



Today is January 1st 2010

2010

New Year's Greetings To Our Family, Friends, and Valued Clients:

I have been writing and mailing out hundreds of copies of this letter each year for I think 22 years now. It might be 23. But this is so late in coming this year there's no time for fact checking or accuracy. Let's just guess and say it has been 22 years. For 22 years I have looked forward to writing this letter and have always done so around December 1st to 10th with a goal of having it the mail to you around December 12th to 15th so you'd have it as part of your holiday. You could sit by the tree and have a hot buttered rum and enjoy the fact that it's on paper and you can sit by the tree without a computer in your lap. You could take it on a plane as you fly to wherever you are from to see your friends and family. And since it was on paper you could actually enjoy it during take off and landing. That was always the goal.

This year I was just being released from Swedish Hospital around the time I'd normally have produced this letter. When I got home I was housebound for a few weeks. All the while this letter was in the back of my mind ("gotta do it, gotta do it, gotta do it, gotta do it") and the 650 calendars for 2010 that were stacked on the credenza in my office at work . . . an office I had not been to in weeks and weeks and had no idea when I'd see again.

I never thought this could happen to me but I now know that it is possible to be so sick, so weak, so exhausted that you just stop caring about things. Me? Not caring about things? Me? Me with no fight left in me? I would have never believed it. But at some point near December 12th, when normally I'd be on my way to Kinkos with the letter master for duplication, I just gave up. I gave in. I just said to myself that I'd do it later when I could. I stopped thinking about it and took another nap. I let go. Letting go is not in my nature but, when as not well as I am now, it sorta feels good.

When David and I started the idea of this letter, whenever we talked about it, we agreed it should be upbeat and happy. We wanted to talk about things we did, places we went, things we thought, restaurants we dined at, houses we sold, our jobs, our dogs, our lives and our friends. BUT the one thing we agreed we didn't want to dwell upon, heck we didn't even want to mention, was our aches and pains. Our infirmities. Our illnesses. Medications we were taking. And so on. We didn't want to become some old gay couple talking about what pills they take each day. We, in a nutshell, didn't want to become OLD in this letter.

Well too late. I am officially OLD now. And there's no avoiding it in the letter this year. I'll try to keep it brief when I get to it, but in a nutshell here's the news: 2009 was the year that it was my turn to get cancer. A malignant stage three tumor. I lived through it. The cancer is gone now (so you don't have to wonder for pages and pages). However the aftermath is a total bitch . . .

I just took a break and reread last year's Christmas letter. It was 27 pages long yet it was a short break as I read quickly. 27 pages? I assure you that won't happen again this year. I ended last year's letter saying that David was 52 and I was 53 and we both had our health and things were thus fine. I started last year's letter by saying, "Before I say anything else, let me just say: **"We're. Still. Here."** " At the time I was referring to our real estate careers and the economy. And our many mortgages. I remember the climate a year ago when I was writing the annual letter: gloom and doom and large companies failing or being deemed too large to allow to fail and so on - you all remember those times and headlines. I clearly remember thinking well this is as bad as it gets. THIS is the worst year ever. Hah!

I don't save every Christmas card we get. BUT I do save some of them. If your card is ugly, I throw it away. If your card is hackneyed, I throw it away. If your card has nothing warm and loving or clever written inside of it, I throw it away. Or some combination thereof. I could save a really beautiful card with nothing written inside of it for years. Or I could save a really stupid boring card if you wrote something in it I'd want to savor in the years to come. (There now, the pressure is on for a clever warm touching and hopefully beautiful, or simple yet elegant, or even better, homemade, Christmas card from YOU to me next year . . . you want to to be in the best Christmas cards ever archives, don't you: 9305 - 45th Avenue NE, Seattle, WA 98115)

Since I was housebound David put up a tree this year. We have not had a Christmas tree in years ('cause we are never home this time of the year). David did this all by himself - he shopped for the tree, he put it up, and he bought lights and decorations and dug out all of our Christmas stuff from the basement. Part of all of our Christmas stuff is my collection of old Christmas cards that I deemed worthy over the years. I sat on the couch one day reviewing all of the holiday cards I have saved. I have cards from 1985, 1993, and so on. I have a dated photo of David from 1985 sitting on Santa's lap and Santa was a woman named Marion Mitchner. (It's been over 25 years now, I could have the spelling of her name wrong.) All I remember from that night is the homemade egg nog she made in a huge mixer - it was amazing. There was rum. Yet I think she had a drinking problem. Anyway I have the photo of David in her lap.

Whenever Mark and Dirk send you a card, Mark never misses the opportunity to write a lovely sentiment in the card. As in the past, this year's sentiment trumped the card but made it into worthy status none-the-less.. I don't have it in front of me, but Mark wrote something like this, "So in the end it really is about family and friends and health after-all." I'll be reading that card every Christmas that we are stuck in Seattle for years to come. This year we were supposed to be both Palm Springs for a week and then in Puerto Vallarta for a week. Instead David put up a Christmas tree.

Enough preamble. Let's see if there's something I can talk about OTHER than the sorry state of my health.

But before I do let me leave you with one thought: I have not had any solid food or a beverage of any kind since Friday November 13th. No food. No drink. No swallowing of any food or drink. November 13th. Today is January 1st. I think that is 49 days. Can you imagine NOT being allowed to swallow anything for 49 days? Nothing. No water even. Yet I need to gain weight.

Wrap your mind around that as I try to find a purpose and direction for this letter

There Will Be No Proofreading This Year

Let's face it - I don't have the time or the strength. Plus those 2010 calendars are in boxes in my office at work. I need to get them out to you so you can plan to get shit done in 2010. This is NOT a holiday newsletter remember. But as for purpose and direction . . . this is your WAKE UP it's a new year, welcome it and let's get some stuff done. Let's plan, let's motivate, let's set some goals. That's THIS letter this year. Lance and I never refer to getting stuff done as "stuff" - NO ! - we always call it "shit." I will call him on the phone and say, "What's up?" and his response will be, "I'm in my attic trying to get some shit done." Or he'll e-mail me and say, "What are you doing?" and I'll respond by saying, "I'm in my home office getting lots of shit done." It's our phrase.

People Are Stupid

Or maybe they are just lazy. Or perhaps they are both stupid and lazy. But not my friend Lisa. My friend Lisa would like everyone to stop, please please stop, saying that today is the start of a new decade. Today is January 1st 2010 and it is NOT NOT NOT NOT NOT the start of a new decade. Today is the start of the last year of the preceding decade. 2010 is the last year of the previous decade. The previous decade started on January 1st 2001. (As much as some of you would like to think that 2000 was the START of a decade, it was not.) It's one thing for your neighbor or your barista or your co-worker to say, "Gosh it's a new decade" because, really, who expects much from neighbors and baristas and co-workers? But it's quite another for all of the talking heads on CNN and MSNBC to be going on about it. I watched Kathy Griffin and Anderson Cooper (he's gay) (and the son of Gloria Vanderbilt) ring in the New Year on New Year's Eve. Anderson kept saying things like, "Can you guess who was the top selling recording artist in the last decade?" and then he'd give you 5 choices. I'd scream at the TV, "How can we know, the decade isn't over yet !!!"

The current decade won't be over until 12-31-2010.

A new decade starts on 1-1-2011.

Do the math, if you can.

Or think of it this way: Lots of people are having children. Even gays. I know because they want to talk to me about their children. In the first 365 days of a child's life the child is NOT one year old yet. The child is one year old at the end of 365 days. Ditto for the next 365 days. At the end of the next 365 days the child is two. If you keep this going you will see that the child is NOT ten years old until the END of the 10th period of 365 days. You would not say, as the child hits nine years old, that the child was a decade old.

Here's how a decade goes: It starts with a year that ends in **ONE**. Like 2001. Then it needs ten years: 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010. Count those years. See if I called it a decade after the end of 2009 that would only be a nine year span.

