



2012

Friday December 7th 2012

Holiday Greetings!

To Our Family, Friends, Georgetown Neighbors, and Valued Clients:

To know me well is to know that I love television. And to know me well is to know that, unlike most people, I am not ashamed to admit that. I don't go on and on about film festivals and podcasts and the ballet. I have no use for Hulu; I'm not even the least bit curious about Hulu (tho' it did have some clever television commercials). Streaming, watching shows on my iPhone, trying to be satisfied with a clip on YouTube - it all makes me yawn. None of those things hold any interest for me. Just give me a good TV, a DVR, and a remote and I'm perfectly happy. I don't pretend that NPR is my sole source of news. There isn't a hoity-toity bone in my body around this topic. Prepare for a long and enthusiastic conversation (without a speck of embarrassment) if you ask me what I watch on television and why.

That being said, let me open this year's letter with one of my personal high points from my last year of obsessive television viewing. There was a short lived show called **Political Animals**. It was about politics. It starred Sigourney Weaver. I love politics and I love Sigourney Weaver. You know I was glued to this one.

Sigourney Weaver played a Secretary of State who was the ex-wife of a hound dog but much loved former President. Her character wanted to run for President against the President she was serving under. (Talk about thinly-veiled.) She had drama in her family with two sons, one a gay drug addict and the other about to marry a binge and purge gal, a mother-in-law who was a very wise but foul mouthed lush, and a journalist who wanted to write a trash article about her but came around to liking her the more time she spent following her.

I think it was the second episode when the following occurred:

The journalist (foil character) is invited on the Secretary of State's plane for some reason (it's a TV show, they make up reasons). They are sitting alone, together, having tea and continuing the ongoing interview while sorta taking jabs at each other over their contentious past. They are interrupted by one of the Secretary's assistants who excuses himself saying sorry but this is important as he hands the Secretary character a folded up piece of paper. He leaves.

In the show there's a bad national situation involving hostages in a bad middle eastern country. She unfolds the note, reads it, pauses, and then says, "They have found the journalists guilty and their execution is set for tomorrow."

There's a long silence. And then there's this exchange:

The Journalist: *How do you do it? Even people like me who have criticized you really do admire your resolve.*

The Secretary: *My usual answer is that I share the ethos with most Americans: If you work hard and give it everything you've got, tomorrow will be better than today.*

The Journalist: *And the truth?*

The Secretary: *Most of life is hell. It's filled with failure and loss. People disappoint you, dreams don't work out, hearts get broken, innocent journalists die. And the best moments of life, when everything comes together, are few and fleeting. But you'll never get to the next great moment if you don't keep going. So that's what I do: I keep going.*

And scene.

[Yes, that's the exact dialogue. I liked the scene enough to want to play it again and again to get the exact wording and punctuation. I love these DVRs with their back up 5 seconds, or whatever, feature.]

Now perhaps I just liked this scene due to Sigourney Weaver's delivery. But, looking back on the the past 5 years, and coming to know myself better, I really think it was the "So that's what I do: I keep going" statement.

"You'll never get to the next great moment if you don't keep going."

And here I am, going again with this letter. I'm starting it a bit earlier than usual this year. Today is the 7th. Last night was my office's annual Holiday Party. (I don't think we're supposed to call them "Christmas Parties" anymore.) It was odd to type the 7th as every time I hear or think "December 7th" I immediately think "Pearl Harbor." I'm neither a war nor history buff. I don't do this around other historic dates. I wasn't around for Pearl Harbor. So it makes no sense to me.

I thought of stopping and starting up tomorrow but I was around on December 8th when John Lennon was assassinated and that's no better. I was coming out of a lower Queen Anne restaurant directly across from Key Arena. Got into my car. **Hey Jude** was playing which was nice but not often heard on the radio due to the length of it. Then about 6 John Lennon songs followed it and even tho' there was no DJ saying what was happening, I knew this was odd. Then we found out.

If I had waited two more days to start on December 9th it would have been the birthdays of two friends of mine - Surrey Tribble in Palm Springs and Clemie Cyburt in, in, ah . . . you know I'm not sure where she is, Colorado or Michigan. Perhaps if I were on Facebook I'd know. But I'm not. But please notice I remember my friends birthdays without being reminded by an alert from Facebook. Facebook, shortcuts to true friendship.

So I'm starting today. A good day to sit and think and type because all year long there's never a day when I have more than two drinks. But last night I had four. And I didn't eat much while doing it. And I don't mean four beers. I mean real cocktails. I was standing most of the night. You know, standing, visiting, talking: working the room with a drink in your hand. It's a cocktail party, that's what you do. But for me last night you get to add in a hunk of nervous energy as I'm fully responsible for our office's Christmas party and it means a lot to me that it go well. I have to find the venue, figure out the catering, make sure the bar can hold up to the 74 agents who work for me, and bring the whole thing in under budget. It causes me no small amount of stress.

I spent yesterday morning culling my archive of holiday music (794 songs in a playlist on iTunes) down to 82 of the best. Then I went through non-holiday music and picked 50 songs that I thought would be great for a party. I ended up with a 132 song playlist that would play for just shy of 7 hours. The party was a 6:30 to 10:00 PM affair so that was plenty of music prepared and lovingly put on an iPod. Later, in the stressed state I was in as we left the house, I forgot the iPod in the **Drop Zone** by the back door. So David and I arrive early at the venue to arrange tables and set up and . . . oh f#&K, where's the iPod? David was a champ. In shitty holiday traffic he drove back to Georgetown (7 miles), got the iPod, and arrived back at the venue on Capitol Hill just before the first guest arrived. By then my stress level had peaked but once the music started I calmed down and set out to mingle. And have a drink. The party was possibly the best one we've had in my 16 years now of planning them. Or so I was told. (Sixteen years? I've been in management for 16 years?)

