



Saturday December 6th

2008

Holiday Greetings Family, Friends, and Valued Clients:

Before I say anything else, let me just say: **"We're. Still. Here."**

Yes, we're still here. Yes, we're still real estate agents. Yes, I still manage an office of real estate agents. And, yes, quite sadly, times have changed. Even in Seattle, a city I honestly, and perhaps foolishly, once thought impervious to bad times, things have changed. More on all of that later in these very pages.

Now, with that out of the way, **HELLO!** Hello, Happy Holidays, Merry Christmas, Blessed Days, whatever your days are this time of the year. I've been, in so many ways, dreading writing this year's letter as I don't know that I'm up to the challenge of being cheery and upbeat about one of the worst years David and I have ever known. That's how I feel some days (like when statements from Dain Rauscher or our Windermere 401Ks arrive). Honestly that feeling could be most days, even the majority of days when retirement statements don't arrive, since I'm obsessed with CNN and MSNBC and two daily newspapers and NPR and the New York Times. It seems I can't stop exposing myself to really bad news. This is probably a sickness, a special one just for me. A form of OCD for the media. Speaking of which, as I write this, MSNBC is doing (I kid you not) a whole day on Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy. My **Media Obsessive Compulsive Disorder**, or **MOCD** for short (yes, I just made that up) makes me listen to this as I think and type. Oh yes, very MOCD.

[Side note: Over dinner last night at **Tilth**, my first time there thanks to two of David's clients (early 2008 sellers who successfully sold just prior to everything going really bad) who sent him a thank you gift certificate, David told me he had "a minor meltdown" at his gym the day before. It seems they installed a flat screen TV on a wall in the lounge as you enter the gym. This annoyed David greatly and he marched right over to the manager and complained. As he told me this I stared at him trying to not break out laughing. It was hard. I'm sure the manager had the same problem. David plans to write the club owner a letter. It seems David thinks TVs are not healthy in health clubs. Question: How have we lasted for 24 years?]

So a full year has passed since I last sat down to purge myself of the year prior. And in that year my database for mailing labels for this mailing has not improved. Neither has this letter become a blog. It's still on paper so you can easily keep it near your toilet and tackle a paragraph at a time. If you're not getting this letter, I'm sorry. If you fell off of the list blame it on a huge computer crash about 17 months ago. Recovery from something like that takes time. Lots and lots of time. Of course if you fell off the list you aren't reading this apology. So if you are getting this letter and you know someone who used to, or wants to, or NEEDS to, it's time to network. If you know

someone who fell off, tell them it wasn't intentional (yeah, tell them that!). Tell them there's no hard feelings. Get us their address and we'll pop one in the mail. We have extras. Please. Just the other day someone in Spokane told David's mom that they were bummed they were cut from the list. Hurt feelings abound. That's just wrong and it troubles David and me. This mailing, once near 1,200, is now less than 600. I keep the list <michael@nelsonupdike.com> and you can help.

Why Facebook Scares Me

I wasn't going to open with this, but while apologizing for a bad database and lost addresses, and to people who might think we intentionally cut them off, I thought of Facebook. I am not on any social networking sites. Or I wasn't until recently. I don't live in a bubble. I'm exposed to things. I have a general idea of what My Space and Facebook and things like that are. I'm just have no interest. None. Zero, nada, zip. (This is also true of Evite, but don't get me started as people will roll their eyes again.) So I'm hearing a great deal about these places, mostly Facebook now it seems, but it's like hearing people talk about sports. I just don't hear it. Then people start asking me if I'm on Facebook. I respond by saying, "Ah, I'm 53, not 23, and no I'm not on it." This seems to get a chuckle and seems to keep people at bay for a good year or so. But more and more and more people, adults mind you, in my age range, keep asking me about this. Then one day, I don't remember when, midyear I think, DAVID JOINS FACEBOOK. I laugh. Not unlike how he laughs when I get a new tattoo. That derisive "you gotta be kidding me" laugh.

Soon David is rhapsodizing about the glories of Facebook. He's telling me how fun it is, how cool it is, how much it is LIKE ME, and how much I'D LIKE IT. He keeps claiming that I'd be a perfect match for Facebook. He talks about some Facebook feature wherein you can tell people what you are doing at this moment in time. He talks about "the letter" going on Facebook. Blah blah blah and blah. I just laugh. Each day he tells me about someone who "wants to be his friend." I just laugh, make a few jokes, and time marches on.

But more and more people are talking about this, and wanting to talk to ME about it. And when they find out I'm not a part of it, they want to talk me into joining so we can be friends. It's not enough that they are enjoying it, they want to SHARE their enjoyment with me. (Again, so reminiscent of Evite. Or Amway.) To know me well is to know that I am not one who joins things. I'm just not a joiner. I hear the word "join" and I think the word "cult."

But during a weak moment One night not long ago David is making dinner. First he makes me a gin martini and I'm enjoying that and I happen to have my laptop with me in the kitchen and I'm wired into the network and I have a few moments and I'm curious so I go to the internet. I type in Facebook.com. I thought I'd just take a quick look at the site. BUT in order to do that you have to give them an email address and create a password. So I do. I log on. I see the names of two or three people I know. I click here, I scroll there, dinner's ready and I log off. That's it. Honest. I have never been back. I don't know which password I used if I wanted to go back. But my name is on the site connected to me in Seattle. My birthday might be there as well, I really don't recall.

The next day I start getting emails. Lots of emails. Emails from Facebook saying that so-and-so wants to be my friend. These go into my SPAM folder, I see them, but who has SPAM time? So I do nothing. I empty my SPAM folder and think I'll get to that tomorrow. Well it's been over 40 tomorrows now and I have not taken the time to go back. I have a job. I have things to do, stuff to read, and TV to compulsively watch. Now I've started to get emails from my friends asking me

why I won't accept their friendship, or something like that. And the requests from Facebook keep coming.

I'm scared. This looks like a giant black hole to me. A time suck. I'm afraid to log back on because I have lost track of how many friend requests are waiting there for me. How long will each request take to figure out? Do I have to respond to each? Do I have this kind of time? Ignoring all of this seems so much easier. My friend Lisa, in Ypsilanti, MI, is one of several people who have directly emailed me asking me to go back to Facebook and be their friend. I promised her I'd do this in January. My actual plan is to go there and play around and get myself all set up while idling away time in Palm Springs the week between Christmas and New Years. (I told Lisa "in January" because as a real life manager I've learned it's important to manage other people's expectations.)

As Good As Its Promise

I have last year's Christmas letter next to me as I write this. Actually I have the letters from 2005, 2006, and 2007 along with notes and clippings on my desk. I was just glancing at last year's letter and I noticed how it ended. I was making some point about people who end their emails with inspiring quotations and then I ended my letter with this:

What the people want is very simple. They want an America as good as its promise.

- Barbara Jordan

Now honestly, reading that is there anyway you cannot think of November 4th 2008? When you read that is it possible to not think about President Elect Barack Obama? I loved that quote when I first found it, and I love it still. And I still get verklempt when I stop to really think about how astounding the outcome of this election was. Last night, while shaving and getting ready to go out to dinner, I was watching a recent **60 Minutes** interview, done the Sunday after the election (TIVO ROCKS - I have a TIVO box in our master bath as a part of my MOCD) and the new first couple was talking of their roots, specifically Michelle's, and what it means to her older family members to see her go from the south side of Chicago to being First Lady in the White House. When I really think of what this means and the impact of it on kids growing up today, I swear I am moved to tears.

I could go on and on and on about the 2008 Presidential Election. I was a rapt watcher of all of it. ALL OF IT. There were times as it was all happening that I wanted to stop what I was doing and start writing this letter there and then. But really - do we need that? Do we need me weighing in? In the end, thankfully, I thought better of it. There are hundred and thousands of pundits who have commented on all of it, from when we had 8 candidates in the primaries to when Joe the Plumber arrived on the scene, to when Tina Fey nailed it. Thankfully I realized my voice was simply not needed in this fray. Between John Stewart, the cast of **Saturday Night Live**, anyone who works on CNN and MSNBC, and, my new personal favorite, Rachel Maddow, it has all been said and done. And said and done far better, and much more eloquently, than I ever could have. But don't think I didn't think about it.

Lance gave me a mixed CD this year (I was getting them monthly for awhile but they seem to have stopped coming of late) with a song on it called: **Don't Think I Don't Think About It**. For a good part of the year that was my favorite song of the year. It's by the guy who used to be known as

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Hootie when the band **Hootie and the Blowfish** were around. I always loved his voice. Well, he's a solo act now performing under his own name (Darius Rucker) and this song kicks ass.

Never say never. I used to say, "NEVER!" to country music. However, lyrics being one of the most important things ever to me, I have in the past few years started expanding into country music. Some of those songs have LYRICS. And if you can ease into country songs that are not too twangy, have a good beat, and that have good lyrics . . . well soon you might find a playlist on your iPod called "Kick Ass Country Songs." So, never say never. Unless it is jazz music. Then, trust me, you can say never with little fear of your tastes ever changing. (Tho' I do love the entire **Charlie Brown's Christmas** album - and they say that's jazz.)

Bond. James Bond

We were flying to New York on November 14th when **Quantum of Solace**, the latest James Bond movie, opened. I was bummed about this as had I been in town I would have been in line for a matinee showing. So, to make up for this, a week or so ago David and I had Gary Tucker and Tim Allen over in the afternoon on a Saturday. We watched the previous Bond movie, **Casino Royale**, ordered pizzas in, and then rushed out to see **Quantum** at the Cinerama downtown. It was a full day of Bond. James Bond. The next afternoon we went to see **Milk**. That's just "Milk." You don't say, "Milk. Harvey Milk." Those are the last two movies I've seen. I plan to see a passel of movies once we get to Palm Springs for Christmas. It's cold there then - there's nothing else to do but go to movies. And experiment on Facebook.

