

Stay West, Young Woman!

NANCY QUINN

HELLGATE PRESS



ASHLAND, OREGON

STAY WEST, YOUNG WOMAN!
©2018 Nancy Quinn

Published by Hellgate Press
(An imprint of L&R Publishing, LLC)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means, graphic, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or information and retrieval systems without written permission of the publisher.

Hellgate Press
PO Box 3531
Ashland, OR 97520
email: sales@hellgatepress.com

Layout Design: PerfectType, Nashville, TN
Cover Design: L. Redding

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available
from the publisher on request
Paperback ISBN: 978-1-55571-913-5
Ebook ISBN: 978-1-55571-914-2

Printed and bound in the United States of America
First edition 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Dedication

In my journey of building a new life, home, and career, I am grateful for the special people who have had such a profound effect on my perspective. I am much obliged to my husband, Bill, our daughters, and the friends I consider my chosen family.

A Personal Note For You

When I was a child, books were my favorite gift of all. Nothing compared to the possibilities of the wonders that awaited me as I read a book. I used to hold a paperback in my hands and dare to dream of what my future held in store for me. It has been my experience that thoughts have a special magical power. While reading my book I hope you find a little magic of your own. Here's a Montana sized "Thank You" for coming west with us; I am much obliged. I also would be delighted and honored to hear from you, so if you have a comment or question, please feel welcome to contact me through my website at www.quinnwildlifeart.com

Contents

Introduction	ix
1. Home, Bitter Sweet Home	1
2. Montana Traffic Jam	9
3. Matters of the Heart	13
4. ‘Hay’ there, I’m Mr. Wheeler	21
5. Jekyll and Hyde	29
6. Do You Hear What I Hear?	37
7. No Time for Tea	59
8. The Buck Stops Here	63
9. I Hope You Dance	69
10. Kobi’s Not So Excellent Adventure	75
11. Magic on Our Mountain	83
12. Mad Max	91
13. Lovely Luna Lu	97
14. The Night Stalker	109
15. Wanderlust	121
16. A Shot of Whiskey	125
17. Suspense	135
18. Trouble’s a Foot	145

Stay West, Young Woman!

19. Chase Lounge	151
20. Sandy's Ice Capades	155
21. A Walk in the Park	163
22. My Dinner with Wilson	171
23. Fire in the Sky	189
24. Shake, Rattle, and Role	193
25. No Moon for Luna	203
26. Fry It, You'll Like It!	211
27. Alone on the Range	219
28. We Bought a Cookie and Saved a Penny	223
29. The Penny Kisser	241
30. Stranger in Paradise	247
31. Be Seeing You	253
32. Nowhere to Run to, Nowhere to Hide	261
33. The Chuck Wagon	265
34. Four Jills in a Jeep	271
35. The Bear-Moose Affair	277
36. A Christmas Cookie and a Penny from Heaven	285
37. Baby, It's Cold Outside	293
38. Spring and Other Seasons of Life	301
39. One Very Weird Week	307
40. Nature Calls	317
41. Two of a Kind	325
42. Got Ants in Your Pant-ry?	331
43. The Greenhouse Effect	337
44. Ain't No Haints!	343
45. These Little Piggie's Went to Market	353
46. Making Molehills out of Mountains	357
47. The Demented Squirrel Legacy	363
48. I've Seen Fire and You've Seen Rain	371
49. The Night Light	383
Epilogue	387
Recipes	389

O wild West Wind . . .
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?
from "Ode to the West Wind"
by Percy Bysshe Shelley