Here's how I know the party was great: At the end of the night as I was paying the bill at the bar, while the credit card was being run, the bartender said to me, "*You know I work a lot of these events this time of the year and you should know this is the nicest, happiest group of people. It's seldom like this. They were so polite and in such good spirits. What kind of business party is it?*" I told her we were the **Windermere Eastlake Office**. She again commented on how absolutely happy everyone seemed to see each other. Then she said you wouldn't believe some of the things I've seen at Christmas parties. I thanked her, signed for the bar tab, and shoo'd the last 9 of us out of there. I noticed the tip jar at her bar, a tall vase, was filled to the brim with money. I also remember it was empty when the night started. How cool is it that at a hosted office party my crew still tips? I love that about them along with just how interesting and fun they all are.

It was a fantastic party and my agents are a great group of people. Of course I pick them - I hire them, train them, and (rarely) fire them so I'm bound to like them. David left about 90 minutes before I did. I shut the place down, hailed a cab for Denise, an agent who lives in Kirkland, and then I caught a cab back to Georgetown. \$11. Plus my "I'm in a very happy place" tip - \$15 all told.

Today I got up too early (I had a hard night after the 4 drinks) and drove David to the airport. Which when you live in Georgetown is a breeze to do. He's on a flight to Atlanta now. Back when we were always healthy and thought we were wealthy (2003 to 2007), we traveled on Alaska Airlines often. It might have only been quick runs to Palm Springs, but they were frequent and they added up. So we were MVP with Alaska and got those little things like decent seats. One year we made it to MVP GOLD. Then 2008 hit and travel diminished with the economy. Then 2009 hit and travel stopped dead in it's tracks with laryngeal cancer.

We lost "our status," as David refers to it, in 2009. And what with my long recovery, and the economy vs travel costs, we never got it back. Until now. We don't have it yet but we think we'll have it back in 24 days. I am 4,871 miles away from MVP. But we have a long trip on Alaska coming for Christmas and I'm fairly sure I'll make it to MVP with that flight. But even with the Christmas flight, David was not going to make it. Since being MVP matters to him more than it does to me, I suggested he fly to Atlanta to see his sister Mary. Just for dinner, one night, and then fly back - it's an easy direct flight. That would push him over. He thought a short trip was extravagant; I thought it was practical. He did it although he's expanded this family visit to three nights as somehow that is less extravagant or easier to justify than "a mileage run." Ah, the times we live in.

The good news for me (besides not hearing him complain about being in the back of the plane near the toilets for another year) is that now I'm alone in our house for four days. I'm never alone and, again if you know me well, you know how I crave what I call "Alone Time."

Video Killed The Radio Star

I am not a Luddite. I love technology and all the new things rocking our world these days. I am not one who is opposed to technological change. Yeah, things might fall by the wayside sometimes, like Blockbuster Video, but thinking back on all my encounters with their slacker clerks perhaps they deserved it. And often what goes around comes around: Netflix, the business that killed the brick and mortar movie rental, is now being undone by streaming to iPhones and iPads. Now I'm pulling for **Redbox** (another Seattle based company) to outlast all of them.

And I'm hoping, still hoping, that books survive. I love holding a book, especially a hardbound book. Preferably a First Edition (I always check). I do have an iPad and I have bought several books on it BUT when it comes time to read, which for me is usually late at night, I always default to a book. I just don't want to sit in the Eames chair by our eight foot slider looking out on a 125 year old dogwood tree holding a device. Neither do I want to crawl into bed with a device. I did make myself read a whole book on my iPad this year. I didn't read it much at night though - I did most of that book on the go in odd places like lines and waiting rooms. The experience was fine, different, not horrible. But I've only done it once.

Anyway I'm off topic (not that you'd be able to tell). What I wanted to say is that even though I am perfectly willing to jettison the old for the new, sometimes there's a brief moment of sadness in the process. And sometimes it happens and you don't even know it. I look at men wearing watches and I just don't get it. Who needs a watch anymore? There are clocks everywhere, all devices have the time on them, and really who doesn't have a phone in their pocket (or hand) at all times? I have about ten watches yet I haven't worn a watch in well over a decade. I didn't make a decision to stop wearing them. One day I opened the drawer where all the watches were and I realized I was done with them.

[I could move on from here to men who wear ridiculously huge watches, like things a half inch or more thick and the size of the lid on a mayonnaise jar, but that would be off topic again. Best to not get me started.]

You might try to debate this with me (why would you do that?) but there's never a time I need a watch when I don't already have a phone in my hand or pocket.

Cars have clocks in the dashboards. I don't take my phone into movies or plays but I know what time it was when the movie or play started. And when I get back to my car, well there's a phone with the time on it. You might say wear them as jewelry, but men shouldn't be wearing jewelry in the first place. I have one agent (male) who longs to do this (adorn himself) and every time I see him try it I tell him to knock it off. One ring. That's all men are allowed.

Where Was I Going With This?

On Wednesday, June 13th of this year I had a realization that this year technology finally killed something I always really loved. (I never cared much about watches anyway.) This was something that left me sad for a moment or two as I tried to decide if I should fight it and try to save it or just let it go. I thought about this for less than a minute and realized I didn't have the energy to save it. So I mentally jettisoned it and haven't touched it since. Just like the ten wristwatches.

It was our social calendar.

David and I have been together for just shy of 28 years (February 12th). And for the last 26 of them we have kept a large hanging paper calendar on the wall in our kitchen. It is made by a company called **At A Glance** or at least that's what they print on calendars.

Office Max Depot always has them in various sizes for both wall and binder versions. I buy one every year about this time as I use the last year's to jog my memory and write this letter. I have 26 years worth of these calendars here in this house. The first 2 years we were together I kept on with my Daytimer-ish, carry around personal calendar and who knows what David did. Likely nothing. But once we started living together a joint calendar was needed and in came the large wall calendar.

So we missed the first two years of planning our coupledom on paper. I still have my binder type calendars from 1985 and 1986 and 1987 however. They contain notes of our first years together.