Larry Yocum called David today to say there was an earthquake in Palm Springs last night. I just went to Google News and Google News says no. ("The computer says noooooo." Can anyone cite the source for that? Besides our household that is?) I told David to tell Larry his river's gonna flood. We have a getaway on a fault line; Greg and Larry now have a getaway on a river bank near Steven's Pass. It started out as a search, with David, for a "little weekend cabin." They now own a 3 bedroom house (with architects and builders crawling all over it day after day) on a rushing river on Highway 2. As the 2008 real estate market dwindled, David expanded his range. Thankfully. (Thankfully for our household that is. And we're THANKFUL to Greg and Larry for some successful activity in 2008 and, trust me, our household was thankful for some income.)

I seem to be rambling, and rambling well past the start of the year. Bring it back into focus

The Next Day • Sunday December 7th

Last night David and I had dinner with Michael Stewart at a fairly new place called Olivar. No "s" at the end. Not Olivar's, just Olivar. It's has taken over in the space where another restaurant failed, and where many many restaurants seem to fail. It's a famous spot but it seems ultimately a deadly place for restaurants. It's next to Joe Bar, that place. Used to be Fork. Used to be a cake shop. Used to be, used to be, used to be. I've been in Seattle a very long time. After dinner I was walking past that white building on the corner of Harvard and Roy, right next to this revolving

restaurant location, across from the Harvard Exit movie theatre, on my way back to my car. It's the DAR Hall, a.k.a., the Daughters of the American Republic House. I have been roped into acting as a bartender there, at the DAR Hall, in January for some charity event. People THINK I have the personality for this sort of thing. I do not. They don't believe me, but I do not. Can't I just

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write a check to the charity and stay home and watch **Criminal Minds**? That's where my personality lies. But this was work related and I couldn't find a way out of it. Anyway, seeing the hall made me think to myself, "Well, at least you will finally go inside of that building." Then I started using my fingers to count decades. I used three fingers. I arrived in Seattle on June 13th 1978. This was about the time the events in the movie **Milk** were playing out, something I thought about all through **Milk**, about the choices I made when I left home. Now it's well past June of 2008. So I have made Seattle my home for over 30 years now. And in those 30 years I have seen more restaurants than I can remember open and close and I have never been inside of the DAR Hall. I've also never been inside of the Cuff. Whodda thunk I'd get inside of the DAR Hall before the Cuff?

I Read The News Today Oh Boy

Let's see today's local obits sadly have the names of two people in them connected to me by well less than 6 degrees. Then there was a long obit of a woman from Spokane who's last name was Updike. I read things like this. Moved on to the New York Times to find that Sunny von Bulow has died. Anyone remember her? She's been in a coma for almost 28 years. She went into a coma about 2 years after I moved to Seattle! They say the room costs per year, this was in the 1990s, were \$547,000 and the annual round-the-clock nursing costs were around \$300,000 back then. Math. Do the math on that - it's probably well over 28 million dollars to have kept her in a coma.

They keep finding feet floating in the water north of here. Now they have taken two feet, found months apart, and determined they are a pair, from the same woman. Both were wearing New Balance running shoes. That was in today's news.

Also in the New York Times today, in the Opinions section, there is an excellent column by Timothy Egan, who happens to be from Seattle. It's titled "Typing Without A Clue" and it starts out about the book soon be released by Joe the Plumber. That's where it starts - it gets so much better from there. This is an excellent example why there's no need for me to try and be a pundit.

Newspapers, still love them. Even tho' it seems soon no one will be working for the Seattle Times.

The Start Of The Year

For most of January I struggled with my love hate relationship with Suze Orman. I love Suze Orman. And I hate Suze Orman. Suze makes me feel good; Suze makes me feel terrible. Suze is worth over 30 million dollars. And Suze only owns one pair of ear rings because, even tho' she could afford many more pairs, she only NEEDS one pair of ear rings. Suze talks to callers like Judge Judy talks to defendants. And she's a lesbian. What's not to like?

Here's my problem: Suze says we need to have cash reserves, liquid cash in a liquid, easy to get to savings account, equal to 8 months of our living expenses. This troubles me. On several levels. Let's start with not really knowing to the nickel what a month's living expenses are. That's a hard nut to crack. And every time I try to put this list down on paper, I get so far, and then a book calls

out to me or Inga needs a walk and I put the list down and then I lose it. A month or so later I start over. But I never finish it. But I have an idea of what the number is. And 8 times that number is a really big number. A really BIG NUMBER. Whenever Suze makes me think about this I go into a funk. Thus I spent the first quarter of 2008 in a major funk.

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There was very little money coming into our household in January and February and March of this year. Very little. We thought this was a rough patch that would pass as spring arrived. Not so. It was a rough patch for a full 11 months (December is looking very good, finally). Please understand that I am not an economist. I barely understand, and believe me I really TRY TO understand, what is going on in our country right now. And the world. And, as you know, I pay attention. But I'm certainly not an economist and definitely not the brightest person when it comes to understanding all of this bailout talk, both for banks and mortgage holders, and for the automotive industry. So anything I say here is just me looking at a wee little microcosm of the world, a microcosm known as our household. I can only talk about our household. Well, I can also talk as the manager of 85 full time real estate agents. I have that real experience to draw upon as well. So I can talk of our two person household and my job. You can extrapolate from there.

Here's what our household realized: New business, in the form of properties actually SELLING, seemed to have stopped WELL BEFORE January of 2008. It was just that we noticed it, our household noticed it, in January. But, sales activity stopped well before. Hmmmm when? So I did some checking. I looked back at David's business, I looked at my office's production, I talked to plenty of agents, my agents and friends who are agents but who work in other offices. I talked to my bosses who track statistics and money far closer than I do as well. I talked to everyone I could. And, when I put it all together, it seems as if the business stopped in August of 2007. That's sorta when the people in my world, and keep in mind my world is largely made up of real estate agents and others in professions closely related to real estate (inspectors, escrow officers, title companies, stagers and so on), think the local real estate market downturn began.

So, what was going on between the summer of 2007 and the first quarter of 2008? Most people I know were resting, welcoming the break. The nature of real estate transactions is that you work very hard for a month or two now only to get paid perhaps a month or two or three later, sometimes more. So even if new business wasn't being written, there were still plenty of deals in escrow, things were still closing, and agents were still getting paid. But paid for old work. Paid for work they did a few months ago. Money was still coming in and the slow down in the fall of 2007 just seemed like a pause, a well deserved break.

When did the people in my world get up from their "well deserved break" and start to worry? I'd say in mid-January of 2008. And the worry grew in February. And by March, when properties for sale (in our world these are called "listings") were just sitting and had been for months, when few buyers were shopping, and when those that were shopping were simply not buying, THAT'S when it really hit. We all kept thinking that spring would change things, things always pick up in the spring, but soon it was May moving into July and really things were no better. By July everyone I know knew. Our household certainly knew. But we knew back in late December 'cause it takes a lot of "fuel" to keep our many balls in the air. Believe me, we knew.

Recently, within the past week or two, another economic report came out that said that the United States was officially in a recession. And guess what? It seems this recession started in August of 2007. Tho' I am not an economist I did figure this out, and I landed on the same month and year, August of 2007, all on my own just based on observing my little fiefdom.

So it was just the worst of times. There was no best of times AND worst of times. It was just the worst of times. And each month we think it's bound to get better the next month. Why? Because to even think about doing what we do for a living optimism is required. REQUIRED. You can't go into real estate if you're basically negative at heart. Pessimism and real estate don't mix.

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January

So, to sum up, we start the new year with our household in a recession that I figured out even tho' real economists won't for another eleven months, there's barely any money coming in, and Suze Orman has me in a major funk. It's January. Let's go!

Here's the thing about me: I am happiest when I am getting something done.

Lance and I call this "getting shit done" and it is the topic of 86% of our communications: "What are you getting done today?" "Are you getting any shit done?" "I'm having a bad day 'cause I can't get shit done!" "Oh I'm gonna get a lot of shit done this weekend." Those are our leads, our conversation openers. The details follow.

So the problem with having no money is, quite simply, it inhibits me from getting shit done.

It's not the lack of money, the lack of the 8 month reserve, or even our plummeting retirement accounts that brings me down. It's not cutting out the nice dinners out at Canlis or Zoe, or some nights even Jaliscos (those can be nice meals too, depends on the company). It's not not being able to plan a vacation or go someplace for the weekend. It's not shopping. Don't much care about clothes. Have pretty much everything I need. Own plenty of books not yet read and have tons of CDs not yet imported into iTunes. Really don't need much in the way of stuff. And tho' the lack of money coming in makes meeting our monthly nut a challenge, even that is just a challenge to rise to. It doesn't bring me down. What brings me down is not being able to get shit done. Often, without money, you can't get shit done. And, for David and me, there's always stuff to do. We own an unfinished 1956 house. We know it's not finished yet. For us "finished" means ready to put on the open market. We're not there. And we want to be. We live at NE 95th and Sand Point Way.

So in January we do nothing. I bide my time. We work. We go into the office every day, five days a week, and we work harder than we're used to for less results. Every day at 4:00 PM we have green tea and a cookie and talk about what we accomplished so far that day. Time are tough, work is tough, but we manage together to keep our spirits up. The daily 4:00 PM cookies help. We walk our dog, we care for our cats, we lavish attention on our pets. We read books. We watch **Saturday Night Live** every Sunday morning (because we're old). David holds an open house every Sunday afternoon while I putter, with shockingly little result, in my home office. We watch **60 Minutes** and **Dexter** and **Californication** and **Desperate Housewives** and **Entourage** and **True Blood** and **Brothers and Sisters** every Sunday night in our pretty damn nice TV room with our pets all around. It's not a bad life. Oh, and we eat at home. Many many nights in a row. Our friends do not believe this when we tell them so, but it is true. QFC is our new best friend, and, when we're really feeling reckless, Whole Foods or Metropolitan Market. Sometimes, but not too often, we have guests.