People are stupid. Macy's is stupid. I just saw a commercial on TV for a big sale at Macy's to start the new decade.

Yet in today's paper there's a whole article about palindromes - things that read the same front to back and back to front. Like: 01-01-2010. You could read that backwards and still get 01-01-2010.

Interesting for sure, but really I wish they would have explained the whole decade thing to the people out there who just can't figure this out. It's far more annoying to Lisa. And me. And about only 7 other people it seems.

There's a scene in the movie DOUBT where Meryl Streep is fussing over a ball point pen she found on the floor under a desk in a classroom and she says something LIKE this: "Surely all of the easy choices we make today will have their consequences tomorrow." I realize I don't have the exact wording here - I'm working from memory folks, memory now often clouded by chemotherapy - BUT I loved that line 'cause I feel that way about SO many things. Like spacing twice after you type a period. The easy choice is to just not do this, to space only once. But what will the ramifications of this be in 25 years? Huh?

Speaking of movies (were we?), did you notice that 2009 started with a passel of these Nazi-themed movies? I no longer will go see movies with Nazis in them. It seems like there's been a rash of them this past year. The Reader, the kid in the pajamas in the concentration camp movie, Defiance, Valkyrie too many, or at least well more than are needed. I'm still getting over Sophie's Choice, which was the last Nazi-themed movie I saw. (That's right, I did not see Schindler's List. I did not need to. I get it, it was a terrible time.)

While I'm on random movie thoughts (am I?), how terrible was the movie Twilight? I have an answer for that. Twilight by Stephenie Meyer - okay, this is not a book I would have, under normal circumstances, read. But Gary Sarozek knew I had it (it's complicated but long story short, I owned it but I wasn't going to read it) and he called me up and asked me if I wanted to read it "with him" over the Christmas holidays (this was a full year ago). He was going to get the book and we were going to read it the same week essentially. Like a two person book club! So I did. Juvenile would be kind. But what did I expect? Then, to complete the cycle, David and I watched the movie. Even more juvenile. But what did I expect?

It's like all of that Harry Potter crap. Yes, I said crap. I just can't go there - I'm an adult. You know where else I can't go? Any movie with Alvin the Chipmunk in it. Or any movie with any part in the movie played by an animated thing that, for me, might as well be Alvin the Chipmunk. Thus no Avatar. No foxes. None of this. I only see movies with only actors in them. It's now a firm rule. I'm still annoyed by the "cartoon" section of Kill Bill. That movie was moving along just great and then, outta nowhere, I'm forced to watch a cartoon.

I'm listening to classical music right now. I love listening to classical music but seldom do as I never know what to buy. Classical music at Silver Platters overwhelms me so I move back to the pop section, grab a few things, and get outta there. But Paul Noot, of the McNoot family, has leant me the most amazing thing. It is a boxed set of CDs put out by Sony. The CDs in it, and there are many, span the past 100 years of music hitting all genres. It starts with scratchy sounding old recordings of folk music and moves through ten decades (that would make up 100 years). I am slowly importing all of these CDs into our home music computer. I just got to the classical grouping and I'm loving this. I want someone knowledgeable to make the selections for me and say, "Here's the best, or certainly an important sampling, of classical music over the past 100 years." I could not be happier. And much of the music I'm hearing right now I recognize, tho' I couldn't tell you for the life of me what it is or who it's by or who is recording it. (Perhaps it is me that is stupid and lazy?) And it is perfect music to work by, especially for me to write by, as my mind doesn't keep jumping into the lyrics. My mind does that whenever lyrics are present.

I'm a bit concerned about the jazz section of this boxed set. What will I do when I get there? I hate jazz music but it is a part of the boxed set. I think for that section I will listen to it first and then decide if I should import it. I probably will just to have the complete boxed set, I'll just not likely ever return to this section. Unless it is made up of Charlie Brown's Christmas. Now that's some "jazz" music I love. But so far that's all of the jazz music I love.

Back to the important classical selections being handed to me: I wish someone could do this for me for arias in operas. I love the main big numbers in operas. I don't want to listen to the whole opera, just the money shot number where the female sings her heart out. But again, how do I know what to buy or where to get it? There's a scene in the movie Philadelphia, the only thing Tom Hanks has ever done that has not annoyed the piss outta me, where Tom's character listens to an aria while dragging his IV pole around the room while explaining what's happening in the opera at that moment to Denzel Washington's character. Love that scene. I just want a CD of 25 arias like that. There were many times at Swedish, and here at home, as I was walking around with my IV pole that I thought of this scene in this movie. I just did. There was no music playing, I just thought of it. Had I had any strength, or any sense of humor left, and had I had an aria I could have played on the music system, I could have had a great time with my IV pole. Anyway, thanks Paul for this boxed set - I am enjoying it immensely. And I only have like 86 CDs left to import!

You Have Had The Following Message For 100 Days, The Maximum Time Allowed

Ah, voice mail. Specifically Qwest voice mail. I have had plenty of voice mails in the past ten years (that's just 10 years folks, not a decade as I'd have to go back almost 20 years to find that specific span of 10 years completed) but none have reached the level of excellence of what I consider the original: Qwest. Cell phone voice mails come and go, and the awful voice mail that we have at my office, but Qwest and it's features rank supreme. One of the best things about Qwest voice mail is that it talks to you when you archive a message. Example: "Message will be saved for 98 days, the maximum time allowed." Really the maximum time allowed is 100 days (on my stupid Blackberry it is seven days -SEVEN ? Come on!) but if you already have a few messages archived this eats into your maximum time allowed. Later Qwest pops up and talks to you when the archived message is getting to old and it wants to erase it. You can override that. I do. Often.

See I use my voice mail box as a amusing memory archive AND as a simple "To Do" list. I'll get a message and it will have some meaning to me and I'll save it (much like cards with nice sentiments in them). For instance the day my mom and dad moved out of our family home, the house I was raised in, my dad left me a voice mail about his day and the final parts of the move. This was in 2005. I saved that message until just this year. I can't tell you how many times I listened to it - but plenty. Every once in a while, usually when DRIVING, I'd go into my voice mail box and listen to old archived messages just as a reminder of things. I'm kinda nutty that way.

And then there's the "To Do" list aspect of voice mail for me. Sometimes a message is not pressing but I save it as a reminder of something I plan to do, need to do, etc. I have a message saved right now from Linda Juliano about having lunch. I was, prior to November 13th, going to take her to lunch. Now I'm going to take her to lunch if I am ever able to eat again. This message, archived, is my reminder of that.

However sometimes things fall through the cracks of the best to do list. I had a message (still do but after I finish this paragraph it will finally be deleted !!!) that was left in the spring or summer

of 2008. Thus I have had it archived for over a year and a half AT LEAST. The moment I heard this message I knew what I wanted to do with it and I saved it. It was from Gary Tucker. And I quote, exactly:

" Okay I hope you're sitting down because I just want to tell you that Curtis and I are talking about moving in together and the idea has come up of the possibility of buying a house. Now before you have a heart attack I don't know if we can afford it because, aammmm, we're thinking, he's thinking, in the three to four hundred thousand dollar range and I don't know if there's anything out there like that. Curtis said, "Well maybe they know about a foreclosure," I don't know, but I thought let me talk to my one set of true Realtor friends. We're also thinking of renting one but, well, we thought we should explore owning one. So let's start the conversation. Just wanted to bounce that off of you and see what sticks. Hahahahaha. Call me one of these days. Bye!!!! "

I just played that back about 9 times to type it out exactly as Gary left it. I wanted to get the pauses and inflections just right. That was the message, early summer of 2008, perhaps spring even. Now it's deleted. To do no more.

I manage about 90 agents these days, and about 5 full time staff, and I don't really show and sell properties anymore. Thus this was turned over to David and the house hunting began. Curtis seemed like the primary house hunter and he and David looked at every house between \$300,000 and \$400,000 under every rock in every area of Seattle. Gary, of course, was always at work. Tho' I no longer do the nitty-gritty parts of house hunting and showing, I do show up for showings. Especially if it's Gary Tucker looking. So often the three of them, Curtis and Gary and David, would be taking a second or third look at a specific house and I'd show up to throw in my two cents.