Sidebar

Truth be told, I actually have my personal calendars going back to when I started keeping a personal calendar in 1980. As part of my disorder I have kept 32 years worth of calendars. If you know me well you know I'm not kidding. If you ask me what I was doing on a random day or night in 1986 I could, in less than 3 minutes, walk downstairs and tell you. I'm like a poor man's google or a very lame idiot savant. The spiral bound calendars from 1980 to 1987 are the size, height and depth, of a hardbound book. They are on a bookshelf in our library. They take up the space of 3 average books, 6 to 7 inches only. They are so easy to keep, why throw them away? Ditto with the large wall calendars. We have always had a basement. I just get a large, long, spike type nail, nail it to the wall, and "stack hang" the calendars in order by year on the nail. Each nail holds about six calendars. It's just as easy as walking out to the recycle bin, actually it's closer.

There was a moment when we were moving out of the huge house in Matthew's Beach into a teeny-tiny apartment and a large storage locker. I was holding 25 calendars in my hand thinking, "Should I move these? We're downsizing. We're shaking it up. I should toss these." But then I thought maybe that's some chemo residue in brain talking. I didn't trust my thinking and how hard is it to toss them on the moving truck and think about this later. I'm glad I did.

Tom Martin is doubtlessly reading this and screaming "**Hoarder!**" But no. Saving these is not hoarding. I refer to them often. What year was I in **Dupont Circle**? They keep the Alzheimer's at bay. Or at they least trick me into thinking it's at bay. I'm sure Merritt will back me when I contend this doesn't qualify as hoarding.

Deja Vu

In 1981 I had a date with a guy who lived in a completely freaky and scary part of Capitol Hill. I remember feeling unsafe taking the bus there, walking a block from the bus stop to his place, and being there. Twenty years later, almost to the week, I was demolishing part of the crazy 3rd floor of **The Dubois**, a small apartment building we bought on Harvard. We had not started the remodel yet and the 3rd floor was a chopped up space being used as an artist's studio. All of a sudden it flashed on me that I had been in this space before. Keep in mind that years prior I sold this very building to David Wertheimer and had walked every part of it with him and I never had this feeling. And then, years later, I had the building listed for sale and walked every inch of it many times showing prospective buyers, again no feeling of having been there before. It was during these showings David and I decided we should buy the building from David Wertheimer. And we did.

We moved into it and started the remodel with **JAS Design Build**. Still, and quite surprisingly, it was months later, when I was alone there one quiet weekend doing demo and I started removing a Comcast cable line from the roof, that it hit me: I had been here before. This studio was Carl's bedroom. (Yes, that kind of a date.)

Does anyone remember when it came out that **Nancy Reagan**, when she was First Lady, had a small pistol? I clearly remembered a joke about Carl's wishing he had a gun like

Nancy's when the cable guy came over the roof unannounced one day laying cable line. Line I was now removing. But this space was completely different, nothing like I remembered it, so I was unsure and confused. I didn't believe the feeling because I'd spent so much time there already, why would I have not had the feeling sooner? Was I just having one of those *deja vu* moments? Or was this real? I kept working but it was vexing, the thoughts coming and going.

Then I remembered that all of my calendars from my single days were now in the basement of the building. So down I went. I didn't know what year it was, I just knew it was well before I met David. I was having a lot of dates in early 1980s so I started with 1980 and began flipping and scanning rapidly, page by page. And bingo, there, in March of 1981, was the exact address of the unit I was demolishing that day written in the margin of my calendar with Carl's name and phone number. And there was the calendar entry showing what evening our date was. See? It's not hoarding if they are useful. I think I'll keep them until I absolutely cannot.

Bring It Home

Good Lord. All of that meandered through my mind while trying to simply say, "The calendar is one big blank." Usually I sit down to write this letter, I put the big wall calendar on the floor next to me, I look down at a month, and I write. Flip the month, write some more. But we only used it retroactively for the first few months of the year and then we stopped. Retroactive calendar usage is when you write down what you did, what appointment you had, after they are over. I now do this about once a week but on my laptop.

January

It seems ages ago but remember the huge snow storm, snow and ice, that literally shut Seattle down for almost 4 days? I remember it because it followed a weekend we spent in Palm Springs. One of us, or both of us, are always in Palm Springs over Martin Luther King's birthday weekend. That's the weekend we found our house twelve years ago. We'd been going to Palm Springs over MLK weekend even prior to finding the house, I guess obviously or why else would we have been there to stumble upon it in the first place? Anyway we flew home on Tuesday the 17th and everything seemed normal but we woke up on Wednesday the 18th snowbound. I felt like a kid skipping school for a week . . . first we were away for 5 days and then we were snowed in for 4 more.

Is there anything better than being snowed into a house you just moved into? We had been in Flora and Fauna less than a month, we were not all unpacked and what was out of boxes was not organized. Heaven. Snowed in with things to put away. After you figure out strategically where they should go. HEAVEN. And there's an adorable little market called **The Carleton Market** that's 2 blocks from our house. They sell household basics and some food and things like milk and chocolate chips and oatmeal so you can make cookies when you are snowed in.

January was all about trips to **The Container Store** (the only reason I ever cross Lake Washington) and home organization. I spent the last week of January literally running back and forth, Georgetown to Bellevue (Georgetown's ramps to I-5 and I-90 actually make this kinda fun, and quick) buying various **Elfa** product parts to build out our one closet. I did it all by myself, I didn't over buy, I was super careful (thus the many trips) and I happened to hit their once a year **Elfa** sale with a hefty percent off all of it.

The only social thing in the whole month was having Greg and Larry over for dinner. The house is very small. The art is not. Plus the art was collected as our homes were getting bigger and bigger. Now we have about 1,700 square feet of living space. Greg is the master of hanging art so he and I spent the night figuring out where pieces could go and getting them there. When you see the "salon" effect of all the black and white pieces in

the staircase heading to the basement you should know Greg gets all the credit for that.