It rains a great deal and I give in to the weather and no yard work is attempted.

The third weekend in January was near to the birthday of Robbie Burns, the national poet and famed lyricist of Scotland. (His actual birthday is January 25th 1759.) (Did you know he wrote

Auld Lang Syne? Think of that on New Year's Eve!) For David's family, the Ridley fraction that is, this is an excuse to drink a lot of scotch and throw a huge party complete with a haggis (hold your nose) and bagpipers. The scotch is all single malt. There are literally hundreds of different ones

you can taste. On Friday David and I got in the Hybrid with Inga, the best travel dog on the planet, and headed out. We don't attend this party every year BUT this year, unbelievably, we got Fred Birchman and Joe Schneider to attend. We've often talked about this party with them before, they showed some interest, we asked, I think thinking they'd never do it, and they said yes. So Joe and Fred flew over on Saturday. We picked them up at the airport and the weekend was a go. I seem to remember drinking. I remember Joe taught me the name of a Bloody Mary where you use gin (which I love) instead of vodka (which I really don't understand at all). It's a Red Snapper. I just googled that to be sure I remembered it correctly (it's been 11 months) and some site said:

The Red Snapper is the original [Bloody Mary](#).

and spoke of vodka. I like Joe's definition better. I still have to explain what I want when I order one however. I digress. Google is another time suck for me. We went to the Robbie Burns party, we mingled and tasted scotch, and afterwards we ended up in some bar in Spokane with more drinks in front of us. Fred and Joe both seemed to have a good time. Are we going this year I wonder?

The day after the Robbie Burns Party (it's always on a Saturday night) I flew from Spokane to Palm Springs. David got to stay on with his family and he got to spend quality time with Inga on the drive home. Since I wasn't fully sure we were in a recession at this point, I went to check on the desert house. Someone has to do this. It is my burden. I check on it for three days.

Somewhere in this month we went to see **There Will Be Blood**. I want my 3 hours back. It's never the cost of the movie I mind, it's the time I'll never get back. But I'm getting to know myself better and better (much to David's chagrin) and so I have really narrowed my focus on what kind of movies I'll give up time for anymore. **The Diving Bell and Butterfly** is not one of those movies. Any James Bond films is. **Slumdog Millionaire** is NOT one of those movies (David went with Michael Stewart yesterday while I thought about this letter.) **Transporter 3** is. The best movie ever made is **Die Hard**. The first one. Ask me how many times I've seen that.

February

The first week - YES, a whole week! - I spent in Ann Arbor, Michigan. I stayed at the Campus Inn based solely on its proximity to a Starbucks. Must be walking distance at 6:00 AM. (Walking distances change throughout the day, did you know that?) I never go to Starbucks, unless I'm traveling and have no other options.

[Oh god, he's gonna go off about espresso again! Oh god! Before I launch into my espresso screed let me just say, believe it or not, I'm proud that Starbucks is a Seattle company. I knew it back when. I was going to Starbucks when Howard Schultz owned a competing coffee company next to City Hall, where I once worked, called Il Giornale. I'll bet very few people, besides me, remember those days. And one of my oldest and favorite clients, Ben Packard (David and I still remember this Phinney Ridge couple well), now works at Starbucks as their Director of Environmental Affairs - HI BEN! (When we knew Ben he was designing yard waste recycling bins I think - I remember Ben pointing these round bins out to me in the backyards of all of the houses we looked at that had

them - I remember the oddest things!) And, as further proof that I have a love hate relationship with Starbucks, I buy all of my ground coffee for home brewing at Starbucks. And, if I want tea, hot tea while walking on the cold streets, I'll go there. And, in the summer I get iced tea there. But you know what I never ever get there? Espresso.]

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Howard Schultz should sit down with me for 45 minutes. We could have coffee but I'd want to go to Stumptown or Uptown Espresso. Howard's got trouble. His company has lost its soul. And it has lost me as a customer. But when traveling in podunk towns (that would be ANY city of ANY size that doesn't have an espresso option equal to the quality of Vivace or Diva or Vita or Herkimer or Ladro, places like that, I'll go to one. We have so many options in Seattle yet people forget that they don't have to go to a Starbucks. But I never forget this. I have a quality place to stop no matter what neighborhood I'm in or what route I'm taking home. The trouble with Starbucks? The lack of understanding of what "dry" means, the lack of attentive baristas, the lack of caring about the product they are churning out, and so on. **If you want 20 ounces of boiled milk, Starbucks is a great choice for you.** Starbucks sells hot milk. In sizes large, hugely large, and extremely large and extremely hugely large. Ever notice that an 8 ounce option is not even on the menu? Large is now their small size. In other states when you get up to the register to order and you ask for a short, everything grinds to a halt while they have to hunt for the cup. They ask each other, they look confused, they ask what's a short? This makes me absolutely crazy. And what of porcelain cups? What if you wanted to STAY in the cafe and enjoy your espresso and read the paper? Must this be done with a paper cup? And then there's Starbucks quality in Manhattan, without a doubt it's the worst in the country. Don't even get me started.

Again, look at me, I digress. So I'm in Michigan for a full week. There is snow and ice. It is cold. I vaguely remember this, but remember it's been 30 and 1/2 years since I've had to live like that. I'm visiting family. And Lisa. Lisa and her husband Eric bought a 3 story brick building, a commercial building, and now that I think of it there's a basement so it's 4 floors, the sort of building you'd see here in Pioneer Square, in downtown Ypsilanti. This is my fantasy. Lisa got my fantasy. And at a price that astounded me. I dare say that even in these troubled times a building like they bought there would be about 10 times as much money here. I'm not making that up - I know what Lisa and Eric paid and I know what Greg and Larry paid for essentially the same thing in Pioneer Square. The factor is 10. They are converting the commercial building into their home. This is my dream - something's not right here. Of course I already live in the NE corner of Wedgwood (or is this the west side of Matthew's Beach?) and that's too far. It's too far. So Ypsilanti is out of the question.

So I visit what family is left, cousins, mom, dad, aunt, sister, sister's family, and so on. Everything there is 45 minutes, or more, from everything else. Nothing is 10 minutes from anything. Lisa and I go to the Detroit Art Museum. I visit my parents and see where they have moved to, I drive by my grade school, junior high school and high school. I drive by the house I was raised in. I drive my places I used to hang out and the high school at which I ever so briefly was a teacher. I fly back to the city I chose to be my home 30 plus years ago.

The 12th was our 23rd anniversary. David and I had dinner alone at **Matt's In The Market**. Two nights later we dined at Canlis with our friends Mark and Dirk on Valentine's Day. Is this like continuing to dance on the Titanic after the iceberg hits the ship? Don't know but we had a great time with one of our favorite couples.

David and I had long wanted to get our former island mates, David and Paul, to see what the desert was like. (Remember, YEARS ago, when David and I owned half of a house on Guemes Island with another couple?) So, after a great deal of calendar battles, the four of us found a weekend that

worked and we spent four days there. For the life of me I can't remember a thing we did, but I know we went and had a nice time. This must mean we just relaxed and talked and caught up.

March

Still there's no money. Nothing is getting done. What can I do? In December I bought a new MacBook Pro, my laptop, from Apple. I had one that worked perfectly well but it was three years old. I used to try to replace my laptop every two years as the advances in technology seem to increase as the prices decrease. So, back in December when I got my new machine, I gave the old one to Owen, my tattoo artist. Long prior to that I found out that he didn't have a computer. I called him a luddite. We made joke about this. He offered a barter if and when I ever bought a new computer. So it came to pass that I exchanged my previous PowerMac for hours of tattoo work with Owen.

When I bought the new machine, the one I'm typing on RIGHT NOW, it came with a year's worth of hour long appointments, one visit a week allowed, but not two a week, with an Apple trainer. They call it One-to-One or One-on-One or something like that. You pay \$99 for this. If you went once a week it'd work out to about \$1.92 a session. They make money betting you WON'T go once a week. But even so, if you went only 15 times a year, instead of 52, you'd be paying \$6.67 an hour for tech support. Even at 5 times a year this isn't a bad deal.

So we had no money but I had plenty of time. Thus I spent most of March, and on into April and May and so on, alternating between two hour tattoo appointments every Tuesday at 4:00 PM with Owen and one hour computer coaching at the Apple Store every Friday at 9:00 AM. Now I have more ink and I know what iDisk is and how to back Quicken up to it every morning at 2:00 AM (Automatically obviously, I'm sleeping at 2:00 AM). Neither of these weekly appointments cost me any money and they helped time pass.)

We went to see a Rufus Wainwright concert on Thursday the 13th in Seattle. This is not unlike going to the Wedgwood Broiler: you have this idea in your mind it's gonna be great, but you get there and it's less great than your memory. Even on CD's this guy is an acquired taste, in person he's way too nasal and whiny. But he's gay and he did an entire concert as Judy Garland (that CD I really like and play often) and because of him I know who Beth Orton is. Some people are studio artists tho,' better on a CD than they ever will be in person. And that's okay.

