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## **GENCO: Gracious, grateful and good**

Nov 26, 2021

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Joe Genco

JAMES NEISS PHOTO



A lot changed in my life in the last year. When I added it up, it was mostly good. For that, I am thankful.

Last September, I decided to sell my financial services practice to a trusted colleague and go to work for a bank. That lasted about three months. It was a toxic work environment.

I kept plodding along, writing all the time and undertaking a big project on our house in Clarence, replacing the old carpeting in our great room with laminate flooring, a big job. I even ended up collecting a few weeks of unemployment for the first time in my life.

Then I was looking at [www.journalismjobs.com](http://www.journalismjobs.com), hoping to find a gig for our son who lived in West Virginia. I saw the regional news editor job open at the Gazette and Union, Sun & Journal because Mark Scheer had gone to Investigative Post.

I cobbled together a writing-specific resume and sent it to John Celestino. He sent it to Matt Winterhalter. Matt only slightly remembered me so he asked Jim Neiss. Jim, a legendary photographer and really good guy, said nice things about me.

Sometime in February, I landed here. My loving and supportive wife Beth was on my side the whole way. Then she took it a step further.

“I don’t like you having to drive this far. We should sell our house and move to Niagara County.”

We began looking at real estate listings in this direction, including Lockport, the Tonawandas and Niagara Falls.

It was a tough market because things were moving so fast and over asking. A Cayuga home in the Falls came and went so fast we never saw it. We found multiple homes that seemed OK in Lockport but they, too, seemed to go fast. Ditto Lewiston where anything in our price range lacked character.

We bid and lost on a house in Deveau. Then we found a nicer one, a little further from the river and somehow signed a contract less than a day after it came on the market.

That brought us to the next phase: Getting our house in Clarence ready for the market and listing it. We did that and somehow sold it for well over asking in three days.

Then came the “break it to family” phase. They knew I was off my rocker when I went back to working for newspapers.

There were more serious concerns. To wit: “Why would you move from Clarence to Niagara Falls?” We heard it in the communities (Clarence and the Falls) and from friends and family and random strangers.

My response?

“Have you seen the river two blocks from my house? You can hear the Rapids from the porch.”

You should see how nice the house we bought is and it cost \$100,000 less than we got. Our home in Clarence was nothing special. If I do miss having almost two acres, now I ride my bike to work along the river.

We had nice neighbors. Now we have nicer neighbors, the sort who bring strawberry shortcake, pie from Lewiston and beer.

Center Street in Lewiston is a 6-minute drive away and Beth found a new book club at the library.

We paid \$30 with a tip last night for a ½ sheet of pizza and double order of fingers. That would have been \$40 or more in Clarence.

I could write a whole column about “Niagara Falls nice” but one vignette stands out.

On Father’s Day, I was shopping in the Portage Road Tops when a random African-American woman dressed in her Sunday-goin’-to-meeting clothes cut me off with her cart. “I am so sorry,” she said. “And if you are a father, happy Father’s Day to you.” Something about the joy and sincerity with which she said still makes my eyes well up.

I could tell 10 similar stories about gentle kindness and community spirit. Are there rough edges and conflicts? Sure. Every candidate for Niagara Falls council expressed support for reassessment. None will act upon it. (It would be good for the city, bad for our tax bill)

But these papers, this city and these times leave me optimistic and thankful. I look forward to being able to quote Robert Fulghum 15 years from now. “It was on fire when I lay down on it.”

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