February

Again it was all about the house. We were moved in but many things were rushed or just not finished in a mad attempt to get us out of our apartment. I was trying to correct a lot of that. To this day there are things not finished. For instance the naked light bulbs dangling from the Romex wire poked out of the ceiling in each room is not meant to be a new trendy look. It's meant to keep us out of the dark until we can afford all of the track lighting we need to finish that part of the remodel. Ditto with the base moulding where the walls meet the hardwood floors. Just haven't gotten to it yet. But once you unpack and start using the space it's amazing what you can put up with and not see on a day to day basis.

Advice: Never move in until it's really done because if you do it may never be really done. Just because David and I are used to this style of living doesn't mean anyone else would be. Or should be. But we seem at home in living this way. Think back, we always have. The **JAS** finished townhome was the only place we've ever lived where it was complete the day we moved in. It really was.

We didn't go anywhere in February. We had Michael Stewart and our friend Julie over for dinner and then later that month I see Michael took Julie and us to The Ruins for dinner. And then, no slacker, Julie had a dinner party and among the guest were Michael Stewart and us (but I'm cheating here, this dinner was in March).

I don't watch ANY so called reality TV shows. I go beyond hating them to loathing them. Until **Top Chef Seattle** I have never watched all of one. I love food and I love cooking but I loath **Iron Chef** more than I love food and cooking. So I'm making a huge exception for **Top Chef Seattle** and obviously I'm doing it for Seattle. This popped into my mind as I was about to mention that in February David and I had dinner on the exact date of our anniversary, our 27th anniversary, at **Canlis**. I won my own personal reality competition when our wonderful new CPA (**Marci Flanery**) sent me a **Canlis** certificate after I won the "Most and Best Referrals in 2011" medal. If you need a wonderful CPA, one who is all over the whole RDP issue (that's lingo for Registered Domestic Partners) call me for her number. We have our 28th anniversary just around the corner and I'm trying to game the system.

Today Is December 8th, A Saturday

It's the next day now. I took a long break. Honestly today is almost over - it was a really long break. I should have jumped out of bed today and hit this letter hard again BUT David is in Atlanta. And I am alone. I am alone in our house with **Calvin** the almost dead cat and **Opal** the light of my life. Alone. I am so seldom alone. I can get up, make espresso while listening to **NPR** as loudly as needed to hear it, clean the kitchen, do the laundry, do the household shopping for the week, run errands, come home, put it all away and then go to the dog park and come home again and you know what? The kitchen is still clean. The house is exactly as I left it. The new **Sirius / XM** satellite radio that I just got is still on and still playing the channel they call **CHILL**. I'd say I "goofed off" all day today because I avoided any writing but there wasn't a moment today that I wasn't in motion. After espresso I opened up and set up my new satellite radio, got all of that figured out, and then few into action on 20 different fronts. But sometimes the action was slowed down by my stopping to reflect on nothing being out of place for a day.

Before I move on with discussing our year, a few random thoughts. I'm often annoyed with the world but this year seemed to produce an unusual amount or aggravation for me. You want to know what **the one thing that irritated me most in 2012** was?

And before you guess, think of all the possibilities here:

- sperm & eggs that instinctively know the difference between love making & rape
- yard signs
- people who would vote to *not be told* if food they were eating was genetically modified or contained genetically altered organisms
- jazz
- political ads, either side, any issue - I can read and make up my own mind
- anything to do with, or anyone interested in, molecular gastronomy
- people who use the phrase "from 30,000 feet" as in "I'm looking at this from 30,000 feet and what I think is we should blah blah blah blah"
- Homocon
- men who wear ridiculous watches
- anyone who would tie a dog carrier with a dog in it to the top of a car and drive
- Danny Devito and Rhea Perlman
- any news story that mentions Lance Armstrong
- Fareed Zakaria committing plagiarism
- Fareed Zakaria (he's annoying whether he cheats or not)
- at the end of the day, zero sum game, wheelhouse, power through (wheelhouse is not driving me crazy yet, I just put it on the list for Rebecca's sake)
- Ann Coulter
- people who can hear one sentence in a longer speech and not realize that the word "that" was likely supposed to be the word "those"
- people who are just too stupid to understand context
- baristas who call me "sir" as in "What about you sir, what would you like?"
- anyone who would gang up on a lone kid, chase him down, and cut his hair
- Frank Schubert
- anyone over the age of 23 who would describe themselves as "an undecided voter"
- people who sound just like the guy in the movie **Deliverance** who says, "This one's got a pretty mouth," when they see me walking my lovely dog Opal and they say: "**Nice dawg. You gonna hunt her?**"
- Groupon
- anything even remotely similar to Groupon

- hot tattoo'd guys at the dog park who say to me, "That's a beautiful dog sir."
- The Talk
- people who don't believe we're very happy living in Georgetown
- Mike Daisey (an annoying big fat ungrateful whiner even before he cheated)
- Really what is it with people cheating, lying, doping, making things up, falsifying, writing stories about their lives that are untrue and on and on and on? Are their memories so short that they can't they remember a couple of years ago when Oprah called that guy onto the carpet for falsifying his life story in a book that Oprah previously anointed and who is now nameless as all people remember about him is that is he let Oprah down? Cheating seems to seldom work out.

Hmmmm. That was just a quick list off the top of my head, I wasn't even trying that hard. Yet for me there was **one annoying thing, one really irritating thing** from 2012 that I really wish would go away. It was any combination of these words: medical, marijuana, alternative, medicinal, holistic, cannabis, edible, green business, canna, collective, cooperative, and herbal. My lunchtime reading at my favorite Pho' spot would have been so much nicer had all of those words never appeared in **The Weekly** or **The Stranger**. Those stupid ads. Excuse me for saying this, but what a bunch of horseshit. God those drove (drive) me crazy. Just having to page past them annoyed me. It's not that I care if people are high all the time or not, I couldn't care any less than I do, but the insincerity of the ads.

I voted to legalize marijuana, or the possession of it, or whatever, even tho' in 57 years I have never possessed it. I also vote to improve parks where they put soccer fields even tho' in 57 years I have never used a soccer field, never been to a soccer field, won't be going to a you get the idea.

