asked them to bring bathing suits (early April) because there was a pool at the hotel. Somewhere in Virginia or Maryland they noticed that something was wrong, and that's when we presented Karolina with a homemade birthday card created out of cut-out pictures from JC Penney Christmas / Wish Book catalog. The card said "Dear Karolina, It's your birthday, but you are not getting this... and there was a picture of roller blades, "turn the page," you are not getting this, and then the picture of a Starter jacket, "turn the page", not even getting this: video games, or this, picture of a puppy... "Turn the page, because... turn the page... and say "hello" to... here a picture of Mickey (or Minnie, I forget), turn the page, because you are going to... Disneyworld!" Of course she was excited, her brother, not so, "does it mean we have to spend another day on the road?"

That little brother, later himself bought an '85 Beamer. He bought it on EBay from some guy named Pepe who turned out to be an old Portuguese soccer fan. Francis bought it with his own savings, after working at the local coffee shop making toast and scrubbing old gas stoves. He drove that car to school back and forth, one hour each way and to his hockey and soccer games and even took it to Montreal several times to show his American friends how Canadians live.

The Big Sister, also with her own money, bought a brand new Little Honda that took us across the States and back. She is staying in NYC for Thanksgiving to host her old California roommate, who has never been to NYC, to show her how New Yorkers live and to take her to, what else, the Macy's Parade.

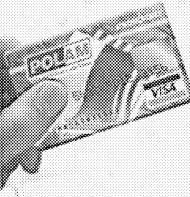

And as Courtland Milloy (Washington Post columnist) said "Nothing purchased can come close to the renewed sense of gratitude for having family and friends," I'll say nothing besides Karolina's share of pumpkin pie to split between the rest of us.

And I never thought that I would quote Arnold the "Governator" Schwarzenegger on a national holiday...but here you go... "I love Thanksgiving turkey... It's the only time in Los Angeles that you see natural breasts!"

**Happy Thanksgiving To All !!!**

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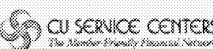


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