Some of these houses really concerned me because - and I know this might sound stupid - both Gary and Curtis are tall guys. Certainly taller than me, but then who isn't? And knowing how often Gary moves (hah!) I sorta knew whatever they bought could be a 15 or 20 year commitment. We saw houses where the two of them were, ah, pinched or stooped on the second floor, or in the basement. I'm big into ceiling heights and I'm not even tall. I can't imagine being tall and not having great ceiling heights.

So, in the end they found a house that was one of those dreaded SHORT SALES in Ballard. Great location, great house, nice yard, great price, but a friggin' short sale. These never go easily. Agents dread them. Clients don't know enough to dread them - they think it's gonna just all be fine. Easily 50% of the time it is not fine. In the case of Gary and Curtis it took months to get approval on the short sale from the bank. And even then I remember some nasty and stressful stuff at the end that involved money and Gary having to take a check to the other agent and trusting him with this money and papers not being ready and bad crazy stuff. And remember Gary is at work. Gary is always at work and really can't pull himself away even for a once in a lifetime activity like buying a house. It was stressful and messy. Or so it seemed to David and me, but then we know how this is supposed to go. I remember it was the 19th of December and a huge storm was due, a snow storm, and I was packed up in the Hybrid and about to drive to Palm Springs with Inga. David was worried about me leaving. There were tons of last minute phone calls to the the lender for Gary and Curtis, to the other agent, to escrow, and so on. This needed to close before the storm hit. We were complete wrecks here - very stressed out. After all this was Tucker and we didn't want to let him down.

It closed. I think it closed on the 19th of December. I know that was the Friday as that was the day I got in the Hybrid and high-tailed it outta Seattle before the snow hit. It may have closed the following week - don't remember, but I know I knew it would close before I left Seattle.

Long story short: The one person I know who never bought a house or a condo or a co-op apartment from me in all of the years I have sold real estate has finally, FINALLY, bought a house. I predict they will be in that house till they are taken out in wooden boxes. And I'm okay with this mainly because they have 3 full floors with full ceiling heights on each. They can stand up in the basement. They can stand up in all of the second floor. No sloping ceilings, now walls that angle into ceilings from a four foot spot around the room. Nope. A house made for tall people. And they got it for a song - it may not seem like it to them, but a year or two earlier this house would have been easily \$100,000 to \$200,000 more than they paid for it. As a matter-of-fact I think the previous owners who were short selling it to Gary and Curtis paid in that higher range for it during the "what bubble?" days of Seattle real estate. What bubble? Bubble?

And of course all of this is a year late. This happened in 2008 and should have been in last year's letter. But I just plain forgot. I was stressed, partly because of Curtis and Gary's transaction, I was trying to get out of town before that major storm, and I just forgot. But, thanks to Qwest voice mail, I never really forget for good.

Hmmmm. I've been writing for quite a while now and now it appears that Gary Sarozek and Matt Ketcham (now a couple) and Mike Allison (Gary's best friend from Portland) are coming here to sit around the kitchen table and watch me be sick. People like to visit. Some days I'm too tired for even that. But they caught me at a somewhat strong feeling moment so I said okay come over. I guess this is a good stopping point for today. And as I stop for today, let me remind you one last time, today is the first day of the last year of the decade that started on 01-01-2001. This decade ends on 12-31-2010. If you promise to remember this, and lord it over your co-workers and baristas, I promise to not bring it up again. More tomorrow.

Saturday January 2nd 2010

You know what? I don't care if people say, "twenty ten" or "two thousand ten." Hello again. I'm back.

Things That Should Be Common Sense

There is a video on YouTube called "California Safe Driving Spoof." I usually find it by searching "hands free driving." This video was posted by a very clever guy making a wry comment on the new laws outlawing the holding of cell phones in cars. He's wearing a bluetooth hands free headset so he never touches his cell phone. However, while driving, he is alphabetizing his CD collection, doing calligraphy on some wedding invitations, eating a burger and fries and having a soft drink, drying his hair, cleaning his windows (with Windex of course), and so on. My favorite part is when he has a block of wood and a cordless drill and he's making a flute for his sister. All while driving. And all legal since he never picks up his cell phone and holds it to his ear.

The stupid thing (in my opinion) about these laws banning the holding of a cell phone is that the laws only address one thing. If the legislatures are going to go down this path they need to address ALL of the things that people do while driving, or, as in the video I mention above, COULD do while driving.

Some examples off the top of my head: Holding a coffee cup, eating a hamburger and fries, putting on makeup, looking through a purse or backpack, changing CDs from one jewel box to the player and putting the CD from the player away and so on. Just like we shouldn't have to tell people to not read a novel while driving, much less pass a law that says don't read novels while driving, we should not have to tell people to not read text messages on phones or e-mails on Blackberrys when driving. Isn't this all just common sense?

The Start Of The Year

Looking back on it now, this year started off quite normally. I did have a hoarse voice tho'. Right around Thanksgiving of 2008 my voice started to get odd, hoarse, gravelly. I just assumed I had been talking too much (me?) at work, that I had strained my voice. So I ignored it. I thought I'd go to Palm Springs, have some quiet time, rest up and all would be fine. So I drove, with my dog (nothing makes me happier), down I-5 never once - never - seeing a snowflake along the way. We all know what happened in Seattle. I missed all of that.

January

David had a less easy time getting out of Seattle. The plan was for me to drive down and for him to stay here a bit longer, finish up some business, and then fly down and meet me. He was worried about me getting out of town? By time he was ready to come SeaTac was snowed in, flights were cancelled, it was a mess. I gather he had a cancelled flight and ended up walking in the snow from SeaTac to Mark and Dirk's house who live close by. He spent the night and got a flight the next day.

I Really Did Run Into Barry Manilow At The Supermarket

Literally. This was before David got to Palm Springs, actually my first night there. The new Jensen's had opened up (a grocery store) and as I just got there I needed stuff for the house. So I have my cart, it's about 10:00 PM at night, the store is basically empty, and I'm just roaming around not paying much attention to things as I check out what's where in the aisles at the new store. So I turn a corner with my cart and I hit this other guy's cart. I look up to say sorry and I'm looking at Barry Manilow. I was, other than sorry, speechless. Of course after he heads one way and I the other I start thinking of all the things I could have said. In the end I decided, if this ever happens again, this is what I'll say: "**Thank for you Weekend In New England**"

David finally makes it to Palm Springs. The house has groceries when he arrives. It's quiet, we're alone with our dog, a nice start to the year. I was "resting" my voice, it was a typical lovely quiet time in the desert. Just before New Year's we leave Palm Springs and drive to San Diego, someplace neither of us had ever been. We check into the worlds most depressing Hotel W in the worst part of San Diego possible. I didn't find anything in San Diego that would cause me to go back there. I did like the huge dog park but mainly because it is in the heart of the city, as is the airport, and you could reach down and pet your dog or you could reach up and touch the wheels of the planes as they were about to land. Seriously - you should see how close planes are to you and the city as they land there. Fascinating. To me at least. But I love air travel.

We drive home up I-5 together. The rest of January is spent having dinner with friends, going up t Guemes Island to visit David and Paul, typical things. I'm doing all the typical things however with a hoarse voice that isn't, despite rest, changing. Hmmm. Perhaps I have the flu? A bug? A cold?

Off to my doctor, Dr Peter Shalit. I get some antibiotics. It is flu season and perhaps I've got something and it's effecting my voice?

February

The first weekend of February is the last weekend I remember having what one could call a normal life. My cousin Susan, from Ann Arbor, came to Seattle for a dancing event, contra dancing or something like that, being held in Ballard. She stayed with us and I shuttled her back and forth to the dance events. The first night she was here we dined at Tilth. I remember enjoying the weekend but I also remember my voice getting worse AND a new development that alarmed me: I started to get headaches.