Like my father I just want everyone to be happy. Go do your thing, I don't need to do your thing, stop asking me if I want to do your thing, I didn't even want to do your thing when I was going through cancer treatments, but you should have a right to do your thing if you want to. And I'll vote for your right. I did vote for your right. Just be sure, in return, to always support off leash dog parks even if you don't own a dog.

The more people who are off on soccer fields, or stoned at home, or stoned on soccer fields, the less people I have to be near and deal with when I'm waiting for a table at **Oddfellows** or browsing at **Elliot Bay Bookstore** or going to see **Skyfall** without my cell phone.

March

But wait. I need to jump back to February for a moment. Many of you know this, David used to be married. To a woman named Glynnis. She died in January. I don't remember who told David or how he found out but we googled her and found her obituary from the February 4th Dallas Morning News. She was 53. I never met her. This is letter-worthy only because after David found out he was reflecting on the fact that now seven people who were in his wedding party, or who were at his wedding, had died.

Around this same time in February something happened in the news relating to the rights for gay people to marry. I think this was when Referendum 74 passed from the initiative stage to the going to the ballot box stage. Yeah, that's it that's when gay marriage started hitting the news and the talk shows on an almost daily basis around here. Every time I'd mention it David would say, "*Well I don't know. Seven people from my wedding party have died now.*" David and I have yet to have one serious conversation about gay marriage. I tell people this when they bring it up and I can tell they don't believe me.

But it's true. We honestly haven't discussed it. So people ask me when I'm getting married and all I can say is no one has asked me to marry them yet. Of course we both voted for it because we want everyone to be happy and to do their own thing. And if that means standing in line for hours at midnight in downtown Seattle when it's cold and raining on a dark December night to get a marriage license on first day it's legal - well we want you to do that. Chereese and Rebecca did. We were in our heated dry house on the couch in front of the TV with our dog watching **Scandal** while living in sin. Or, as I always used to hear my dad say as I was growing up, "while shacked up."

No one says that anymore. "They're shacked up" or "She shacked up with some guy from the bar" or "He's shacked up over in Ballard with some chick he met at the roller derby." Perhaps I should try to bring that phrase back?

I just googled it. First hit, from the free online dictionary:

1. To sleep together or live in sexual intimacy without being married.

Okay, Now March

Well, March in a moment. First I want to address the two questions David and I are most often asked about. Neither of these questions have a thing to do with gays marrying. After last year's holiday letter questions around topic one skyrocketed. And questions around topic two are constantly on our FAQ list.

Topic One: Why Georgetown?

I used to drive up and down I-5 and I'd go past these two exits (Corson and Swift / Albro) and I'd wonder, "Where do those go?" Over a decade ago I sold a duplex to a guy I knew who is now dead. He was an early client of mine for several years, I sold him several different houses and helped him sell them when he was ready to move on. At first he had a very simple name. It was one of those two last names names. A very short first name which is most often a last name and then a very very short and common last name as a last name. He worked at the King County Health Department in AIDS prevention work. One day he calls me up and wants to sell the last place I helped him buy and he wants to buy a duplex. But his name was now a new name. He kept his first name but changed his last name to the name of a river that he was next to when he had some sort of epiphany about his life. Whatever. (I should have put "people who change their names" on the list of annoying things, especially changes in CrAZy ways, on the list.) So I found him a duplex on a street I'd never heard of called Carleton in Georgetown. I remember not having any idea where I was. I remember it was unfamiliar. I saw an Arby's and the lights were bright and we went in there and ordered soda and wrote the offer up. (Now there's a Starbucks in Georgetown for things like this.) Then we lost touch. That duplex is block away from our house now and I walk by it often.

Bizarre. That story has nothing to do with why Georgetown or those two exit ramps. Those are just my first memories of knowing about this area. We used to go to the airport a lot and on the way home I'd see that Corson Street exit sign and I knew how long and tedious the drive still was to Matthew's Beach and I'd think to myself if I lived there I'd be home now.

Now and then you'd read about cool businesses opening up in Georgetown. I'd hear people talk about it (but no one in our circles) and I'd wonder. Then I found myself up in Matthew's Beach with David (again) ready to move on. But where to? What would be different? What would not bore me to tears? I started floating the idea of exploring Georgetown to David. He'd have none - and I mean NONE - of it.

I've been a good student of the art of David. Over the years I've sold houses I really didn't want to sell, I sold the Harvard townhome when I really didn't want to, I was seduced by amazing architecture that David found in Matthew's Beach, I moved to a part of Seattle I never thought I would, I've signed on car title papers, all sorts of things I didn't want to do. He's clever in that way. Like water dripping on concrete (a much better example than water on a rock, concrete wears down so much faster). I have caved every time. So how much did I learn? Just enough.

First I started touring Georgetown alone and not telling him about it. Over dinner he might say, "Where were you this afternoon?" And I'd nonchalantly say, "Oh I was exploring shops in Georgetown." Matt Dillon opened **The Corson Building** to great reviews in all the press dining columns. I might leave the review open to that page on the kitchen table. I'd start touring real estate. And so on. It took over a year to get David to even come here with me. Finally we were in a tiny small loft apartment, we had sold our lot in Palm Springs, and we were in a minor way shopping for condos in downtown Seattle. Of course we looked at a few condos that had homeowner's dues that equalled our mortgage payment here. Over time the math worked out in my favor AND by then he was crazy in love with our new puppy. And doesn't every puppy deserve a big yard.

I told David I was perfectly happy to look at condos (and I was, that was fun) and that I didn't want to move *to just any house* in Georgetown. No. No I made it sound hard and unattainable. I told him I really only wanted a house on Flora. Mid-way on Flora, not too close to the shops and not too close to the industrial part. I told him it had to be flat. I wanted a flat square level lot with a sidewalk out front and it had to have a useable alley behind it. And I'd like a large yard, a sunny large yard. And he'd say, "Yeah. You sound like all of my buyers with your crazy specific wish list. If that house ever comes along I'll consider it."