Introduction

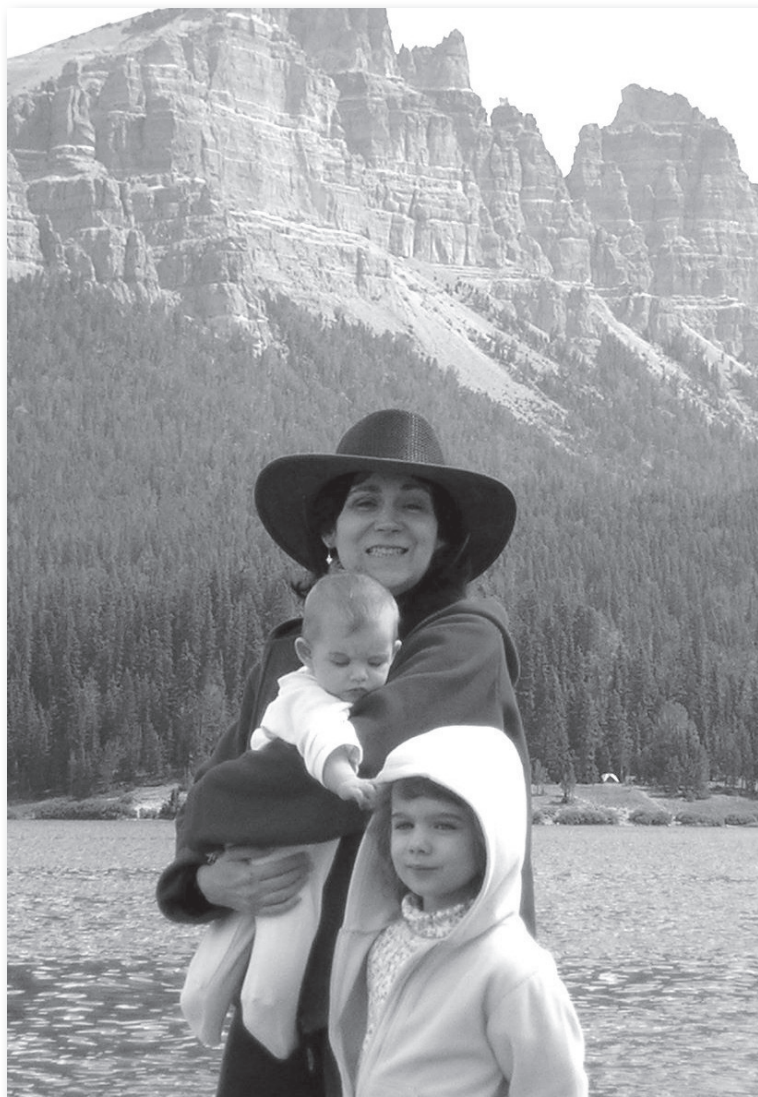
I REMEMBER OUR FIRST JOURNEY OUT WEST TO look for a place to call home. Since it was a month-long excursion, I often sent a post card or a letter to my dear friend, Jane. I wanted her to be able to share our experiences along the way because, like me, she had never been west of the Mississippi.

The last card I sent to her, I signed “Buffalo Bill and the western girls.” It was a very telling signature, as I was becoming more comfortable with the west and my place in it. Even with such young daughters in tow, I believed I was a modern day pioneer heading towards a better future.

When I look at the photo below, I realize just how much time has passed. Now I am fortunate to share even more stories about our family building a life in Montana. You may recognize some of your favorite friends from my previous book, *Go West, Young Woman!*, such as our horses, Wilson and Whiskey. There is always a chipmunk tale or two to be shared, a story of an encounter with the cougar who still hunts our land, and, of course, our interactions with the colorful people who make Montana such a treasure.

Stay West, Young Woman!

I believe that facing life with humor and perseverance can help you achieve your own dreams, wherever they may take you. To this end, I hope you find these western experiences inspiring and uplifting.



My western girls

Home, Bitter Sweet Home

IT WAS THE KIND OF FALL DAY that was perfect for hiking and made you glad you were a Montanan. The air was dry and crisp; brilliant red, yellow, and gold foliage surrounded me, and the view was one of mountains that rolled and stretched into the endless expanse of clear blue sky. But was I really a Montanan, or would I always be a transplant, an outsider? I wondered . . . *would I ever be accepted with my city ways? Would I ever truly belong? Perhaps it was just me, for lately I'd been feeling unsure about things. Did I suffer from wanderlust? Would I always be looking over the next hill for a new opportunity to reinvent myself and my life . . . again?*

My thoughts tumbled over each other like rivulets of water pushing tiny pebbles further down a stream to an unknown destination. And why not? All my life had been composed of one long chain of events that involved constantly starting over, rebuilding, and relocating. Never had I lived in one place for more than a few years. Never had I know peace of mind for very long. Whether by choice or forced by circumstance, I was always trying to piece together the fragments of a repeatedly shattered life. Now, for the first time in living memory,

I actually had set down permanent roots. Still, I waited for the other shoe to drop. My heart and mind had become restless again. Why? It was nearing our tenth year on the mountain. My mind swirled with thoughts and images of the past, present, and future. It was as if all the pages were turning rapidly in my own private, mental scrap book. I was reliving old events and placing myself in new experiences that had yet to occur. I was tense, suspicious, fearful, and expectant—of what exactly, a return to the patterns of my past?