The next night we were in Las Vegas seeing Bette Midler at Caesar's Palace. Just like that. We went with Greg Kucera and Larry Yocum. Left cold and grey Seattle in the morning and by lunch we were poolside at Caesar's having lunch in shorts and t's outdoors. Had a fancy dinner that night (we still didn't know what was in store, really) and loved every second of Bette's show. The next day we hit the Liberace Museum (when in Vegas . . .), jumped into our rental car and DROVE TO PALM SPRINGS. Road trip! Bette was just the opening act for a lovely four days playing in the desert. We all flew home from Palm Springs on Tuesday. March was almost over.

Saw **The Bank Job**. The next night we were having dinner on Kelley Meister's last night as a waitress at Machiavelli on Capitol Hill. Kelley is one of my agents now. I'm sure she used to be mean to me when I ate there (as you know all of those gals at Machiavelli can be fierce), but since hiring her not so! Anyway it was a party for her on her last night - after like 12 years or something.

Several of us (from the office, don't even remember who) went there for a meal on her final night. Ended the month by having a lovely dinner with Janice and Charlie Helming at Zoe in Belltown.

And Now It's Tuesday December 9th

Hmmmm. Today is Surrey Tribble's birthday. I am a bad friend, been too busy to even send a card. And it's late now so I don't think I'll call. Oh well, he probably doesn't want to be reminded of this anyway as he's VERY very very old now. Wait - I just remembered it's also Clemie Cyburt's birthday. Old friend from community theatre back in Michigan. She's in Arizona now (I think). And Surrey's in Palm Springs. All old people to the desert. Happy Birthday to BOTH of you.

So I get a call today about the charity auction I am being compelled to help with. They want to ask me a question. But, before they do, I ask, "Can't I just give you a check?" So their question is would I mind being reassigned from bartender to MC of a raffle? I ask, "Will I have to speak in front of a group of people?" 'Cause I don't do that. No public speaking. Ever. Never do anything that will draw attention to myself, that's a guiding principal of mine. Anyway, long story short, now I'm a MC, whatever. Who do they think I am? Gary Tucker? I am NOT Gary Tucker.

There's a "restaurant" in my 'hood called "The Wedgwood Broiler." David and I had dinner there with Julie Heyne tonight. It always SEEMS like such a good idea to do this (eat there that is, not see Julie - it's always faaaabulous to see Julie). I don't quite now how to describe this place. It's not campy. You want it to be, but it's not. Our slate layer, Andy Casey (awesome), was putting down the kitchen floor this afternoon and I mentioned we were going there. He asked what it was like. I asked him if he likes his vegetables cooked and cooked and cooked until they are very very soft. We had martinis at least. A very inappropriately dressed straight couple in the booth across from us was making out and touching each other, and not a little bit, WAY too much, at the end of their meal. And they were adults, sitting on the SAME side of a booth, the other side was empty, one of those deals. Hours later, after a movie at home (**Fracture**), I told David it would be years before I ate at the Wedgwood Broiler again. It will take some time for me to forget what it's really like and gloss it over in my mind to the point I think it will be campy fun again.

Back to the narrative young people accidently make me feel old:

God I'm Old # 1 [3 - 31 - 08]

It's Monday, March 31st. I run a meeting. One of my agents has his personal residence for sale so after the meeting I head out to see this new condo listing on lower Queen Anne. (In the biz we call this "touring," as in "I'm going out on tour now," meaning I'm off to look at more properties.) On the way I spy Vita on 5th and think more espresso would be nice. I park. After I get my coffee I realize I'm parked right next door to **Silver Platters**. I remember something I've been wanting. I head in and a hip tattooed young clerk with several small pieces of metal attached to his head immediately asks me if I need any help. Wanting to save time I say, "Which section is Sarah Brightman in?" He replies "Easy Listening." **I hate it** when the hip young clerk directs you to the Easy Listening section. Besides, do they know how freaky Sarah Brightman can be? Really. She's not really easy to listen to at times. This woman is sorta wild and fancies herself all goth like. Which is a joke in itself. And she's sorta demented looking. At least David and I think so. Almost

beautiful, yet, in the right light, she's demented looking. However we love her voice. And most of what she chooses to sing. So I randomly pick up 5 CDs of hers way in the back corner where they keep Easy Listening. I walk by aisle after aisle of rap to get there. I don't care. I'm 53.

April

Let's Re-cast Young Frankenstein

Oh my gawd! Yes it's April 1st, but I don't think this is meant to be a joke. Watching Larry King. Jesse Ventura is on. Remember him? What a freak show. He is now describing himself as "off the grid." He has now said, "off the grid" three times and the interview just started. He's mad at America. Mad at the Democrats. Mad at the Republicans. He's mad as hell. And he looks it. I think if Mel Brooks wanted to cast a remake of **Young Frankenstein** (the movie, NOT the Broadway musical which I found lame), he's got his monster. You should see his hair. Right now. On national TV. This is not pretty.

Okay, Okay, Enough Already With Palm Springs

I am just going to have to stop saying, each month, that we went to Palm Springs. You, my super intelligent reader, surely must be getting sick of this by now. Year and after year, and month after month, and even page after page, I talk about going to Palm Springs. It's just a given. The sun comes up in the East each morning and I go to Palm Springs each month. People say, well just a few who are trying to be difficult jerks, or they're overcome with envy, I can never tell which it is, they say, "You travel a lot," or "You're always on vacation," or some such nonsense. It's not travel. It's not vacation. It's a second home. We have to check on it to be sure it hasn't slide into a fault line. We have to check on it to be sure it hasn't been broken into and severely damaged for the third time (and the next time will be the third time). If it were a second home, a cabin let's say, on the Hood Canal and we drove there each weekend I am certain "these people" would let up with the snarky comments. It's still just two hours away, it's just that it involves a plane. So, see, it isn't travel, it's an obligation. It's taking care of our retirement account. Let it go.

So, on April 3rd, just in time for Dinah Shore weekend, we got on a plane with Rebecca and Cherese and we flew to Palm Springs for six days of obligation. Someone has to dive into the pool daily to check on the salt levels of the water. So the four of us did. I believe that Joy and Mary were there that weekend as well. It was hard work; it was great fun. While there this happened:

God I'm Old # 2 [4-3-08]

It's Thursday the 3rd of April and I'm standing in line in the beautiful Bank of America building on South Palm Canyon Drive in Palm Springs waiting to make a payment on our only credit card. I could do it on line, but this bank is so cool I just like to go there. On my way into the parking lot my cell phone rings and I get some bad news about a real estate deal I was hoping to put together in the Mount Baker neighborhood for Lance Hood. So I'm standing in line bummed out and annoyed. Then my left pocket starts to vibrate and I realize e-mail is coming in on my Blackberry. A cell phone in my right rear pocket; a Blackberry in the left rear pocket = That's how I roll.

(The use of that phrase, "That's how I roll" is an in-joke that only 3 people will get - sorry about that everyone else! I contend that, "That's how I roll" in 2008 is the **cultural equivalent** of "My bad" from 2007. David claimed just a few days ago he's never heard anyone say, "That's how I

roll." I don't believe him. I think he's just trying to be all superior and make me feel creepy and not age appropriate!)

Anyway, so, ah, oh yeah, I'm in line at the bank, in Palm Springs, and in comes an email that cheers me up. Here's what it said (exactly, I saved it, it's a keeper!):

Michael,

You perhaps have not thought about it, but this month is the 20 year anniversary of my purchase of this house. Thanks to you! I know there were years when you thought I should sell the place before it crumbled around me, but look how well it's worked out! Honestly, buying this house is the only smart financial move I've ever made. So, in all sincerity, thanks for pointing me toward this place and making the deal work.

Ciao.

Robin

The email was from Robin Updike (no relation to David at all). My very first thought was how sweet this was. That made me smile. Especially after the bad news of a moment before. But this thought was quickly followed by, "God, I'm old." And soon after that, "God, I'm tired." Have I really been driving people around in cars and showing houses and dealing with contracts for 20 plus years? It seems so. I was so exhausted by this thought I had to rush home and get on a raft and float in the pool with a gin and tonic, extra lime, at my side. I floated and thought of how Robin's email truly made my day.

On April 11th we hosted a small birthday party for Frank Kennard here at our house. Gary Sarozek and Marcia and Lance and us I cooked, I don't remember what tho.'

The Summer Bedroom

Well it's April 20th and even tho' it SNOWED in Seattle that weekend, we moved into the "summer bedroom" here in Matthew's Beach. I'm sure most people perform some housing ritual this time of the year ("spring?" - I think they call it that, even tho' it SNOWED this weekend). Some people pack up their winter clothes and move them to storage in the basement or other odd ball closets in the house while they break out their spring and summer wardrobe. Some people spring clean. Not us. We change bedrooms.

Our main bedroom, the master bedroom attached to our award winning master bath, is upstairs at the front of the house facing EAST. We like to sleep in total darkness - **no** light should creep into the room we sleep in anywhere at anytime. By time you move the clocks around an hour (which happened in March this year, what's up with that?) and then let the season shift when the sun rises, well . . . by 4:30 AM the sun is coming up over Lake Washington we can't stop it from getting into our room and we hate it. David really hates it. This morning, for instance, there was soft light

coming into our bedroom around 5:15 AM. David really hates this. He has a sleep mask. David's sleep mask looks exactly like the sort of mask they used to wear on "What's My Line?" Sometimes I wake up facing David and when I open my eyes I think Kitty Carlisle is on the other side of Inga. (Because by sunrise Inga is usually between us, spooning one of us - the lucky one of us - and

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sticking her toenails into the other one of us - the not so lucky one that morning.) Some mornings I can't tell if it's Kitty Carlisle or Bennett Cerf. Other mornings I'm just startled.