Today we live in Georgetown on a large fairly square lot with a nice paved alley behind it and a wide, extremely nice, tree lined paved street, with parking on both sides of it, in front of it. The house is small. The lot is large. The street is name Flora. Our neighbors are astoundingly nice and interesting. They all have dogs. We honestly like all of them. Opal is thrilled with the yard. I can get to SeaTac in less than 10 minutes and it's an easy pleasant drive. And the house is just the right size. We are both very happy here.

Back when I was deathly ill during the cancer year people would ask me, "How are you?" and I'd say something simple like fine or I'm doing fine or I'm hanging in there, whatever. There'd be a pause and then they'd have the follow up question. It was always the same follow up question, "No, how are you really" Usually the follow up question had the words how and are emphasized in some way, "No really, **how ARE** you?" You get used to it. And people mean well. And you're so sick you sorta don't care.

David came home earlier this year and said to me, "How come when people ask me how we are liking Georgetown and I answer they sorta ask me again? I get the feeling they don't believe me." I told him I was familiar with this syndrome.

Topic Two: My Health.

In a nutshell I seem to be doing great. The tumor that was on my vocal chords in 2009 is long gone. The treatments are long over. I go into see a team of various doctors every six months and each time they tell me the cancer is gone, there's absolutely no sign it was ever there. The last time I went in for the battery of tests they said, when I was once again clear, you can start coming in once a year now. I gather this goes on for 5 years from 2009 - so 2014 perhaps? My oncologist seems to think that doing PET/CT SCANS might not even be necessary anymore. I might disagree with him next June, we'll see.

I can't believe I was ever 135 pounds. I have stacks of 32 inch waist shorts and pants and a few shirts that I can't imagine I ever wore. I have sailed past 34 inch waist and I'm sad to say I'm back at 36 inch waist things being comfortable. I'm up to near 180 pounds

(again sad to say) which is where I was when the tumor was found. These days I think more about going on a diet again, or at least watching what I eat again, than I ever do about having had cancer. It has been amazing to be free to eat whatever I want for 2 years (butter) without thinking about it.

So I'm fine again, really I am, with just two "problems" left over but now I'm just not thinking about them as problems anymore. Now I just think about them as that's they way things are, get used to it. One is my voice. It is what it is and I'm lucky to have a voice at all. Most days it works. Sometimes it just gives out. When I'm excited or when I talk fast, it gives out. It does not work over the phone when talking to phone tree machines instructing me to say why I'm calling.

And the other thing left that I just have to man-up and learn to work around is my ability to swallow. I cannot take an aspirin. I cannot swallow a capsule. Nyquil? Those are huge, thus never again. Pills will not go down. I feel like **Nurse Jackie** cutting capsules open to get the goods out. Food is 95% fine, some food (butter) is easier than other foods. And I have breathing problems. Like I can't do hard work or exercise without major breathing issues. I can get winded and need to gasp for air just walking up hill. But the hardest thing is to drink a glass of water. What's left of my throat, the wind pipe and the food pipe, don't always work in tandem. My mom used to say, "Did that go down the wrong way?" The answer, when it's water, is always yes. Then the painful coughing begins.

Twice a year I go into Swedish, in the real OR, and Dr Aye puts me under and dilates my throat. Dilation. We call it "stretching" which is just a series of rods, each one bigger than the last, being slid down my throat to break up the scar tissue (scabs?) that clogs my throat. I did this last on June 20th of this year. I do this next on December 19th. I hope to mail this letter to you on December 17th so, see? Just like before, I might be dead again by time you get this. You never know about those hospitals and those operating rooms and those anesthesiologists. It's a full day full of potential slip ups.

I never complain though. I think you can ask anyone, especially David, I never complain. I just put up with it. Stoically. I read two major papers daily and it's surprising to me how often people are dying of throat cancer. I don't know if I'm just hyper aware of this now or it it's on the upswing. Usually they say it was esophageal cancer (which is not what I had), sometimes they say laryngeal (which is). Either strikes close to home for me and I just thank my lucky stars. This year alone I have read obits for Richard Dawson (**Family Feud** for some, **Hogan's Heroes** for me), Christopher Hitchens (essays, amazing essays), Levon Helm (**The Band**) all of whom have died of throat cancer. And back to my lucky stars.

Of course another obituary I read this year was for Jonathan Frid. He was 87 when he died. in Hamilton, Ontario. He died on Friday April 13th. Friday the 13th, oh so what. Well if you remember who he was, then that date is somewhat ironic. Maybe. Or maybe it's ironic due to the way he died: "He died from complications of a fall." Don't now who he is? Here's a hint - he had a cameo appearance in a wretched Johnny Depp movie that I hoped would be better than it was when I went to see it but ended up being worse than you could possibly imagine: **Dark Shadows**.

There Is, However, Something Wrong With Me

But I'm not ready to write about it yet. I will get to it in this letter, but later as I find it totally embarrassing and don't quite know how to put it out there. But I will. It's always full disclosure with me.

March Came In Like A Lamb And Stayed That Way

So the master social calendar was still in use however only two things were marked on it in all of March. One was that we had a lovely dinner out with the owners of the Windermere

Eastlake Office where we work, Steve and April Kieburz, and then we all went to the ballet. April is more into the ballet than anyone I've ever known, and she's a major backer of the ballet, so our seats were perfect. It was a lovely night out and, for me, culture at a higher level than I'm accustomed to. Of course keep in mind that a novelist bringing wisdom about writing and character development to police cases on **Castle** counts as culture for me.

The other March event was a five day trip over President's Day Weekend to Palm Springs with Robin Updike and Fred Birchman. (Updike, no relation, they just have the same last name.) This was fun as we don't often fly down and back with people so the whole trip felt much more special than our usual quick runs down there and back. It was also remarkable as we got Fred on a plane, specifically an Alaska Airlines plane. Plus, here's where my memory might lapse without notes, I think it was Fred's first visit to the desert. The four of us ate, drank, toured the city, and parts of the desert valley. There was a trip to **Joshua Tree National Park**. The visitors center was warm and welcoming that weekend; the actual desert was cold and windy. I remember us all getting out of the car, running to various vistas, taking quick looks and then running back to the car as the wind pelted us with desert sand. However I also remember sitting out under the stars having smart cocktails and a lovely dinner that same weekend. That's something the four of us could never do in March in Seattle.