Here's the thing about me: I never ever get headaches. I never take Tylenol or Aspirin, I never need to. I'm 54 years old and I just rarely - perhaps once every year or two - get a headache. But all of a sudden I'm getting these sharp piercing bolts of pain in my head. Not good. What could be wrong? I know! I'll go to the dentist for a complete exam and x-ray. Perhaps I have a tooth problem that is manifesting itself as a headache? So I do. Complete cleaning and exam with full circle all around my head x-rays and everything is just fine. No problems at all. I leave there with a headache.

Back to my doctor. He sends me for an MRI. What? I have never had an MRI before. They do my head, the brain part, looking for whatever could be causing the headaches. The MRI comes back with no problems at all. None. Everything is fine. I leave there with a headache also. Next my doctor refers me to an Ear Nose and Throat specialist. I see him on February 11th.

Over the course of 2009 there were about 4 or 5 really low points - things that hurt or made me faint. This visit was one of them. The ENT doctor says he's going to stick a small you won't feel a thing camera down my throat. I say okay. What I don't know is he's getting there by going UP my nose with the camera, hitting a hard surface, and then bending the camera so that it heads DOWN my throat. I cannot tell you how uncomfortable this was. After he was done, as I was trying to get my composure back, he says, "I need you in here tomorrow for a procedure." He then goes on to tell me there is "a mass" growing on one of my vocal chords. Well it isn't hard to figure out where this is headed. Finally I knew. Suddenly everything makes some sort of sense. I didn't know for sure at this point that it was cancer but, trust me, when this is happening to you, you sorta KNOW.

The next day was February 12th, our 24th anniversary. David and I had dinner reservations at Spinasse on Capitol Hill. Scrap those plans. Biopsy instead. By now you all know where this is going: It was a cancerous tumor. Specifically a Squamous Cell Cancer, stage three, malignant.

Let me stop here. Let me jump ahead. On August 12th, literally, and I guess by some huge cosmic coincidence, I was given the results of both a PET CT SCAN and some more surgical biopsies. Both came back NEGATIVE for cancer. As my chemotherapy oncologist, Dr Kaplan, said to me at the time, "These reports are clean as a whistle." I learned a new cancer term: NED. NED stands for No Evidence of Disease. I was, for the time being, cancer free. (Still am today by the way.)

February 12th to August 12th is exactly six months. I went from a cancer diagnosis to "cured" in six months. It took longer to bury Michael Jackson. There are about 100 people at Windermere and another 100 family and friends who during those 6 months received exhaustive e-mail reports on what I was going through. I think it was 14 or 15 e-mails all told. As events were unfolding for

me, everyone in my close circle, and surely everyone at Windermere, wanted to know what was going on. And I'm into full disclosure in all aspects of my life, and I like to write, so e-mail updates were sent. I still have them. I could forward them to you if you wanted to read them and didn't get them as it was happening and you have some compelling desire to read about one guy's experience with cancer. Or you can go with this very abbreviated version in this cheery New Year's letter!

March & April & May

Well cancel all the airline tickets. Oh, and that weekend get-a-way in Portland? Call the hotel and cancel that too. Oh, and call everyone on the social calendar and cancel, cancel, cancel. Wipe the calendar clean. We have no life anymore, at least not one like we used to have, one that involved travel and entertaining. Now our lives are about doctor's appointments. We are in over our heads. Who do we see? Where's the best place for treatment? What kind of treatment? How do we learn all of the things we don't know? Why is no one calling us back? Why is everyone so calm and lax about this? It took over a month to assemble "my team" of doctors and figure out the where and how of my treatment plan.

I settled on the Swedish Cancer Institute, right there on Madison Street, a building I had walked by on my way to my dentist, or to the B of A branch immediately next to it, for years and years and had never given any thought to at all. My chemotherapy Oncologist was Dr Henry Kaplan and my radiation Oncologist was Dr Tim Mate. I started my treatments on Monday the 16th of March.

Oh - forgot to mention - it was determined in discussions with my Ear Nose and Throat surgeon, his name is Dr John Burgoyne and he's the one doctor I still see about all of this, that surgery was the LAST option for getting this tumor out of me. Usually the first thing they do is operate, take it out, and then follow it up with treatment to kill off anything that might be left behind. I did not choose that route as in my case surgery to remove the tumor would have also removed my vocal chords. I would never have been able to talk again. At least not naturally. And I would have had a hole in my neck for the rest of my life. I decided to bet the nest egg on treatment alone. And that meant two things: RADIATION and CHEMOTHERAPY.

The radiation program is quite simple: You get radiated 38 times, 5 days a week for basically 8 straight weeks. 38 times. NOT 36 times. NOT 39 times. It has to be 38 times. The cancer doctors have this all worked out. I asked several times why 38 times and not 40 for instance as I am curious about these things and found this 38 number to be odd and random. I could explain all of this to you here but I'm trying to keep this cancer part of the letter under two pages. My first radiation appointment was on Monday, March 16th.

As for chemotherapy, that was a 10 hour day eight times. My first chemo appointment was on Wednesday March 18th. I had chemo every Wednesday for eight weeks. It was a 10 hour day each time. There were 5 IV bags they dripped into me and each bag took 2 hours. It started first thing in the morning with a bag of fluids (saline solution, water essentially) then they'd switch that out with a bag of chemicals when it was empty, then 2 hours later another bag of fluids, then another bag of chemicals 2 hours after that and then the fifth bag, a bag of fluids to end the day. Five bags. Two hours per bag. A ten hour day. In the middle of my chemo day, at 2:00 PM each Wednesday, I'd have to get up from the chemo ward and walk down the halls of Swedish to the radiation floor. It was two floors and a hallway walk away. Because radiation has to happen every day at 2:00 PM. So there I was walking my IV pole from the chemo ward to the radiation ward. I'd get my 25 minutes of radiation and then I'd stroll back to the chemo ward to finish up my day.

Chemo is probably something I don't need to give any details on. You've all seen it on TV hundreds of times. It's an IV drip, it's slow, it's tedious and it might make you sick to your stomach, or worse. What more is there to say about it? Besides they have to put an IV port in your arm each time?

Ah, but the radiation aspect of this. Now that's unusual. Think of the top half of a mummy's sarcophagus. Imagine that you were on hard flat table and someone had made a FORM FITTING sarcophagus of the top half of your body - from your waist to your head. And I mean form fitting - made on you, for you. Now imagine that every day at 2:00 PM you go to the radiation ward and you lie down on this hard flat table and they take "the mask" (that's what they called it) and they put it on top of you and the BOLT it down to the table. It is tight. You cannot move. You can barely blink. This is the idea here - to get you in the exact same spot day after day after day. The first 5 to 10 minutes of each radiation appointment was about the sarcophagus and markings on it that had to line up with laser beams coming out of the big "wheel of radiation" as I called it. After you were "just so" everyone would run from the room (because as it turns out, and as I discovered on November 14th, radiation can have nasty side effects and you don't want to be exposed to it if you can avoid it!!!). Then you'd see the big "wheel of radiation" go into action. You'd hear it moving into a position and then you'd hear this buzzing sound for a few minutes. Then it would rotate and move to a new position and then the buzzing sound again. This would go on for 25 to 30 minutes (in my case).

Will This Letter Ever Get To You ???

Sadly (for the timeliness of this letter) a full week has gone by. It is now Sunday the 10th of January. What happened? I went back to work this week. And I went to Virginia Mason hospital (a new player in my health drama) every day this week at 9:00 AM to sit in an oxygen chamber for two hours. It robs your day of time to do other things, like work things, so I end up staying later at work each day, till about 6:00 PM, and then when I get home writing just seems too taxing.