We had moved to Montana when my husband, Bill, retired from the United States Air Force. Weary of the grueling life at his last assignment in Washington, D.C., here we had built a new way of life, different from anything either of us had ever known, and had only dreamed of. On the mountain we could escape the memories of the terrorist attack on the Pentagon, the subsequent war on terror, and the constant pressures of metropolitan life that ground one down—gridlocked traffic, endless noise, crime, congestion—and the caustic effect it had on neighbors, acquaintances, and pretty much anyone you met. Here my neighbors were deer, elk, rabbits, moose, wolves, bears, and assorted lesser wildlife. Though the apex animals were, admittedly, more dangerous than some city dwellers, they, at least, did not go out of their way to irritate you.

But I had nothing to fear, for my friend, Kobi, my half Malamute/German Shepherd, trotted alongside of me without a sign of tiring. From time to time he would look up at me and I would notice a little gray in his muzzle, glinting silver in the sun, reminding me of all our years together.

Deep in thought and reflection, I looked down as we walked along our private road on my usual route, feeling the gravel crunch beneath my feet, and trying not to lose my balance or slip on the loose granite that formed our mile of driveway. Even with the sun out, I could feel a cold, stiff, vicious blast of wind bite at my face and neck. Bracing myself from its impact, I pulled the collar of my jacket a little closer to my cheek for protection. My hickory walking stick made a faint thud as it hit the ground in rhythm with my footsteps,

helping me maintain my balance while also offering some comfort as protection should I encounter some unexpected guest. “*Yea, though I walk through the valley . . . thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.*” Odd that these words should enter my thoughts. Again I reminded myself there really was nothing to fear but my own imagination. As I broached the top of the hill, we paused and I looked up from my feet to the grassy meadow below. It was then that I saw it, one golden Aspen tree, kissed by frost, shimmering like a single flame in the sea of evergreens that bordered the far edge of our field. I was alone in my thoughts, reflecting on that tree, wondering how much we were alike, standing on our own, growing and thriving, despite being somewhat out of place. It had a beauty of its own, proud and unapologetic. So why not I?

Being atop this open pasture gave me a sense of just how small I was when compared to the snowcapped peaks and the vast acreage that surrounded me. Even after all these years, it never failed to impress upon me my good fortune. Country life has a certain kind of magic all its own, and Montana possesses a wild nature that would be hard to match almost anywhere else. I could understand why only certain types of personalities are drawn to it. Many areas of the state look as if they have been untouched by human hands for thousands of years, including much of our own land. That primitiveness calls to your senses and evokes raw emotions, reminding you that you are just another living soul on this Earth. Devoid of connection to your fellow man and your technology, you suddenly feel isolated and incredibly vulnerable. Alone in the wilderness, nature is king; you are merely a pawn.

I searched further down the hill to the valley floor where the creek cuts a small swath through the land. Here stand clusters of Quaking Aspen, nourished by the cool waters and relished by the beavers. I could not hear it, yet it beckoned me, so we began the gentle descent to the place where small cutthroat trout struggle to reach the Arrow River from their mountain breeding grounds. It was an easy journey down and soon we were standing at the bank of the creek, still lush

Stay West, Young Woman!

with tall grass. I thought about the Blackfoot tribe that may have fished it, and imagined a young squaw who might have stood in the very spot I now occupied. Perhaps she was a mother with children of her own playing at the water's edge while she searched for chokeberries in the calm and quiet of the afternoon. Or maybe it was a young brave who stopped for a drink as he read the signs of game that favored this spot.

Gazing across the valley at miles of grassland, trees, hills, and sheer escarpments, my thoughts turned to the early pioneers from the east who settled the land I now call home. One in particular came to mind, Nannie Alderson of Virginia, who arrived in Montana in 1883. What was she thinking the first time she stood in front of the might and girth of a solid rock outcropping? When she touched the rough surface, did she wonder whose worn fingers may have traced those mineral streaks before her? She was a young bride, who along with her husband, Walt, had decided to begin their married life in the west by raising cattle to build their fortune. Like the gold rush miners a generation before, they intended to return to the East after amassing enough wealth for a lifetime of security and creature comforts. But a few years later Walt was killed by a horse, and Nannie, now with a young daughter of her own, remained in Montana where she ran a boarding house and later owned a ranch. She was a true pioneer woman, full of grit and determination. She considered Montana a great and wonderful country if you were a man or a horse; but it was "hell on women and cattle."