April May June July August

Huh? Five months at once? Yes. Why? It can be summed up in one word: **GARDENING**. Actually two words would be better: **LANDSCAPING and GARDENING**.

In my mind there's a difference. Landscaping is more major site work to me, more hardscape, more making a plan and laying it all out The major stuff. Like removing eleven trees. Like removing every rhododendron on your new property. Like digging a new trench in a new location for a new water line from the special "irrigation water meter" on your vacant lot so you can have the ever amazing **Ted Munro** install two freestanding (but very solid) frost proof hose bibs with super cool bright blue on off handles on the top. Like taking up sidewalks. Like actually digging up and cutting out the stumps of the large 11 trees and the many huge rhododendrons. Like removing cyclone fencing and the hideous poles that hold it up. Like installing an underground sprinkler system. Like designing a fence and installing it (well parts of it but all of the posts). Like clearing the way for a new two car concrete parking pad off the alley and getting it poured. Like planning the size of the deck and then "roughing it in" so you can work around it. (Roughing it in is Michael speak for no stairs and no railings at all - yet - on a deck quite far from the ground.) Like designing a 16' X 12' patio and having it made out of 79 old pavers found in the yard mixed with 156 new ones found at a local nursery losing its lease and having an everything must go sale for (I paid 50¢ a paver, do you know what a find that was?)

That list is **only part** of what I got done here this year. I am nowhere near finished. If you saw the yard now you'd not believe anything has been done. You have to have seen the yard when I started to appreciate where I'm at now. That's what I call landscaping.

Whereas when I say gardening I mean the smaller, easier, more enjoyable stuff. The stuff that people can see and comment upon. The planting, the pruning, the transplanting, the growing, the weeding and the harvesting of food. If landscaping is the hardware of your computer, the hard drive, then gardening is the software, the apps you work with daily.

Remember it was in the middle of June when I went to the **At A Glance** wall calendar and realized it was empty. And I mean EMPTY. Here's the deal . . . all I did all spring and all summer, in every free moment I had, in every free moment before dusk during the week after work, and sometimes very early with a coffee cup in my hand before going to work, and surely every moment of every weekend, all I did was work in our yard.

When I wasn't working in our yard **I was being in our yard**. Being in our yard was me just sitting and staring and thinking. There was a whole lot of thinking, usually with a tape rule in my hand, often two tape rules, a ruler and a sketch pad.

The Perfect Day

I'm up before 7:00 AM. David is already out of the house, gone to the gym, he leaves around 6:15 AM. I am a very sound sleeper; I never hear him go. I wake up alone (well not really, Opal is always beside me) and I pick up the work jeans and sweatshirt that I dropped on the floor when I came in from outside the night before. Within 5 minutes I'm ready to walk out the door. Opal and I grab the **Wall Street Journal** off the front porch as we do our morning walk to **All City Coffee**. It is an eleven minute walk to the heart of Georgetown. They allow dogs inside. (It's a mystery to me that this is allowed, a mystery that I don't question.) Opal sits by my table waiting for small treats from my pocket as I enjoy my quad cappuccino and a morning glory muffin. I read the paper. Since it is a Saturday the **Wall Street Journal** is especially great - they have great weekend stuff, reviews and food and travel articles - on Saturdays. This Saturday there's a long review of the new 2013 Ford Escape. I'm interested in this as I still own my 2005 Ford Escape, now with 93,000 miles on it.

Home by 8:00 AM. By 8:05 I'm in the yard opening up sheds, the garage, getting tools out, getting a staging area ready, setting out bottles of water. At 8:25 AM Jose arrives. Jose owns J & A Landscaping and he arrives with two other guys. One is named Mike. The other guy's name I still haven't caught after days of working with him. By 8:30 the four of us are ready to rock and roll. We work all day. They do way more work that I do. I do a great deal of directing and pointing and lighter work. I'm sure I'd have a breathing fit if I tried to do half of what they do. I got Jose's name from Lance. Best referral ever. Of course I turned Lance onto **Geoff Murphy**. Probably a better referral ever due to the higher skills Geoff brings to the table.

So the four of us work until just after noon. They jump in one of their trucks and head off for lunch. I go up to a great Pho' shop I found in a busy and weird section of the not so pretty part of Georgetown. By 1:30 PM we're all back and working again. We are tackling the major projects on the landscaping list above.

At about 4:00 PM we are all beat. I go up to Jose and ask him, "How much?" I know the hourly rate for the 3 guys but sometimes one of them will run out for a load of gravel or wood chips or soil. Sometimes there are dump fees. Sometimes Jose brings parts - the day we installed the irrigation system for instance. I then jump in my truck and head up to the B of A in Georgetown, I hit the ATM, and thankfully I have a high daily limit as some days it's quite expensive. (I jump in my Escape, it's confusing, I took everything out of the back of it and lined it with plywood. I treat it like a truck. David hates this.) I then hit the Georgetown Starbucks for iced espresso iced lemon pound cake and I head back the Flora Farm. I pay Jose in cash. By time I'm back they have cleaned up and put away all of my tools and theirs. They leave.

I am alone. I sit in a chair and survey what we got done while enjoying my iced espresso and lemon pound cake. I throw Opal's ball. After about 30 minutes I get a third wind for the day and I start pruning a tree and soon I'm knee deep in wisteria and other plants that need tending.

Literally the next thing I know it's 6:00 PM. How do I know this? Because David, who is home by now from a day of showing houses to clients, is somewhat exasperated with me for not coming in sooner. He knows by time I get showered and cleaned up it will be past seven and so we'll be late for whatever is next . . . dinner being his primary concern.

