**A BUS DRIVER PHILANTHROPIST**

I was touring the great open spaces of the American west, sitting on an almost empty tour bus in the middle of Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming. Everyone had got off the bus for a nature break leaving me alone with the driver, a quiet unassuming man named Bill Green.

So far into the trip, Bill hadn’t said much to any of us, concentrating as he was on driving the sometimes precipitous, often serpentine roads of the American Rockies. But now that we were just the two of us, I struck up a conversation by asking him where he liked to go on vacation when he wasn’t driving around a busload of tourists.

“The Philippines,” he answered, surprising me.

“Manilla?” I asked, naming the capital, which was about all I knew of the southeast Asian archipelago of Pacific islands.

“No,” he answered, “northeast of there. A little offshore island called Siargao.”
He could see I’d never heard of it, so he added,” It’s very popular with surfers.”

He told me 20 years ago he’d built a home on a remote beach on the island for about $1,000, quickly explaining how money went a long way over there and even farther back then.

I asked him how he got along with the locals after all this time. “Oh, I’m pretty much part of the community now,” he said proudly. “I get invited to weddings, christenings …. all the big local events.

“Soon after my house was finished,” he went on, “a very pregnant young woman came walking along the beach to see me. She told me she already had five children and couldn’t bear the thought of having another one. Would I take the baby she was carrying? She pleaded with me so ardently, I felt I couldn’t refuse. I lived alone. I knew nothing about babies or child rearing and had no real concept of any long-term commitment I might be getting into, but I wanted to help and promised I would take the baby when it arrived.”

He pulled out his cellphone. “Would you like to see her?” He was very proud to show me a photo of a smiling, beautiful young woman posing on a beach. “Her name is Nice,” he said proudly. “She’s 19 now.”

“Wow!” I said, stunned. But then thinking of all the practicalities of raising a child from the cradle to young adult, I asked, “How did you manage to raise her, not only when you’re living alone but when your work is over here most of the time?”

“I have a housekeeper,” he said. “But the community is very small, very close-knit and nurturing. We pull together.” As if to emphasize the point, he dropped another revelation: “I put the local doctor through school, as well as two nurses. And I give to three different churches.”

Now I was totally amazed. “How do you manage to donate that kind of money?” I asked.
“I do it all on the tips I get from driving this bus. Like I said, a little goes a long way over there.”

We chatted a little more about the people, the community, and how it’s changing. The once quiet, remote little island is now one of the top surfing destinations in the world. The Philippines Department of Tourism intends to promote that even further. It’s currently working with Australia’s Academy of Surfing to help ensure high standards of surfing instruction locally and enforce strict safety protocols.

Meanwhile, Bill’s once peaceful surfside haven, built for $1,000 twenty years ago on a remote stretch of sand, is rapidly appreciating in value. A big hotel is going up just along the beach from him. He estimates his home is now worth around one million dollars and climbing rapidly.

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