At times I concurred with Nannie's sentiment, and thought of how rough it also was on the children. My own girls enjoyed a lot of modern conveniences, but I often wondered about the wee ones of the pioneer settlers. Miles from anywhere, their time was spent helping the family to survive day by day, without the numerous comforts we now take for granted and consider basic necessities. No internet, television, radio, telephone, automobiles, central heat, electricity, or indoor plumbing! The lucky ones had food on the table and a safe place to bed down each night. And that situation, to varying degrees,

continued on some ranches well into the 1950s. If you were a native Indian, the situation was often bleaker, making all hardship a matter of perspective. Just as some people always seem to have it better, there remain those who always seem to have it worse.

I could think of no better example than that of the single women from all walks of life who found their way westward, preferring a new, unknown destiny to the dull monotony of their previous lives. Several books document their stories of daily hardships and their struggles to face the future on isolated plots of prairie grass, all ill-suited for farming.

In Montana, where free land was available for homesteading, these valiant women worked substandard soil that lacked water and vegetation. They battled both weather and varmint infestations, while struggling to perform the daily physical chores normally expected of men. Despite their smaller stature and reduced upper body strength, they endured the suffering and privation of wilderness life on the wide-open, wind-swept prairies. Removed from any kind of social nicety, they were lonely and isolated, left without male or female companionship. To help cope with the misery of her existence, one young woman, who valued her porcelain tea set above all else, would place a "formal setting" on the wooden box that served as her dining table. Her only link to civility was her hand-painted tea cup with pale blue flowers. Had she lost it, I fear her own sanity and will to continue might have been lost as well. It is a feeling I completely understand and can connect to.

Other women chose a less arduous path, such as teaching school, but the business opportunities as a whole were few and far between. Even highly educated female surgeons found resentment and rejection in many western towns, though mining camps tended to respect and appreciate them. For those of lower moral standards, the obvious options were varying degrees of entertainment, many of which led to prostitution. But for the most daring women, there was the life of crime. Rare as they were, female outlaws did exist, if somewhat of a novelty. One of the most celebrated examples was a refined and

Stay West, Young Woman!

educated young woman from Canada, born Pearl Taylor, but later to be known as Pearl Heart. Petite, attractive, and tired of her wealth and societal constraints, she eventually arrived in the Arizona territory of the southwestern United States near the end of the 19th century, where she entered a life of crime with her lover (?), alias Joe Boot. Hart and Boot had the dubious distinction of being the last stagecoach robbers of the old west. After their eventual capture, she successfully convinced a jury that she only robbed the stage so she could afford passage home to care for her ailing mother. Despite the presiding judge's dismay and outrage at the jury's not-guilty verdict, neither defendant escaped punishment, as both were immediately charged and later convicted of disrupting the U.S. Mail. Within a few years Hart had charmed enough newspapermen, jailers, and inmates alike, that she eventually received a pardon from the Arizona governor. Boot had taken a more direct approach and simply escaped from a work detail, never to be seen again. Yes, the era of the Wild West was a colorful period in our nation's history, for women as much as for men.

Long before me, many men, women, and families left the safety of their homes and loved ones to live their dreams of the west, armed only with hope and the knowledge of the hard work that lay ahead. Perhaps some of them had even stood where I now stand, looking at the same mountains and sharing thoughts similar to my own. They had loved, lost, attained, survived, suffered, and rejoiced. Some worked their land for years under the Homestead Act, yet having been unable to prosper, were forced to abandon their dreams, their homes, and even their possessions. I chuckled at the thought that, so far, the only possession we had lost was a refrigerator that blew out of the back of our truck in a windstorm.

I continued my walk while musing about the past, both real and imagined. The world about me was breathtaking, perhaps too much so, for now I was getting out of breath as I climbed back up to the road home. I took comfort in the knowledge that a cup of tea was

waiting for me, warm and welcoming. Along with a cozy fire and the smiles of my husband and daughters, what more did I really need?