On the lower level of our home (let's not call the lower level of a fancy split level built in 1955 a basement okay?) we have two more bedrooms. Sorta. They look just like bedrooms with closets and windows, and they're big spacious rooms by today's lowered standards, but I wonder if those windows meet code today? They did in 1956 when this house was finished but they're sorta high off of the floor. But for us this is all good - smallish window high above the bed makes for a dark room. And it's about 20 degrees cooler downstairs most of the summer here. Upstairs we have too many windows, we have two huge 4' X 8' skylights, and we have all of these cool triangular windows that are impossible to cover tastefully. So there's too much light. And way too much heat. But downstairs? It's a quite, dark, cool oasis. So at the start of spring, even when it snows here the night before, we begin sleeping downstairs. And in the fall, after the sun stops coming up so impossibly early, we go back to sleeping upstairs. We never stop using the master bath however - it's just a trek from our bed to the fancy bath for half of the year.

In Palm Springs we only need one bedroom. And much less closet space as shorts and t-shirts really take up less room.

On April 30th the guy who turns on and off, and flushes, our in-ground sprinkler system each year showed up and turned the system **ON**! So the auto fill on the pond, the backyard hose bib, and the 6 zones are flush with water again. Let the summer begin.

It's Thursday December 11th

I've been writing on and off for 5 days now and I'm only up to May. Good lord, how can you stand it?

"It's Coming On Christmas, They're Cutting Down Trees"

Last night we met Mark Besta and Dirk Miller at the Triple Door to see a man dress up like Joni Mitchell and seriously, very seriously, sing Joni Mitchell songs for two hours. I had heard of this man, John Kelly, before but never had an opportunity to see his show. The moment I saw the ad I called the Triple Door and reserved 4 tickets. Then I begged Mark to leave his house for the show. It was our first social event with Mark and Dirk since his surgery back on September 16th and I was so looking forward to both seeing him AND seeing this show with two guys old enough to find this show oddly appealing. It was at first weirdly jarring, followed by oddly amusing in a somewhat creepy way, followed by simple appreciation for this man's obvious love and adoration of Joni Mitchell.

As I type today I have typed "Joni Mitchell" into the computer and iTunes has called up all of her material we have imported. I'm not saying his performance wasn't good, but let's just say I need to

hear Joni sing the songs again to clear my mind of some of his vocal movements. You probably want to know how many songs that is, yes? Just a sec, I'll go check. Back now. It's 123 songs. If I just let them play it would take 8.7 hours to hear them all. That's almost 9 hours of Joni Mitchell.

While there I checked on the entire iTunes library. It's 7,511 songs. On random play it would take 20.1 days to hear them all without ever repeating one of them. What if it were Christmas songs? Well those we have 714 of. 1.6 days. But I only play them when David is not home. We have a deal: I don't play Christmas music when he's home; he doesn't play jazz when I'm home. We can come together around The Vince Guaraldi Trio's **A Charlie Brown Christmas**. As I have said countless times, it's the only jazz album I can stomach.

May

Well there was some deficit spending. I couldn't take it anymore. Surely a very small project would be okay? We bought two new toilets for the house. We call the ONLY plumbing firm we'd ever call, Quality Plumbing, and have them bring out and install two new toilets to match the other two in the house. There are four toilets. We use them all. But two of them are new, nice Toto toilets with those wonderful soft close lids. The other two toilets hail from 1956. With lids and seats that just crash down if you let them go. And once you're used to the soft close lids you forget and just drop the lid and let go as you turn your back to leave the room it crashes down with a bang and you jump and at our advance age this is not good. Scares the shit outta you. Now all of the toilets here match and all have the very awesome soft close seats and lids.

It's shocking what home repair things can cost. And what home projects can cost. Even the small things, things that you think can't be much, even those things are. Back when David and I lived in 17th on Capitol Hill we used to think that most home repair things ended up costing \$500. Rebecca and I used to joke that the things that used to be \$500 were now \$1,000 - no matter WHAT it was. Just pick up the phone to call someone and it's \$1,000 - plan on it we used to say. It did not matter WHAT the home repair was, what the nature of the project, in the end, no matter how cheaply you thought you could do it when you started, it ended up costing \$1,000. Fast forward 9 years or so and that number is sadly moving up. Unless your name is Frank Kennard. Then anything you do will only cost \$250. And an entire kitchen will only be \$25,000. He has a way about him. David and I just don't have that way about us.

Here's Why I Love My Blackberry So Much

It's so much more than just a phone. I can get all of my e-mail on it. Constantly. Anywhere. I like to be connected. I have CCN's web site set up to e-mail me "Breaking News," I have Google sending me their version of new bulletins called "Google Alerts," and I can get e-mails from my agents immediately when I'm away from my laptop. If they have bad news or need help, I can push one button and call them immediately from inside of the e-mail. And now, thanks to Dina, an agent in my office, I'm starting to use Blackberry Messenger, which is essentially text messaging. She taught an old dog a new trick. I guess it is the same as text messaging, the only difference is I can figure out how to use BB Messenger whereas I still haven't figured out text messaging from a standard cell phone. It's all too handy - how did I ever live without it?

Sometimes it brings me great news. Case in point. I'm here Palm Springs with Tim Allen. May 9th - it's a Friday night. We went a late afternoon showing of **IRON MAN**. So we leave the movie theater and we're on our way to dinner and I pick up the Blackberry (which I left in the car, I **can** separate from it for performances, movies, dinners and the like). I check my email. And there is, what SEEMED LIKE AT THE TIME ANYWAY, very good news. A building that I had tried a week

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prior to sell to Lance Hood, and that he lost out to four or five other offers on, THAT building is going to be available again in a few days. The email asks simply if he's still interested. Just days prior I was standing in his parking lot trying to console him as he seemed to have really wanted it and I had to keep telling him others got it, it was tied up, let it go, I gotta get on a plane now. And now, three days later I get the breaking news that the other offers all died in various ways. Was my client still interested? So I called the other agent, I called Lance, all from the Blackberry even before Tim and I got to whatever Mexican restaurant we were going to that night. I love my Blackberry. Or, given what a hellish nightmare this offer has been since then, do I hate it?

It's Saturday December 12th

It seems that every year when my office holds its annual holiday party the weather sucks. Three years ago, in 2006, was that killer rain storm that actually took a human life. Last year, 2007, it rained and was blustery. And last night, our 2008 version of this mammoth cocktail party, was true to this pattern. We had a tent, a large tent, 16' X 16", set up on the shore of Lake Washington just off of the family room of our host's house. When I was dropping off the liquor for the bar at 3:00 PM this tent was flying up and down and slidin' left to right. It was just scary. But things calmed down a bit by 7:00 PM and the party went off without a hitch. I like nothing more than a huge cocktail party (we had just over 100 people at its peak) with a bar and great food and lots of people to talk to. I'm always nervous getting this set up and always happy while it's happening and always greatly relieved on the drive home. (I'm responsible for it, the stress, the stress!)

June

It's June. Or is it? It's the next day. David is out doing his part to bolster the national economy. I'm writing. Writing costs nothing. Today, as we had our office Christmas party last night, and as we've been invited to another tonight, I'm playing Christmas music. It's peaceful here, until David returns. I hope to finish this letter today. I gotta move on, busy week ahead.

June opened with David and I back in Palm Springs. It was the tail end of Memorial Day Weekend. This time we went alone. Often we're taking guests there, sometimes it's nice to just go there and float and watch movies and vege-out alone, as a couple. And sometimes it's even nicer for me to go there without anyone, even David, and really be alone. Alone with a capital **A** - completely ALONE.

So It Was The Day Tim Russert Died [6-13-08]

I was in Palm Springs for the weekend completely alone. So naturally all of the TVs in the house are on and tuned to CCN. I'm not really watching them, just listening to news in the background as I move from room to room fussing the house and working on small projects and working on work stuff on my laptop. So there I am, at my desk working on my laptop, and the news breaks about Tim Russert having a heart attack and dying. I can't tell you how upsetting this was to me. I truly liked

this man and followed his career. He was a pure joy to watch because he was truly joyful about politics and the process and he loved, you could just tell, he loved sharing that joy with his audience. I was shocked - he was a huge part of the 2008 election coverage, something I was 100% addicted to, and I knew I was going to miss him. Crazy I know. Some might say, "He's just a TV

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personality," and, in a way they would be right. But you form opinions about these people, at least I do, and he's a man I had a very high opinion of. I was sad about this.

The next weekend David and I flew to Chicago to attend his niece's graduation from Northwestern University. We visited with his family, who were mostly assembled there, and David and I had a few days alone staying in downtown Chicago. If you can't go to New York, Chicago is a great option for spending time in a real old fashioned city. And they have fun politics in that region too - and added reason to like all things Chicago.

July

I have said over and over that this year was not a great year for income or savings or any things financial. **However the year before was.** Back in the middle of 2007, when things were good and we were flush and no one knew the very bad things that would be happening to our economy and country a mere 10 months out, David and I were presented the option to join an old friend of David's on a cruise on the Baltic Sea. I have a very long list of places in this world that I WILL NOT be visiting (much to David's chagrin), but the Baltic region is not on that list. I have always wanted to go to this part of the world (a part I think of as "safe"). And David had "an in" in his old friend from Texas, name Rob Kendall, who was organizing a subgroup on ship who would get special tours in the ports. And what were the ports? Well, in this order, they were:

Copenhagen, Denmark

Warnemunde, Germany

Tallinn, Estonia

Saint Petersburg, RUSSIA

Helsinki, Finland, and

Stockholm, Sweden

I had always wanted to go to Russia. And all of those other ports were (and still are) highly attractive to me. Design, Danish Modern, furniture, Russia, different and interesting foods in safe places hmmm, what else could possibly make this sea cruise more attractive to me?