So the whole cancer thing started in February which, in this letter, was two and a half pages ago. I wanted to keep the "cancer" part of my year to two pages total so already I've blown that. Let me see if I can wrap it up here and move on. So it all ended, or so I thought, on May 6th. May 6th was my last day of radiation and my last day of chemotherapy. By May 6th I had done 8 full weeks of both - radiation 38 times and chemo for 8 ten hour days, always on a Wednesday. When it was done, it was done. They all said come back in August and we'll test you to see if we got it. Bye.

May

And thus I was set free. When this all started I weighed 195 pounds. On May 6th I weighed 140 pounds. I was glad it was over. I had no idea at this point if it worked or not, but I was so glad the process, the grind of treatment, was over.

Looking back on it now, I don't have such a bad memory of chemotherapy. Yes, there were one or two nurses who were particularly bad at drawing blood and putting an IV connection in my arm, but mostly they were fine. Once the IV connection is in your arm you just go to a room, in my case a private room each week, and sit. There are chairs for visitors (and I had plenty) and there's a TV. There's a bed for taking naps and when you're not napping you sit in a fancy Lazy-Boy type chair. I used to get faint and have real big issues with needles and drawing blood. I'm pretty much past all of that now. Eight weeks of chemotherapy blood draws and IVs will help you with that.

Neither do I have a bad memory of the radiation appointments. (Other than there were 38 of them and they ran for consecutive weekdays - again such a grind!) Of course NOW I feel a bit differently about the radiation aspect of this process, but at the time all I could think about was having cancer, that it was stage 3 and I didn't want to move to stage 4, etc. You get so focused on the disease that the aftermath of the treatment just doesn't your mind. It's all about the tumor. Aftermath? Fall out? Negative side effects? No one really talks to you about those things as it's happening. Nope, it's all about the tumor as it's happening.

I consider myself quite lucky. I am fully aware that not everyone has the outcome I have had. I am also well aware that not everyone is treated as well as I have been. I must say that the people who work at Swedish Hospital all amazed me with their attitude and kindness. And I don't just mean my specific doctors or radiologists or nurses. I mean EVERYONE I dealt with at Swedish. The receptionists. The security guard I walked past to get to radiation every day. Everyone. They learned your name, they called you by name daily, they said hello and goodbye by name, they smiled, they said encouraging things.

As I move on from this let me recap my LOW POINTS in the process. Granted this are low points specific to my personality:

Low point # 1: Dr Burgoyne "sliding" his small "you won't feel a thing" flexible camera up my nose and down my throat during our first meeting when he discovered the tumor. I can't tell you how unpleasant this was for me.

Low point # 2: Kaplan explaining what a portacath was to me. This was during one of our early interviews before any treatments began. I was telling him of my huge fear of needles and blood draws and getting "stuck." He says oh well there's a way around all of those weekly "sticks" and he goes on to explain a portacath. David is sitting next to me. I go white as a sheet as he is explaining this to me and slump over on to David's shoulder. Seriously I have (had?) a problem with not only things like this BUT with even discussing things like this.

Low point # 3: Friday, March 27th - Getting my first PEG FEEDING TUBE put into my stomach. It stands for "Percutaneous Endoscopic Gastrostomy" and what it is is a plastic tube that sticks out of your stomach, in my case fairly high up near my chest, and hangs down for about 14 inches. At the end of the tube there's a cap. To get nutrition you take the cap off and inject "food" into the tube. The food goes into your stomach. The "food" is a canned beige liquid that smells awful and looks worse. Each can is 500 calories. You are supposed to inject 5 cans a day to keep going. This is partly how I went from 195 to 140 pounds. This was, for me, definitely the worst part of this whole year. It was visually disturbing. It was unpleasant to use. And it is hardly eating. I referred to it as "feeding" much like they do in the rash of vampire things around today.

Low point # 4: Saturday, November 14th - It's coming. Oh yes. It's coming. They let me go on May 6th when treatments ended but trust me this ain't over yet.

Low point # 5: Friday, November 20th - Getting my SECOND PEG FEEDING TUBE installed in my stomach, in the same spot the first one was, in order to be released from Swedish Hospital.

Low point # 6: November. December. Being released from the hospital and being housebound for most of November and December and then going from Thanksgiving to the New Year without being able to either travel OR enjoy any part of the holidays since I could not eat or drink anything.

May & June

On May 18th I decided to fly to Chicago, rent a car, and drive to Detroit. I was 140 pounds, skin and bone basically, but I thought I wasn't that out of it and I should get back into doing things I would normally do. Everyone here kept questioning me about this, was I strong enough to do it, was it a good idea, and so on. And the Chicago part (as opposed to flying into Detroit Metro) was really working them up. I think they thought I was weaker than I really was. Or than I thought I was. Looking back on it, when I got back up to 158 pounds and I could compare my body strength levels, I realized - and I hate to admit it - but they were all probably right. But at the time I really wanted to do this and thought I'd be fine.

My favorite Aunt, Geraldine Mumm, was turning 80 on the 26th of May and my cousin Marsha was throwing a party for her mom at her lake front home in Dexter. My other cousins, Mark and Susan, would be there plus the extended Mumm family and my whole family. I wanted to be there. And I wanted everyone to see I survived. So I went.

Before I tossed myself into family matters however I spent two nights with my friend Lisa. One at her house in Ypsilanti and the second at her relaxing getaway house in Port Austin. Port Austin is at the very tip of "the thumb" of Michigan. She drove. We listened to music and talked and had a great time. Then it was back to Ann Arbor for me. I checked into my hotel in the heart of town and began seeing members of my family individually and in groups. Dinners. Lunches. And so on.

A High Point

I returned to Seattle on May 27th and was scheduled for a minor surgery the very next day: On May 28th I got to have the PEG FEEDING TUBE removed from my body. I can't tell you how great this made me feel. By this point I had returned to eating food and swallowing it the normal way on a full time basis. Prior to my trip to Michigan I was primarily using the canned "food" and was only eating minor amounts of real food due to the pain and what could and could not go down my throat. (Remember my throat by this point had been radiated to the point of being burned on the inside and was filled with scars and damaged tissue.) I was working through the pain and difficulty of this diligently as the sooner I could eat on my own the sooner this vile tube could go away.

An Even Higher Point

I was not allowed to travel at all during the treatment phase of my year. Normally I go to Palm Springs repeatedly during the winter and spring months for a weekend here and a weekend there. It's the best time of the year to be there and a great time to NOT be here. Since I can't garden here yet, why hang around? So I had pent up desire to be there. My employers, who can I just say were absolutely amazing during this whole cancer time, agreed to allow me to defer part of my salary to one of my Assistant Managers for a month. So . . . my Assistant Manager took over the day-to-day things at my office and I packed up the Hybrid and hit the road. With my dog. Nothing makes me happier than a good ol' fashioned road trip with Inga. Nothing. I love driving. I love being alone. I love my dog. I buy a bunch of new CDs and one book on CD and I'm good.

This trip I didn't stick to I-5 the whole way. I don't remember the route I took now, but fairly soon after getting into California I left I-5 and headed east into the mountains. Stunning.

A much slower route to be sure, but I had no deadlines and plenty of time. I left Seattle on June 9th. I was going to be gone for over three weeks! I had time.

Palm Springs With No End In Sight

In the entire time we have owned the house in Palm Springs, and that's since March of 2001 so just over 8 years, I had never - NEVER - been there for more than 6 days straight. It's always a long weekend trip or a trip over the Christmas holidays, but never for a week or more. Usually it's 4 to 5 days per trip. When Inga and I got there we had three weeks to be there - three weeks with no plans and no commitments. Other than going to Koffi every morning at 6:00 AM and then going to the dog park immediately afterwards.

Tim Allen and David flew down for a week while I was there. I picked them up at the airport just like out of town guests. Other than that week with them, I was alone resting. When I left Seattle the exterior of my neck was cracked and scarred and burnt. I looked like I was caught in a fire but only a scarf around my neck caught fire and burned. It was the radiation. Miraculously while I was in Palm Springs this all healed up. I left Seattle looking quite scary. I returned to Seattle with a whole new neck that looked like a baby's bottom - all fresh new skin.