“Come on boy,” I said to Kobi, as I quickened my pace. “It’s time to go home.” Kobi increased his stride as we walked back toward our house.

When we passed the stable I called a greeting to our horses, Wilson and Whiskey. They briefly looked up from their feed bin and replied with small nickering sounds. I smiled in spite of myself, thinking how vocal and opinionated our animals had become. They now felt very safe in expressing their feelings and opinions. Sometimes, though, I could do without all those opinions!

As Kobi and I got closer to the house, I saw Sonja, my youngest daughter, step out of the door, and my thoughts shifted to her bright and lively face. “How are you, Honey Girl?” I inquired.

“Oh, just fine, Mom. I’m trying to finish my school work before we go to town tomorrow.”

“I’m glad you’re so proactive. We’ll have to be up and out early.”

“I’ll be ready; I promise,” she nodded.

“You had better remind Sandy, too,” I replied.

Sonja groaned at the thought. Like most teens, Sandy had trouble getting up in the morning, and she was more than willing to let her feelings be known to any who disturbed her slumber.

I removed my coat and hat and hung them in the hall closet, while placing my hiking shoes on the boot tray. It was a ritual I still hadn’t gotten my family to follow as rigidly as I did. The result was an endless struggle with other people’s clutter and debris.

As I left the entryway, the fragrance of applesauce cake reminded me that our dessert had cooled sufficiently to be put away. The smell of apples and cinnamon lingered, and I saw I was not the only one enjoying the scent. Kobi was sniffing the air appreciatively, and I watched as his nose twitched while we headed into the kitchen.

It was time to prepare supper, but the phone rang. My neighbor and best friend, Gail, began speaking, “I know you go to the

cardiologist tomorrow, so call me as soon as you get home. I want to know what the Doc says. Gotta bolt!”

I no sooner agreed than she hung up. By now I was used to short conversations with Gail, but they had become an important part of my life.

Much had happened to bring me to the point of needing a cardiologist. I hadn't required one during those pressure-filled days in Washington. I struggled with numerous other health issues back then, and I had led myself to believe that once I resettled into a more genteel environment my overall health would improve. It hadn't, and now I was saddled with a potentially more serious problem. I sat on the bench near the doorway and began to mull it all over when Sonja's voice interrupted my thoughts.

“I can help with dinner if you want me too,” she cheerfully offered.

“I would love that. Why don't you go get some pasta out of the cabinet and we'll come up with something. We also need to clean and cut the vegetables in the fridge.”

“Thanks, Mom; that would be great.” She threw her arms around me and gave me a big hug. I held on a moment longer than usual. As I let go, I watched her walk away and felt a tug inside me, or maybe a little fear knocking at the door to my spirit. *How many hugs will be in my future?* It hung there for a moment. *Nancy Quinn, enough of such talk!* I could feel the emotional shift and thought if fear tried to open that door, reason and faith would slam it shut. *Enough of this nonsense.* I looked in the pantry cabinet. *Now what kind of sauce should we make?*

Montana Traffic Jam

WHEN I LEFT WASHINGTON, D.C, I THOUGHT traffic jams were a thing of the past. I presumed my days of dodging cars and pedestrians were over. Never again would I get stuck behind some stalled vehicle or other impediment that delayed access to my destination. Can a country road be as frustrating as a six-lane highway at rush hour? Perhaps *not as frustrating*, but close. Sometimes a little amusement is thrown in as well. Just be prepared to dodge the road hazards.

The morning had begun the way it often did, running a little late and well behind the power curve. “Let’s go, girls!” I called up the stairs. “I can’t be late for this appointment.” My voice had an edge to it. *Why is it every time we go to town, it’s like herding stray cats?* Along with a mail stop at the Post Office and a run to the local garbage dump, there were items to be returned to the stores in Helena and a half dozen other stops. I was on the verge of sheer exasperation. Every “town day,” no matter how hard I tried, always turned into the same last minute rush.

“Is Kobi in the kennel?”

“Check.”

“Does he have water and a bone?”

“Yep.”

“Is everyone strapped in?”

“Yes, Mom.”

“Yes.”

Bill sat impatiently fiddling while I finished my mental checklist, then immediately threw the car in reverse and backed out of the garage. He quickly turned it around and started barreling down the hill.

“What’s your hurry?” I complained.