How about: **IT'S AN ALL GAY CRUISE!**

David and I had been on five other cruises up to this point. But always on, ah, traditional, oh, I'll just say it, on straight ones, straight cruises. Cruises where we never saw or talked to another gay person. (Except for that creepy encounter I had on the Queen Mary while sailing across the

Atlantic Ocean, but let's never revisit that story.) We knew that gay cruises were out there, we just never pursued them. We always joked that we were "working our way" up to one of them, warming up to the idea. Practicing our "cruising skills" on Royal Caribbean as it were. By 2007 we were fully warmed to the idea of, what I like to call, a "Ship of Gays."

In 2007 money wasn't tight, everything about this seemed like a perfect line up of our interests, we had an in on the ship, our only question was: "How fast can we sign up?" How good of a room can we get on the ship? Who do we send our money to? How much would you like and can we send it now? Those were our only questions. Then. Back then.

Fast forward a year. By now the world is heading straight into the crapper, and we sorta know it based on the local real estate market, but, well, what to do now? We really want to go. And we paid for it last year. At least the ship part of it. And we got free first class miles on British Air to Copenhagen. No money spent on airfare. Ship is paid for. Dates are set. And I finally got a Blackberry, the WORLD EDITION specifically so it would work in Russia! We are more than in to this deep.

BUT it's a bad time to travel. Ask Lance, he whines anytime I travel. So do some others. Can you afford it? Should you be going AT THIS TIME? And so on. Believe me this was a hard thing to pull off at this time. There was missed work, missed income. But, then again, was there? Really? Was there work to miss? NOT REALLY. It's not like this was a busy year for David or for my office. If you're gonna travel, other than money, why not do it when there's little work to miss out on? Rationalizations are a beautiful thing.

To know us it to know we went. We're reckless in that way. Well, not reckless. Reckless implies we don't think about what we're doing. And we DID think about it. We agonized about it. Let's say we're fully aware RISK TAKERS instead. It was, when all was said and done, exactly 16 days out of our month. Two full days of plane travel and 14 days in the Baltics. Seven of those days are paid for, on the ship, but, well, if you're going all that way you might as well sit down at either end for a day or two. In the end we decided to spend three days in Copenhagen BEFORE we got on the ship and four days in Stockholm AFTER we got off it. So we had 7 days worth of land hotel bills to budget and pay for, and meals to think about, and - dammit! - we're going anyway! And so we did.

We left on Tuesday the 8th on that wonderful British Air flight that leaves Seattle at 5 or 6 PM. It's so civilized. First Class. They feed you and give you unlimited cocktails and you have a seat that slides down into a bed. And, thanks to an Alaska Air credit card, and many monthly Palm Springs flights on Alaska, you get the tickets for free (stockpiled miles = free in my world).

Obviously I could go on and on about this trip. Isn't that obvious? Heck, I can go on and on about espresso or a Blackberry, surely I could go on and on about a REAL vacation (for those of you who still confuse Palm Springs with a REAL vacation). But I don't want to.

Let me boil it down to these six points:

1.

In July the weather is perfect in this part of the world. But just barely so. They don't have hot days, even in the summer. And it rains a great deal there. If you ever go to these parts, do it in July or early August. Since so much of life there takes place on the sidewalk, on the streets or in

plazas, or at outdoor cafes, you really want to experience it in the summer when these aspects of their life are in full swing. These places would be dismal if it were grey and raining I fear.

2.

I expected to see a lot of blondes once we arrived. You always hear that light skinned, blonde and blue eyed people dominate this corner of the world. And all of that is true. But what surprised me

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was the number of redheads I passed. I'm just not used to this. I neurotically kept pointing out all of the redheaded guys to David.

3.

The cuisine in these parts is not that great, probably the reason why there are so few Danish or Swedish restaurants in the States, the food is more of a joke than it is fine cuisine. We did have Beef Stroganoff in Russia at the place where the dish was created, the Stroganoff Palace. In the States, David and I have eaten at the Russian Samovar in Manhattan - that was a fun meal.

4.

They drink a lot of beer. These people, in all of the countries we visited, drink an amazing amount of beer. We only had beer with lunch. After five it's gin. As Joni says, "Gin's what I'm drinking,"

5.

You can find quality espresso there. Any city we go to, the first thing David does upon arrival is google espresso. He then reads online reviews and figures out which cafes we should visit. Since it's our first activity every day, along with the newspapers (which are harder to find over there), we need to know our options. In Copenhagen we hit pay dirt within easy walking distance from our hotel.

On our 4th visit to this wonderful espresso shop in Copenhagen, where we were waited on by the same girl every day, she tried to ask me two things: one, **Were we brothers?** And, two, **Where were we from?** [Side note: It makes David absolutely crazy when people ask us if we are brothers. I say cut them some slack, but it puts him in a funk for about 10 minutes each time it happens. And it happens. They see two bald guys, about the same age, who are obviously close, and their mind runs first to family, not lovers. So they ask. It cracks me up each time. I think David is horrified that people think he looks like me. I don't know why. I have a killer nose.]

Anyway, on her second question, when she found out we were from Seattle, she lit up like a Christmas tree. She got all excited. Keep in mind she speaks little English and we speak no Danish. She flew from behind the counter, took my hand, and guided me over to where they sold products, machines, grinders, cups, the like. One of the products was a DVD on how to make espresso put out by David Schomer, the owner of Vivace on Capitol Hill. She excitedly pointed at me and pointed at the DVD and said she "learned" there. It took awhile to figure out she had never been to Seattle, BUT she trained on how to make the perfect cappuccino by watching this DVD by Seattle's Vivace's over and over. She was a great barista, the espresso had the perfect crema, and places like this made our days in Stockholm and Copenhagen memorable.

6.

There are more churches and museums in Saint Petersburg than you care about. Certainly more than I care about. David (and our subgroup) dragged me to every one of them. I really have to muster to go to museum after museum after church after museum. I'd rather sit at sidewalk cafes

and have wine or espresso and watch foot traffic. But, when in Europe, and when with David, just show me my seat on the tour bus. [Side note: The reason I bought my Blackberry was because of this trip. Knowing literally a year in advance we'd be doing this, I went out and bought a World Edition Blackberry. And just before we left I called my carrier (Verizon) and activated the chip that allowed my BB to work on the Baltic Sea as well as on a tour bus in Russia. I always tell David with my Blackberry I'm never alone. I used it often on the tour bus.]

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The best thing I remember was the Spilled Blood Cathedral. This is the place where Russia keeps the tombs of all of its dead Czars. We happened to be there on July 17th. Thursday July 17th 2008. The family was killed on July 17th 1918. When their bodies were finally found, years later, they were moved to this cathedral and properly buried. The Russians prepared a corner of the cathedral for the Romanov family and they were reburied here on July 17th 1998. So we were there on the 90th anniversary of their slaughter and on the 10th anniversary of their proper burial. July 17th was extra busy that day at the Spilled Blood Cathedral as Russian citizens were stopping by to pay their respects and drop flowers at the entrance to the room the Romanov family is now in. You can't go into the room, but you can walk up to the doorway of it and gaze in while thinking about what the Bolsheviks did to them.

Get Ready For Something You Might Find Really Hokey

First let me just say that I know as I think about this, and as I try to type it, that I am not going to be able to adequately describe this minor event or how I felt about it. I'm not a fool, I know my limits and I know how foolish, or silly, or hokey this is going to sound. Or is "schmaltzy" the word I'm looking for? Don't know. But I am going to describe what for me was the most beautiful and touching moment of this whole vacation. Here' goes:

It is Day Three on the Ship of Gays. Every ship has what they call "a sailing party" on day one as you pull out of port. This gay cruise was no exception. At these sailing parties there's always a free cocktail of the day, and, if you're really lucky, they play the theme from **The Love Boat**. I'm not kidding. The gays didn't play that song (pity, would have been extra campy if they had), but there was music. Day Two we were in Germany all day and the ship didn't sail again until "dark" at 10:00 PM, plus they only have the sailing party on Day One. (I'd say **dark**, but it really never got dark there - maybe around 3:00 AM there was some darkness, but mostly not. Talk about the land of the midnight sun!)

So it's Day Three and it's just a full day of sailing, no ports until Day Four. So you hang out on the ship all day, read, relax, eat, enjoy the balcony on your stateroom, that sorta thing. But there was all of this talk and promotion about the "Tea Dance" at 3:00 PM by the main pools on the 10th floor of the ship. David and I didn't think much of this, not really "dancers" either of us, but we thought we'd wander up there and check it all out, but we do so closer to 3:30 PM when everything is in full swing.

So (here's the schmaltzy part) We take the elevators to the 11th floor and walk out on the promenade deck that circles the pools on floor 10 below. The first thing we notice is that the entire promenade deck is packed, shoulder-to-shoulder, hip-to-hip, with men. Standing, talking, drinking, sorta like El Mirasol on a Saturday night. You can hear the music, great dance music, blaring up from below. So David and I make our way over to the railing to look down and when we

get there and look down all you can see is hundreds upon hundreds of very happy, mostly shirtless, gay men dancing. I literally started to cry. I was surprised when I did, but there I was crying.

I was just awestruck. Here I am on a ship on the Baltic Sea, the sun is glaring down on us yet the weather is perfect, just shy of 80° and wonderfully warm, the vista is beautiful and then piled upon all of that are all of these very happy men dancing. Talk about getting verklempt! I immediately choked up just thinking about what I was seeing all around me. THIS MOMENT was worth all of

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the worry about taking the trip in the first place, THIS MOMENT is something I will carry with me forever. As a matter-of-fact recently, while watching the opening credits of the movie **MILK**, I again thought of this moment. I'm not saying the moment was political, but for me it was. For me it was just the thought that we have gone, in my lifetime, from the opening credits of **MILK** to a thousand gay men dancing shirtless on a huge ship on the Baltic Sea without a care in the world. I was honestly touched by this then and, as I think about it now, I still am. The feeling is not unlike how I felt on election night this year as Barack Obama won the election. The feeling is not unlike how I felt watching Michelle Obama be interviewed about her background and what it means to her and her family and friends to see her move into the White House as First Lady.