July & August & September

I left Palm Springs after this glorious three weeks on July 2nd. No scenic route this time - this time I was on a deadline: I needed to be back to attend the Most All American 4th of July Party Ever at the lake front home of Mark and Dirk. It was really quite something. David and I hope to be invited back next year.

So it's July. Back to work. Back to work. Back to work. Nothing much happened in July, August or September. In August I had my first POST treatment PET CT SCAN. It's a full body scan where they inject you with radioactive sugar (this is the PET part, don't ask me what it stands for) an hour before the scan and then let the sugar rush off to find the cancer cells. Evidently cancer cells eat sugar faster than other cells and so the sugar bunches up there and since it's radioactive it shows up on the scan better. I'm sure I just butchered that explanation of what a PET CT SCAN is. And there were biopsies again - they put me to sleep and go in and take things out and test 'em. On August 12 my main oncologist, Dr Kaplan, pronounced my scan results, "Clean as a whistle." Ditto for the biopsies. Nothing. NED as they call it: No Evidence of Disease. See you in three months.

Tom Martin visits us in Seattle about this time. Tom has never seen our new house (it's not so new anymore, but he and Rick moved to LA before we moved here). We have a dinner party in the garden in his honor and we hang out and visit. A good time. And since we rarely have over night guests it was a chance to use one of our many guest rooms.

Not Everything Is About Cancer: Sometimes Other Shit Happens

On August 20th, a Thursday, David and I met up with Bruce and Donna and a friend of theirs from LA at a local oyster bar for happy hour. Drinks flowed. Appetizers came and were devoured and then more came and then oysters and then we all headed off to dinner. This was on a Thursday. The following Monday, the 24th, David and I were planting ground cover in our yard. We had

bought a few flats of it and we really needed to get it in the ground as we were going to Portland the following weekend for David's 53rd birthday. So we're working. It's warm out. We have not had dinner yet. I'm getting dizzy. I say to David, we'd better stop. I think I need food, I'm dizzy.

Off we go to a Thai restaurant in Wedgwood. We're sitting at the table and I'm feeling worse and worse. I say to David I think I have to go to the bathroom. That poor restaurant. That poor bathroom. What happened next was very vile. And messy. I come out of there a new shade of green and I say to David, "We have to get out of here now." We get home and I have more and more attacks of diarrhea. It just won't stop. Finally I get to sleep but I'm up all night hitting the bathroom. The next day I somehow manage to go to work and make it through the day. But when I get home a new feature - I start vomiting uncontrollably. On Wednesday we're off to see Peter Shalit again. We assume, stupidly, that this has something to do with left over chemo effects or radiation, we don't know. We just assume everything is about cancer or it's aftermath.

We were wrong: I ate a bad oyster. They took blood, they took stool samples, urine samples and tests were run. Bad oyster. I was sick, and I mean really sick, for a full week. It took a week to get this out of my system. Sadly, for David, who has had a really trying year, his birthday weekend in Portland was cancelled. Once again I was too sick to move. No travel for me. The following week the King County Health Department called me. Evidently when you have a stool sample done and it turns that it has this special oyster bacteria in it, it's reported to them. So they call me, I'm at work, and they say, "Do you have a minute or two for a few questions?" Ever helpful, I say yes.

Well their idea of a minute is about 35 minutes and a few questions for them is half of Wikipedia's content. This interview, their idea of "a few questions" is going on and on and on and on and finally I say, "Look it was just a bad oyster, let it go." It especially annoyed me that they wanted to know where I had the oyster, what restaurant. Plus we don't know that if I were in better condition I would have even reacted the way I did. Obviously my immune system being what it is (compromised) and my weight still hovering around 155 pounds, I was ripe for this special oyster bacteria. It has something to do with warm water, warm water where the oyster was found. No one else in our party got sick. Just me. I finally told them enough was enough and that I had a meeting to go to.

Palm Springs Again

Labor Day. A three day weekend becomes another 6 day jaunt to the desert. David and I fly. A simple nice way to end the summer. We float in the pool and we see friends who live there.

October

I'm turning 54 and I'm not dead. Surely that calls for a week in Manhattan and some Broadway shows and some fine fine dining experiences. Chereese and Rebecca and David and I all fly to New York. They go a day before we do and stay a day longer. We go for just 6 days. David and I manage to eat at **Per Se** and **Le Bernardin** while there. Rebecca and Chereese take us to **Craft** for my birthday dinner, on my actual birthday, after we saw the matinee of **Bye Bye Birdie**. It got terrible reviews but we all had a great time. There's a lot of walking, shopping, the usual. We stay in Times Square. We love it there. I bought a very expensive (relative to what they are) set of measuring spoons at ABC to further my new obsession of baking cakes back home.

November

This month starts out great and then crashes and burns in the worst way possible. The guy I voted for for Mayor of Seattle wins. We fly outta town to Atlanta. One of David's sisters, Mary, and her husband Dave, have now moved to Atlanta. This is something I can get behind. Their kids are off to college and Dave is a Delta pilot and Delta is based in Atlanta. I have always wanted to visit Atlanta. Mary and Dave have a house on a lake in 17 hours from an airport in Minnesota that they are always suggesting we visit. This I cannot get behind - I don't find lakes and jet skis and pontoon boats at all appealing. I'd go crazy inside of 20 minutes and then I'd be hours and hours from a city or an airport. So I felt a wee bit bad about not ever wanting to visit. But not bad enough to actually go - I know myself too well. But Atlanta? I'm so there.

CNN is headquartered in Atlanta. Coke is headquartered in Atlanta. The worlds largest indoor aquarium is in Atlanta. They have good food in Atlanta. Elton John has a condo in Atlanta. (Perhaps I can bump into him at the grocery store?) And the best part? Alaska Airlines flies direct from Seattle to Atlanta. (I am all about air miles on Alaska - this is why I flew to Chicago and drove to Detroit - because Alaska flies direct Seattle to Chicago!)

We did all the things I just mentioned about (except bump into Elton John). When you get to CNN be sure to pay extra and take the VIP tour of the facilities. You get to go into newsrooms and you get to see more. We had some wonderful dinners. We will be going back. It's nice to see Dave and Mary AND next time we're renting a car and driving to Savannah. And the southern food we found was worth the trip. As soon as I can eat again, and as soon as I don't have a 15" latex tube sticking out of my chest, we'll go back for a long weekend. It was an easy trip - oh, and the train from the airport to Mary's house could not be easier. It just could not be easier. Love good mass transit.

And Then The Big Crash

November 11th was Cherese's birthday. She wanted a simple dinner at King Fish Cafe. So the four of us went and had a lovely time. I had the gumbo and corn bread. It was a great meal.

The next night David and I stayed home alone and had pasta and watched a movie. The next night, which was Friday the 13th, David and I stayed home alone (we do this often tho' no one believes us) and had pork chops and side dishes.

Why do I remember this sequence of meals now? Month later? Because those 3 meals were the LAST THREE MEALS I had.

On Saturday, November 14th I was home alone. David was on a real estate appointment with Kevin. I woke up, made a cappuccino as I always do, got out a pastry that I bought the night before at Grateful Bread in Wedgwood, and sat down at the kitchen table to read the New York Times and start my Saturday off in a good way. All of a sudden I started choking. The pasty was coming up, or not going down at all, and flying out of my mouth in chunks. Coffee was spraying here and there. I got up and went to the sink and tried to clear my throat and try again. It all happened again, major choking and gagging and an inability to breath. This went on for quite awhile. I made some calls to some friends for advice (like this is gonna help?), I called David, I said I'd be okay, and I went back to trying to be okay. It wasn't working. I was gagging and I was scared and alone and finally I just decided I needed to go to the Emergency Room. So I got in the Hybrid and drove

myself, alone, to Swedish. As I pulled up right in front of the ER David was pulling up from one direction and Cherese from another. The three of us go in. I check in and am whisked into an ER room where I spend the bulk of the day. Nurses and doctors come and go, people try to figure out what's wrong, but it's Saturday and the doctors I need to talk to, my Medical Team as it were, well they all won't be reachable until Monday.