“We’re already five minutes later than planned,” he fumed. “Do you have the shopping list?”

“I thought you had it,” I replied. He slammed on the brakes and the car skidded to a halt in the gravel, kicking up a plume of brown dust. I distinctly heard a groan as he backed the vehicle up to the house. I hate driving backwards because I find it so disorienting that it sometimes give me a headache. Today was no exception.

Mumbling something under his breath, Bill jumped from the car and dashed into the house, returning a few moments later with the little yellow notepad that served as our “to do” list. He threw the shift lever into forward gear and hit the accelerator.

“We’re not in that big of a hurry,” I reminded him.

“Now we’re seven minutes behind schedule,” he snarled.

I sighed and shook my head. Sometimes, being married to a person accustomed to military precision and timing has its drawbacks. We had descended halfway down the mountain when Sonja, spotting a herd of elk in the lower pasture, pointed and yelled, “Wow look at those!”

“Beautiful, how many do you see?” I strained my eyes to count the silhouettes in the trees below us. Three of them looked up in alarm when they saw our vehicle approaching and began to run up the hill towards our road.

“Why are they running this way?” I asked.

“I don’t know, maybe they want to race,” replied Bill as he momentarily stepped on the gas. The car lurched forward.

“Very funny, Mario Andretti.” I knew he was only teasing because he immediately eased off the gas pedal and the car decelerated. One would think the elk would run in the opposite direction, but no, they dashed blindly across the road just ahead of the car. Bill slowed the vehicle down to a crawl, waiting for the last one to pass only ten yards ahead of us.

“Not the best decision, was it?” I said wryly. “I would classify that as a P.E.D.”

I glanced back at my girls. Sonja would want to know what I meant, but Sandy just gazed dispassionately into space, focused more on the music from her head phones than the event unfolding in front of us. Then she noticed the elk for the first time and removed her head phones.

“P.E.D. means ‘poor elk decision.’”

“Huh?” she grunted.

“Never mind.”

“More delays,” griped Bill, as he once again accelerated down the hill.

We rounded the next bend and came to a cattle guard partially blocked by the neighbor’s cows napping in the road. The car crept up to them, and after much horn blowing and inching forward, some of them moved over to the edge of the trail. One particularly terrified cow chose to run ahead of us, glancing back every few seconds to see if our SUV was still there. Her face said it all. *Oh no! That horrible black beast is still after me; I have to run faster, faster!* After ten seconds or so it finally occurred to her to just run down the hillside out of our path. Short of breath and heaving, she related her harrowing adventure and narrow escape to the other cattle grazing nearby. They listened politely while simultaneously chewing the grass and relieving themselves in the same spot. Such sights always remind me why I rarely buy beef.

Stay West, Young Woman!

Now firmly on enemy ground, Bill tried valiantly to dodge around the bovine landmines left in the road, but it was to avail. More than once I heard the telltale sound of cow patties breaking apart beneath the floorboard. I could even feel them rapping against the metal under my feet, and I cringed at the thought as the odor seeped through the car. At last we were on the highway, and I could relax for a bit.

Thankfully, the rest of the drive to town was uneventful. I was relieved we did not encounter a cattle drive on the mountain pass. They aren't very common except in the spring and fall when cows are being herded to the fields or to market. Typically, the delay is only a few minutes, but when at their worst behavior, disobedient bovines can block heavy traffic for up to half an hour as they dash on and off the road, only to be rounded up by the escorting cowboys. It's an inconvenience at most, but this is the west, and ranchers need to make a living, so we take it all in stride. It can be a little awkward explaining to the medical specialist you've waited three months to see, that you were late for your appointment because of "cow complications."

This time we arrived at our destination a few minutes late, but still on time by Montana standards. In this way it was quite unlike Washington, D.C., where being even 10 minutes late for an appointment could result in a cancellation.

Although time passes here the same way it does the world over, the concept of punctuality is a bit more relaxed in this western culture. Long lines are a rarity, and when folks are stuck in them, you don't see them constantly checking their watches, stamping their feet, and behaving irritably. They do not hurry about on foot, bump into me with their carts while shopping, or try to rush ahead of me. Slow they may be, but publicly rude they are not. That generally slower pace and the lack of urgency usually means time is on my side. As one old cowboy put it, "I'll be there directly." What 'directly' means is yet to be determined.