One night on the ship, at dinner, they seat you at tables of 8 to 12, David and I made friends with a couple, Mark and Chris, seated to David's right. We lingered after the meal was well over, retired to a karaoke lounge where we had drinks and talked, and then went off to see Bruce Vilanch (I think it was Bruce, there were several shows on board) perform his 9:00 PM show. Great fun. We live in Seattle, a place they likely seldom come to. They however live in Manhattan. Thus the odds we'd see them again increased greatly since David and I strive to make an annual trip to New York.

August

In August we hung around here shocked - because by this time it was truly shocking - by how much the local real estate market had died. So we hunkered down as much as is possible for us and we worked. At least we went to work daily. I always have management things I can do, and, in a really down market, there's always the opportunity for me to play life coach, counselor and therapist as well to my 85 agents.

It had literally been several months since anyone checked on the house in Palm Springs so, in the 116° heat, I did. The water in the pea traps, and the water in the toilets, all EVAPORATES and nasty gases work their way into the house. It's a tad unpleasant if it's been left a long time. I had to go flush the toilets and run water back into all of the drains. It's not all fun and games.

September

The nice thing about David's birthday, besides David of course!, is it is always just a day or two before Labor Day Weekend. David turned 52 on August 28th and on that day we flew to LA to spend two fun days with Tom and Rick. We stayed at their house, we shopped, we hung out having coffee at their kitchen table with their two big golden Labradors reading the newspapers and talking and catching up, we went out for a great Mexican (not Finnish) dinner. After two fun days of visiting David and I drove from LA to PS so that David too could enjoy our desert investment.

Late August, September and October

We were living with f#\$%ing rats in our house.

Remember the summer bedroom? (See above.) Remember the 16 day Baltic vacation? (See above.)

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It took us a long while to figure out we had rats in our house. Or, would it be more accurate to say that once we guesses there were rats in our house it took us a long while to believe it. To admit it. To get outta denial and try and deal with it? It's all of that.

It seems that while we were on the Baltic Sea with hundreds of men, the rats decided to move into our house. Inga, the world's best Weimaraner was staying with Joe, who Inga loves, the world's best dog walker. And our the cats, Calvin and Claire (yes they are still alive) were staying at what we call the Kitty Hotel, aka Daryl, the worlds' best cat sitter. So the alarm here was on and the house was empty. And the rats saw their chance.

The rats found a way to our house and then they found their way to a chase that was built, to my specifications, out of plywood and then covered with sheetrock in our basement. The chase has two runs to it that meet at a 90° angle. One run runs directly above the headboard of our bed in our summer bedroom. The other run of the chase, past the 90° angle, runs along the south wall of the same bedroom to the place the rats found outside where they could come in.

God this was maddening. First, as you're lying in bed, you think you're nuts. You think you're hearing things. So you try to ignore it. Soon however you are waking your partner up and saying, "Do you hear that?" This went on for most of August while we went into denial that we could have rats in our house. Then however I started noticing rat turds all over the kitchen. I'd pull out a cookie sheet and there'd be rat turds. I would go to get Inga a treat and there'd be rat turds. Finally I was looking at the cook top on our stove and I notice rat turds all over it.

So, by September we BELIEVED we had rats. They were in our kitchen floor. The kitchen floor is unfinished and has plenty of large holes in it where things were removed, old plumbing, sinks, dryers, things like that, but never finished. We never had the money, even 3 years ago, to tackle the kitchen. the kitchen floors is directly above the ceiling of the summer bedroom. So the two rooms we are using the most are most effected by the rats. It got to the point where it sounded like they were having a party in the chase over our heads at night.

If this every happens to you, don't bother calling Willard's Pest Control (tho' if you remember the movie **Willard**, or, later, **Ben**, you gotta love that name) or Cascade Pest Control. They can't tell you anything you don't already know. And they can't do anything Monte can't do. Just figure it out, be calm, be logical, and then call Monte. You can do this, just stay calm. And whatever you do don't spend \$45 on some stupid device that is going to electrocute the rats when the walk into it to get the peanut butter or cheese. I am about to throw the one we bought, in desperation, out. And those glue traps, can I tell you they might work for baby mice but a large rat just walks onto them, eats the peanut butter and then tracks glue around getting off of it. He did leave a clump of hair behind. Not helpful.

You want to know what works? **GOOD OL' FASHIONED MOUSE TRAPS AND THEIR BIG BROTHER THE RAT TRAP** (a larger version). There is a reason why there's an old saying about not

being able to invent a better mousetrap, or not needing to, don't recall right now. After wasting hundreds of dollars with Cascade Pest Control for their stupid visits, and after the guy they sent out creaped David out to the max, and after screwing around with glue traps for two weeks, we called Monte. Monte and I figured out how they were getting in. Using metal flashing we stopped all access. Then we threw out all of the glue traps and moved to RAT TRAPS. Then we killed 3 rats. And, one night in the midst of all of this, Calvin came in thru the dog door (as he does),

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walked into the TV room al the while making a strange meow guttural sound he normally doesn't make, and then he dropped a baby mouse (or rat) on the floor while we were watching TV. It wasn't dead. Ever see two gay men try and catch a mouse? The damn thing eventually got away from all three of us, me and David and Calvin, and ran into a hole in the kick under a bank of cabinets in the kitchen. Great. Just great. Now he's safe under there and we're back to being all freaked out.

Anyway, we triumphed over the rats. When all was said and done, it took about three and a half months of diligent effort to do this, but we did. We won. The rats lost. Three rats lost their lives. And we won!

October

What Part Of "Greater Than \$250,000" Don't These People Understand?

Well now it's the day after the last Presidential debate. By now we have heard the phrase "Joe the Plumber" about 30 times - and that was just during the debate. Now it's the day after. Now every talking head on every TV channel, and even on NPR, literally everyone, is saying "Joe the Plumber." The day starts out in the dark with reporters camped in his front yard (I'm not kidding) waiting for Joe to wake up and come out and go to work. Everyone wants to talk to Joe. And they do. His fifteen minutes have arrived. Literally. Joe is Everyman and his opinion matters.

However as the day wears on . . . by the afternoon we learn that Joe the Plumber isn't even a licensed plumber. He's not a plumber. He's a plumber's assistant. And even then he's not legally allowed to do any plumbing work in Ohio without supervision. To do that he'd need to be a licensed apprentice or a journeyman. He's not. Not even close. He's just an employee at a plumbing firm. Quite a difference. And guess what? He doesn't have the money, or even a plan, to purchase the plumbing firm where he works. The day prior Joe alluded to buying the firm and questioned Obama's about whether Obama's tax plan, the \$250,000 part, would hurt him.

I don't think Joe understands this. The firm might gross \$250,000 but that doesn't mean individual employees do. The firm might make near \$250,000 a year, but Joe does not. Far from it. So Joe asking Obama about his taxes going up when he purchases the firm was farfetched. As it turns out Joe's income is well lower than \$250,000. Joe would benefit if Obama is elected. Joe's personal income tax would NOT go up. Yet here's Joe on every station giving his thoughts on taxes.

OH - did I mention that Joe currently owes the state of Ohio \$1,182.98 in personal income tax?

So, as the most interesting political season I'll likely ever experience begins to draw to a close, David and I just hang out at around our house and wait. By now banks are failing, and lending institutions are failing, and mortgage lending is in a free fall. Companies are collapsing. The stock

market is going crazy, but in a negative way. Each day you think it can't get worse, or something more unusual just can't happen, and then the next day it does.

So we wait. We try to get into the hunkering down place, the place where you just FREEZE outta fear, deer in the headlights, but it's really not quite our style. So David and I go to Issaquah with our friend Robert Heuer to see a musical at the Village Theatre. It's not much, but it's something!

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November

Okay we just can't take it anymore. Really too many months in a row with no shit getting done. No home improvements. No construction. We can't stand it. We CAN'T STAND it. But really there's no extra money. We are barely making our bills.

So we decide to GUT OUR KITCHEN. And then FLY TO NEW YORK.

Really that ought to help.

We know a great tile guy, Andy Casey. We were still quite disturbed by the rats and all of their many floor access points. Hmmmmm We wonder how busy Andy is? What would it cost to put down a slate floor if **WE** gutted the kitchen ourselves? What if **WE** did this? What if there were no general contractor? What if **I WERE** the general contractor? So we call Andy. He comes, he measures, he calls a day later with a number. The number is very very reasonable. And I am absolutely desperate for something to do. Really. All of this INACTIVITY is killing me. There's little activity for David, there's little activity at my office, there's no activity here at the house and I think Calvin's mouse is still under that one bank of cabinets.

So I sell David on this idea. And, since he has the time, I ask him to take two days off work, the 6th and 7th. We get two labor guys who I met through Lance and schedule it and **BANG** we start. At the end of the second day our entire kitchen, every cabinet, the sink, all of it, it's in a big pile at the end of our driveway. All of our kitchen stuff is scattered throughout the dining and living rooms. Chaos is everywhere. We eat frozen things now that go into the microwave. We have no sink upstairs. The espresso machine is in the basement next to the laundry sink. And I'm fulfilling my life dream, I'm now a general contractor! Sadly there are no JAS Design Build people showing up at 7:30 AM each day. Not in the new budget. Not in what I now call, "The Realtor's Remodel." Nope, it's just me and a telephone and a laptop. I make lists, I make calls, I get shit done. But oh so slowly.