I am checked into the Intensive Care Unit for the night. David and Cherese take my car home, get some stuff for me, and come back and help me get settled. I am 54 years old and this is the FIRST TIME I have ever been checked into a hospital. I have, up until this day, never spent the night in a hospital. It's sad. I'm scared. David is worried and wants to stay but we have a cat and dog and house to run and I am going to sleep anyway so I send him home. So there I am, alone in the ICU with more IV drip bags and nurses coming and going all hours of the night.

The next day I am moved to a very nice private room on the 12th floor - the top floor- with a view of Capitol Hill. Just to rub it in I think. I'm trapped in this room looking at the Hill that I want to be on. They put me in the cancer ward. Cancer is not the problem but once I told them my history that's where I ended up. I have no feeding tube and I can't swallow anything so I'm on a constant IV drip of TPN (I think that's what it was called), some sort of nutrition. I end up being in this room for a full week. People visit. David comes often and climbs into bed with me and we watch TV and then, around ten, he'd go home to deal with the house and pets. It was a very hard time. And very sad.

On Monday my team of doctors starts to show up. Dr Kaplan comes by. He knows this has nothing to do with cancer, but he visits daily anyway - he was always the first to show up, early, like before 7:00 AM. Dr Burgoyne, my Ear Nose Throat man, shows up daily as well. We know the problem is in his arena. And Peter shows up. Along with several doctors they call "the hospitalists" and a whole heck of a lot of nurses. I am seldom alone. I am put on rolling beds and taken here and there for tests. I am taken for x-rays. Many people are trying to figure out what's wrong. Meanwhile I am not eating.

Since I'm there, and since it's November, and since I was due for another cancer check anyway, Dr Kaplan sends me off for my second PET CT SCAN since the end of my treatment. And since I have to have Dr Burgoyne go into my throat to see what's going on, more biopsies are taken from where the tumor was. Once again - the good news in all of this - NED still: No Evidence of Disease. No sign of the tumor. No cancer. Dr Kaplan tells me that I can now move from a once every three month check up and scan to a once every six month check up and scan. So my next scan for cancer is late April or early May. But I'm still clean as a whistle.

Finally after a full week of scans and surgeries and tests, and after many discussions with Dr Burgoyne, I am given two options: stay in the hospital longer to see if the little repairs he made during surgery start to work OR get a PEG FEEDING TUBE and go home now. Back to the issue of nutrition. I want out of there so badly that I immediately opt for the feeding tube. I am wheeled off to surgery and when I wake up I'm back in my room for one more night. The next day David is there early to help me pack up and take me home. I had been away from home for a full week.

That IV nutrition called TPN didn't keep my weight up. When I get home I weigh a new all time low of 134 pounds. I am bone. I am skin and bone. I have skin just sagging off my body where muscle and fat used to be. Therefore I am weak. My legs give out. I fall down. I am housebound for the

remainder of November. I sit at the kitchen table for 17 hours a day, 6:00 AM to 11:00 PM. I nap often. I lose interest in TV. I lose interest in books and magazines. I can't take my dog for a walk. I miss work. I look out the large kitchen window at the yard and the birds. I send e-mails and fiddle with my laptop. My ankles swell up to a huge and painful size from sitting all day long.

What's the problem? I haven't really addressed that, mainly because I still don't feel as tho' I have firm answers to that question. As near as I can tell I am currently dealing the AFTERMATH of those 38 radiation appointments. The radiation has somehow compromised the tissue in my throat that separates my esophagus from my trachea. Esophagus is for food. Trachea is for air. When I was choking to the point of driving myself to the ER, the food and coffee I was trying to drink was heading down my trachea (a.k.a., windpipe) for my lungs. There were other problems as well, like some pocket of air that wasn't supposed to be next to my trachea, but let's just skip all of that. Suffice it to say I'm a mess. A post radiation mess. My last meal was November 13th, I have gone almost two full months with no food, no water, no swallowing of anything. While trying to gain weight and put body mass back on. Oh, and during the holidays when everything seems to center around eating and drinking and celebrating with food and cocktails.

I skipped Thanksgiving dinner and sent David without me. December is a blur. I look at the calendar we keep and it's a complete blank. No nights out with friends. No movies. Nothing. November and December just passed by and I did absolutely nothing but try to improve.

David, bless him, got a Christmas tree and put it up all by himself. Then he went out and got lights and things and decorated it. I'd nap on the couch and smell the tree.

I somehow made it to Tim Allen's special birthday dinner in November. Chereese and I had planned it but it ended up being all Chereese with no help from me. But I made it there and watched everyone eat.

I somehow made it to my office's Christmas Party in December. This I planned but thank god for Cass at Saint Clouds for making it come off without a hitch. One of my agents offered up her house (it was supposed to be here but IV poles are so un-festive) and a small group of agents pitched in and helped decorate and set things up. I was so glad to attend this party and see everyone again - it had been over a month since I had. The food looked wonderful but again all I could do was watch everyone enjoy it.

I was pretty low in November and December. Almost to the point of true depression I'd say. But, well, it's pretty hard to get me that low and keep me there. Somehow I pushed on through. One day Chereese took me Christmas shopping - I only got things for David. He put that tree up and I wanted there to be some boxes under it on Christmas Day. David and I had rented a condo in Puerto Vallarta with Rebecca and Chereese for the week between Christmas and New Years. All the plans were made, airline tickets were bought, and - tho' it killed me to do this to David - we had to cancel. The girls went with another couple and had a great time. David and I stayed home.

I just can't really put into words how sad I was during November and December. I just couldn't make myself do anything and I felt terrible about David's holidays. OH - this letter. Hanging over my head the whole time was this letter. You'd think that if I was sitting at the same table day after day after day I could write the letter. But you know, not so. It is surprising how tired and exhausted you can get. Especially without food. I just couldn't bring myself to face it. At some point I just gave up on it, let it go, and decided it would be a New Year's letter instead.

Must Find Some Upbeat Things To End With

Hmmm. Our kitchen remodel, which slowed down a huge amount the first half of this year, is now 90% finished. To you it might look only 55% finished but that's 'cause you don't know about all the stuff that was done behind the walls and under the new slate floor. Like major electrical. Like lots of plumbing. Like rat control measures. (They can't get in anymore!) Like moving the gas line for the oven and cutting through a brick exterior to install a hood (the sound of which makes me insane). And you don't realize that we sold blood for weeks at a blood bank to pay for that damn SubZero. It might look like a fridge to you, but to us it is a huge monetary piece to the kitchen puzzle that we accomplished. We're crazy. We didn't really sell blood, it was a metaphor. Anyway, it's all put back together now and we have two banks of finished cabinets. We also have two "banks of cabinets" made out of plywood and 2 X 4s. This is the part that looks 45% not finished.

Here's Something From 2009 That I Found Amusing

So it's June and I'm in Palm Springs on my rest and recuperation visit. I'm having a quiet breakfast at Rick's, probably my favorite breakfast/lunch joint in all of Palm Springs, and reading the LA Times. Near my table there's a booth with four gay guys in it. (And yes I can tell they were gay guys, just one of my talents.) I'm not listening to them, or not trying to, I'm trying to read, but they are talking about real estate. One couple is giving the other the lay of the land. I'm trying to not listen as David and I own all the real estate in Palm Springs we'll ever need to so I don't need tips and pointers. But finally I overhear a very pissy gay voice with that certain tone that only certain gay men can perfect say this: ". . . and there's the Ruth Hardy Park area but it's all 70's stuff and very crack-house-y."