Once the kitchen was missing using our FREE round trip ticket that we get from Alaska each year, buy one, get one for \$50, was a no brainer. (Again free is such a relative concept to me.) We bought one first class ticket to New York and got the second for \$50. It's dollar cost averaging at its best! We left on the 14th. We were there for 5 days. We saw four shows: **South Pacific**, **Forbidden Broadway**, **August: Osage County**, and **Pal Joey**. And we saw Chris and Mark from the Baltic Sea cruise. We were planning on taking a train north of the city to a city called Beacon on the Hudson River to go to the Dia Foundation. When they found out about this (David was emailing ideas back and forth) they offered to not only go there with us, but to drive. So they picked us up at our hotel in a very new BMW and we visited and drove, saw art and visited, had lunch, walked the town of Beacon, and visited more on the way home. Great fun - thanks again guys!

Thanksgiving took place with the usual suspects at the home of Greg and Larry this year. We would have hosted, we're sure it's our turn, but we had no kitchen and no floor, not even a sub floor, by this point. Geoff Murphy, a great carpenter, found many spots where RATS had chewed things. Like wires. New wires. He repaired all of the rat damage and started putting down a new sub floor.

David and I were so thankful for the election all month. We still are. We know things are bad, but we at least look ahead with hope. Go see MILK. He keeps saying, "You gotta give 'em hope."

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It's Sunday December 14th

It snowed here last night. We went to Kevin and Kent's Christmas party and it was lightly snowing all night, on the way there, while there, and on the way home. A lovely white dusting that stuck to everything. It made it feel that much more "Christmasy" all night. The roads were a bit icy last night and today they are way icy. We were supposed to have dinner with Ruth Updike, in Tacoma, today with Gregg and Elisa, David's niece who is pregnant, but David thought better of it due to the ice. So he's upstairs addressing Christmas cards and I'm finishing this. He actually put on Christmas music for a while (which was surprising, and nice) and now he's moved it to, guess? He doesn't know I played Joni Mitchell for hours the other day when he was out. He just put her on. I will be that he too needs to purge his mind of the last time he heard her music.

Yesterday Andy finished the kitchen floor. The new slate floor is down, perfectly down, on Geoff's perfectly level and strong sub floor that has no dips or hills in it. It all feels so much more solid than what was there before. And there's no gaps. No holes. No openings of any kind. It's tightly down from wall to wall. Take that RATS! Andy came by yesterday and sealed it with some wonderful smelling chemical that took me back to my childhood in my dad's sign shop. I was light headed. Andy wore a breathing mask, like they kind the wear in the movies, a full-on gas mask.

Tomorrow Quality Plumbing will reinstall the radiators and Reed Wright Heating and Cooling will flush and fill the boiler system, bleed all of the radiators, and perform a tune-up on our whole heat system (it's over three and a half years old now and it's never been serviced so it can't hurt). All of that PLUS we are getting new thermostats. I have always hated the thermostats that we have now. They were put in by the last heating and cooling company, the one that put the boiler in when we remodeled in 2005, but I have always hated them. They are too fancy. I want much simpler. It's not forced air heat - I don't need it to be programable with all of these times. Water heat doesn't work well that way. You just want to set and let it be. Constant. You want constant. I do anyway.

Soon an all metal, second hand, industrial restaurant sink that Tim Allen and Monte found down at some second hand supply place on First Avenue will be installed on our new slate floors. It will have 4 X 4s for legs. The dishwasher will sit on the new slate floor next to it but NOT in a cabinet. It's just gonna sit there, all exposed. The stove will be put into it's new place. We did buy a hood. The hood will go up. And then the fridge will be rolled back into place. Counters will be made with legs of 2 X 4s and 4 X 4s and plywood tops. You think I'm kidding? I am not kidding. Phase One of the Realtor's Remodel only planned for the new slate floors and the moving of the stove and adding of the hood. The rest of it is not being done. The rest of it will happen in Phases Two and Three. And those two phases depend on whether or not YOU call David up and buy a house. So don't make us "camp" out here without a proper kitchen for too long!

David's Work Is Never Done

By now you know, if you have been paying attention, that I manage 85 real estate agents at the Windermere Eastlake Office. And I know it sounds self-serving, or expected, for me to say this, but David is one of the best of them. Really, he is. And his partnership with Kevin Gaspari is still going strong. Even in this slowest of slow years, they have survived. They had three different builders list new construction townhome projects with them, and they worked with many individual buyers and sellers this year. It's been a hard year, but even so they have contracted for an assistant to help them with their business. And tomorrow David has a big closing, one of the

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biggest of his career, when a high-rise condo that he wrote up in DECEMBER OF 2006 finally closes. It one of the best of the new buildings down there, a very fancy condo, pricey, a nice commission (after over two year of working on it). Remember when I said sometimes agents work one month only to get paid several months out? Here's a case in point! Anyway he is happy about this - he loves these clients, this is their second purchase, the first one being like 12 years ago or something like that. Anyway - **HAPPY CLOSING** to **BILL and SUE** ! You guys deserve that place!

And speaking of business I told Lance I was NOT going to talk about the miserable spring and summer we had trying to get him this building on Capitol Hill that he has wanted since he saw it in April. He and I have made five, yes 5, offers on this place, with numbers ever descending on each, since May. At the same time we have been trying to sell a 6 unit building he has in the Eastlake neighborhood. Everything that could have gone wrong - like in the WORLD - has since we started. Banks fail. Banks get scared. People make crazy offers. It has NOT been easy and, up until last Tuesday, it looked like it was all for naught.

But last Tuesday we thought we'd give it one more try - and then quit if it didn't work. Well, lo and behold, it took this time. We managed to, finally, get a contingent offer accepted on the property he wants to buy an then, the next day, we managed to get his property sold, or at least under contract. Due to inspections (tomorrow at 11:00 AM) and a 15 feasibility study period we really won't know if this is all going to happen until 5:00 PM on the day AFTER Christmas. So we are pending inspections. And, since there's now a small chance this summer's work will have a happy ending, I thought I'd leave this as a cliffhanger. Lance is now poised to either be the largest combined transaction ever (and by that I mean a linked buy and sell at once) in my 22 year career OR Lance has chewed up my whole summer and left me broke with nothing to show for it. The suspense. Kinda ensures you'll open the envelope when this letter arrives in 2009 doesn't it? Lance as a cliffhanger. Tune in next year

Goodbye To 2008

It's as good as over. It has not been the most fun year we can remember, but we survived it and we plan to survive next year as well. We are very grateful to have things to look forward to. Like an Obama administration. We've been paying close attention to his cabinet appointments and we have great hope the embarrassments and disasters of Bush administration can be undone. And we have hope, finally, that - hhhhhhhmmmmmm, dare I go there? On page 26? Do I bring this up now? No, I'm gonna skip it. Who wants to end on a downer? The year's been bad enough, let's just move on. [Guess what it would have been. Go ahead, guess. WHAT was the other big event in 2008 that we, or, well perhaps more ME than David, (that's a hint) would have had a personal stake in?]

Anyway as the year ends David and I are grateful that we experienced a crowning moment in American political history. We fear the alternative would have been to discover how much lower the United States could have sunk. This country has sunk a great deal in the past eight years and I

just don't think I could have dealt with more years like the past eight. We are so thankful and happy here for the election results that I can't tell you. And if I could I'd get all weepy again.

Beyond that, **David and I** are in good health, with me at 53 and he at 52. **Inga** is the light of our lives and **Calvin** and **Claire** are the oldest brother and sister cats ever at just past 16 years now.

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Somehow we have managed to remain ahead of the mortgages here and are still getting along well for a couple coming up on a full 24 years in February. (The 12th. February 12th. 24 years. Friggin' amazing.)

My god. 27 pages? What is the matter with me? All week long I have been getting Christmas cards with one page folded letter inside of them, almost like liner notes. I read each and every one of them over a cup of tea in the late afternoon. Every day, no matter where we are, David and I try to find each other around 3:30 to 4:00 PM and STOP and either go to Starbucks and buy a cup of tea or make one at home. Usually there's a cookie. We STOP and ask how was your day? What did you get done? What happened with so-and-so? And we sit for as long as it takes to eat a cookie and have a cup of hot tea. By doing this we don't have to talk over dinner. Instead we can watch the flat screen TV I installed on the wall in the kitchen next to the table, complete with a TIVO box. We talk at 4:00 about our days. Over dinner we watch some Tivo'd TV show we missed the day before.

Case in point about the cookie and tea I am finishing this right now at 4:15 PM. David just came in from taking Inga to the dog park. As he walked by my office he said, "I got you a cookie, I'm gonna make some tea." So it must be time for me to go upstairs and be with him.

Listen, I am exhausted and I have a full week coming up and this has to get out and guess what - I am NOT going to proof read it. I know Merritt Green will. I know Janice Helming will. And god knows Lisa Walters will. Any others of you who wouldn't mind doing so, read it, circle all of the spelling errors (which are not spelling errors at all, they are TYPING errors) and spacing issues and grammar issues and mail it back to me. Honestly when you do, Janice, Merritt and Lisa, I go back in and make the corrections. Why? So that when I die and you want to print the collected works of Michael Nelson they will be error free.

I'm sorry about the 27 pages but remember this: A blog can never be a "page turner" whereas this letter can. Because it is on pages. 27 of them. Read, turn, read, turn. 27 times. Remember this is perfect bathroom reading material. A paragraph at a time and then next thing you know it's July!

We sincerely hope things are good for you and yours !



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