Why did this catch my ear? Guess. Go ahead, guess. David and I live in the Ruth Hardy Park area in a house build in 1949. Most of the houses on our street are small simple houses that were built in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Yes there is some housing stock around here from the 1970s, but not most of it. And crack-house-y ? ? ? Situations like this always remind me of Annie Hall, the scene wherein Woody Allen hears some people in line at the movies pontificating about something and he confronts them. I want walk over to the other 3 guys in the booth and say, "Hello. He doesn't know what he's talking about. Just so you'll know I have a 1949 house in the Ruth Hardy Park neighborhood and there are no crack houses in sight." (We do have a cab company in sight that drives David absolutely ape shit, but I wouldn't bring that up to these guys.)

Keep Those Cards And Letters And Emails Coming Please !

So NPR is it "Latch Me Sing"? That's what it sounds like. But is the "Me" a "Me" or a "Mi"? And is it three words, or two? Every morning as I listen to NPR on the way to the office I wonder about this. I wonder if I'm listening to "Latchme Sing" or Latch Missing" or Latchmi Sing" or "Latch Mi Sing" and so on and on. Of course I could go to NPR's web site and research this if I really cared. I guess I don't. Or is it that it's easier to just make a reference to it here, in **THE** letter (as I now refer to it) and rest assured that about nine of you smarty-pants out there will rush to send me know-it-all emails? Oh yes, I get emails. I get corrections, I get grammar lessons. I get emails from people who can't tell when I made a typo as opposed to a spelling error. I get emails. And, you know what? I love, I absolutely love each and every one of those emails.

Especially the simple thank you emails, the acknowledgement variety. Don't stop. Never stop.

Every time I get an email of any kind I forward it to David and say, "See? I have a fan base." This causes him to roll his eyes and sigh deeply. It also gives both of us a good laugh and after 24 years of dinners together we are always thankful when we can inject a good laugh into the meal.

It makes him crazy when you encourage me. We have a fairly stupid debate about this letter every year. Correction: HE has a fairly stupid debate with himself. I don't respond as I've heard it all before. He makes his suggestions, he has ideas, he lectures me about what I could do. He wants a letter like David and Paul's, very short, very small and with pictures. Color photos. I ask him, because I'm absolutely sure he has never investigated this, if he knows what a single page with one color photo on it costs to copy at Kinkos. I ask him to find out, then do so math: Number of pages in the letter, about 640 letters produced each year, times the cost per page. I ask him to look into that each year. He never does.

[Full Disclosure: I use cost as a excuse with David each year. However the truth is that I am not smart enough to figure out how to insert a photo into a word processing document. It's true, I don't know how to do this. On the other hand, I do know how to type. Typing is my strong suit.]

While I'm mentioning cards and letters and emails from the fan base, can I just remind everyone that THE letter is actually MY letter? Can you even guess how many people write me to say thing like this:

"I can't believe it was 27 pages long and you didn't even mention my _____."

or

"Are you telling me that my _____ couldn't fit into a 27 page letter?"

or

"What about when we _____ and you said it was letter worthy? What happened?"

or

"Why was she mentioned so many times and I didn't get mentioned at all?"

I have no defense. Then again, do I really need a defense? Really? Really??? All I can do is point out that usually I'm doing this in one sitting, or maybe three sittings or so, usually at one of the busiest times of the year. In addition to my job and the regular things needed to run our lives, there's all the extra holiday stuff. Add to that that I'm working on a deadline, and add in my annual advance worry (dread) about having to go to the bulk mail mailing center with this massive mailing. Then add in the capper: I'm doing this from memory at the advanced age of 54. Give me a break please I'm trying to remember the events of a year at a very old age! And this year I'm adding the lingering fog of chemotherapy into the mix. If I missed something, if I forgot that great time you and I had, cut me some slack.

When I get these cards and e-mails I try to not make excuses for myself. No. All I ever say when I write back is, "You should write your own 23 page letter. It sounds like you have some good material and I'd love to read it. I promise to read every word of it when I get it." And really, I'm

not being a smart-ass when I say this. I do read every word of every Christmas letter I receive. When I'm trying to be a smart-ass I add in the following, "Don't forget in your letter to tell everyone about the time I ran into Barry Manilow at the supermarket and was awestruck."

Words And Phrases I Don't Like And Would Prefer To Never Hear Again

webinar

power through it

graphic novel

Social Planning Methods That I Do Like

Does your household ever double book one night for two different social events? You know, basic over scheduling? One day, two events, usually at opposite ends of town? This certainly was not a problem for our household this past year since all social events were canceled. I guess if you're single this would be very hard to do (unless you are complete airhead, or totally unorganized, or both), but couples can do this with ease, even smart couples. We used to frequently. But then I came up with a system. Each January I go to Office Depot Max and buy a LARGE hanging wall calendar, the biggest one I can find. It hangs in our kitchen. The squares for each date are quite big and can easily hold 3 to 4 items stacked by general time of day. Meetings, doctor appointments, stuff like that can go in the "day" area of the squares but really it's all about the "night" area of the squares. Our "system" is that whoever schedules something for **US** to do first, that's what we do. If a member of the couple says, "Why, yes, we are free for dinner on Tuesday night" without first checking the master kitchen calendar, well then THAT member of the couple is the one making the "I screwed up and double booked us and now we have to cancel" phone call. He who schedules on the master kitchen calendar first is safe. He who does not check the master kitchen calendar first looks bad when canceling (often at the last minute).

Hey! Did I Ever Follow Up On The Headaches?

Boy this is getting random now. I gotta stop. I think I mentioned that I never ever get headaches. I love that about me. Getting a headache was the big tip off to me that something was wrong, seriously wrong with me. For me a headache is like a canary in a coal mine. Anyway . . . here's a funny thing that I wanted to be sure to mention and impress upon you that this is totally true and I am not exaggerating here: I was getting the headaches pretty much daily when I was first discovering the tumor. BUT after one, and I mean only one, radiation appointment the headaches went away and I have not had a headache since. The tumor was pressing against a nerve, or so my team of doctors theorized, as it got larger. I guess one bout of radiation was enough to shrink it back from that nerve. One treatment, only one, and I have not had a headache since. Really.

I Did Not Make Any New Year's Resolutions This Year

Why? Because I made a resolution when I was diagnosed back in February and I managed to keep it and never break it. Having done so I decided I was "off the hook" for more goal setting for 2010.

The resolution that made in February and kept was to be pleasant and graceful to everyone I met during my cancer treatments. I decided I was going to be the model patient. I was never going to bark at anyone, I was never going to be grumpy, I was never going to be difficult or cross. I figured this was going to be hard enough without making it worse on me and those around me. Model patient, that was my goal. I'd be honest and tell you if I failed at that, but really I don't think I did.

Goodbye To 2009

I hope to never have another year like that. I hope you never have a year like that as well. And I hope that David never again has to put up with what he put up with last year. Let me just say there is no one I'd rather be at death's door with than David. He was absolutely perfect the entire time. A great balance of concern and helpfulness without being cloying or excessively emotional. I cannot imagine having to go through last year without him. Also a shout out to Michael Stewart and Rebecca and Cheresse for all of their help and support on a daily basis. You guys all really helped me make it through this.

Greetings To 2010

I see myself gaining weight, eating and eating and eating, and continuing to hear NED when I go in for my check ups. I see the Seattle real estate market certainly doing better than it did in 2009. I see David selling houses and condos and I see my office thriving. And I see a social life again, the calendar in the kitchen filling up with things. I hope to see Palm Springs again. And I see our yard in full bloom with happy fish in the pond and hummingbirds swarming. But mainly I see food. I see me cooking. I see you eating what I cook. I see dinner parties. I see food.

And remember: No proof reading by me this year. So the 4 of you who do take a red pen to it and then mail it back to me each year will play an even more important role this year.

Please proof and edit and return - YOU know who YOU are !!!

We sincerely hope things are good for you and yours !

Goodbye for another year, and please keep in touch,



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[Both of those are cell phone numbers and get both texts and emails]