That really was a day I had this year. And it really was perfect. It was Saturday June 2nd. I know this because it was such a perfect day I wrote it down. It was followed by Sunday

June 3rd when the same sort of day played out again only this time without Jose and crew. On Sunday David and I always make espresso and read the **New York Times** first, at home. Then David leaves for the gym (this is his idea of shaking it up - he goes to the gym slightly later.) And as soon as he's out the door, I'm out the door as well. The back door.

Forty Acres On Flora And I'm The Mule

I'm in my 8,000 square foot urban playground. (We have two lots, each 40' X 100', next to each other. We could build a house on the vacant lot. We could develop and try to make money. But then where would I put a Koi pond in a year or two? Oh yes, I'm working in that direction, it's in my master sketch. Since the house is so small its footprint thankfully takes up a small part of the 8,000 square feet. I putter around all day. Neighbors are everywhere and there's lots of talking over the fence. Sometimes there's a lot of dogs being put in our yard (since there's nothing there yet) for what I call "**The Official Off Leash Georgetown Dog Park.**" I'm in the yard all day again. The day ends the same way with David hollering out the back door, "Are you ever going to stop?" So I do. Then, since it's Sunday night, we make nachos and margaritas and watch **60 Minutes** followed by **Dexter** followed by **The Good Wife**. The perfect day. Again. And again. And again.

This is what I did every weekend this spring, summer and fall. Mixed in there I tried to grow food. This was the first time I ever tried to grow food. I had 10 tomato plants, 4 pepper plants, 3 cucumber plants, 5 raspberry bushes, a patch of carrots, a patch of cantaloupes, and a double sized patch of radishes. And, I don't know what I was thinking, a patch of corn. Some of this worked. Most of this did not work. I'm new to this. But it was great fun for me. Especially in the fall when David and I were eating amazing tomatoes for a full month and I got to stop buying a bunch of radishes every other day. I can't wait to try this again next year. My layout will be much better and next year I'm going to have those raised farm feeders - those metal feeding troughs - as raised beds. (All of this bending . . . I'm 57, less bending would be nice.) Oh, and next year I'm going to have an underground professional irrigation system . . . pop up sprinklers, the whole bit. It is 90% done - all of the hard work is done - the pipes are in the ground and are filled with water right now.

Okay There Was One Weekend When I Wasn't Farming

In the middle of May we took a weekend off and drove to Portland. So did Robin and Fred. And so did Greg Kucera and Larry Yocom. The six of us met up in Portland for a weekend. There were two great meals and the main reason we went: **Candide**. We went to Portland to see the **Portland Opera's** production of **Candide**. Again, we got Fred to do this. I am sure that we are the last people who will ever get Fred to the opera again. I am no fan of watching opera (I will listen to it at home if I can do other things while it plays) and I worked to convince Fred that this was more **Candide**, more musical comedy than it was opera. I was very wrong. I was in pain watching this production. And then I'd look down the row at Fred and I'd feel even worse. Did I mention that we had some nice meals? I also think Fred was conned into this weekend by the promise of not one (Palm Springs) but two solid mentions in this letter. During both of our 2012 weekends together we'd do something, or he'd make a good joke, and then he'd ask, "Is this letter worthy?"

Stephen Sondheim's Follies

It's one of our top ten favorite Broadway shows. But we didn't get to travel to Broadway to see it. But we read that the Broadway show was packing up and moving to LA. It was going to be in LA during the same time that we make our annual trip to Palm Springs with Cherese and Rebecca. So on May 26th we borrowed the rental car the four of us had and drove into LA for a day. The girls got to have a day alone by the pool and David and I got to have a nice day in LA. We had lunch. Then we went to see **Follies** - it was on Broadway to great reviews and travelled - intact - to the Ahmanson Theatre.

There was only one cast change and, for me, it was a good one. I won't say her name, but on Broadway the lead female role was played by a woman whose voice greatly annoys me. In LA she was replaced by a woman named Victoria Clark who was wonderful. The woman who plays the nasty stuck-up mother-in-law on **The Good Wife**, the TV show, was also in the cast - **Mary Beth Peil** is her name. It was a wonderful production. We were so glad we bought tickets and planned this so far in advance.

Afterwards we met up with **Tom Martin** for dinner a few blocks away. We seldom see or hear from Tom these days so it was great to just have a few hours to sit and catch up. When the night was over David and I drove "home" to Palm Springs to finish our week with the girls.

In June I met my health insurance deductible for the year. David worked on his a wee bit - he had a colonoscopy - but I blew mine out. I had a PET CT SCAN on June 15th followed up by a day in the hospital for a throat stretching on June 20th. Between those two events and the attendant doctors appointments and follow-ups that go with them, I hit my \$\$\$\$ deductible.

The last weekend in June I flew to Palm Springs to flush the toilets and run the sinks and showers. It gets so hot there in the summer that the water in your p-traps dries up and the water in your toilet bowls evaporate. What's a homeowner to do? So I went, alone, to check on things. One morning, while flushing the toilets, I happened to have the TV on. This was just chance that at this exact moment while down there I had it on. And what I saw was so sad. I officially stopped watching **The Today Show** on Thursday June 28th, the day **Ann Curry** said her on air farewell after being fired by the network. I was a big fan. For years. Particularly during the year when I was battling treatment and was often sick in the morning before work. I was kitchen table bound; they were my morning. I used to buy into their "family" schtick. The way she was let go was just pathetic. What ever happened to loyalty? I used to always watch **The Today Show**. I used to Tivo it.

No more. But I missed having a morning family to have coffee with. So I bought a small FM radio called **The Songbook** by **Tivoli Audio** from **Peter Miller Books** on First Avenue. I carry it around the house with me in the morning, from my desk to the bathroom to the espresso machine, to the closet listening to **NPR** on **KUOW**. If I ever wake up and turn it on and hear a sobbing **Nina Totenberg** being forced off the air I just don't know what I will do. (And no, I'm not comparing Nina Totenberg to Ann Curry. I'm comparing NBC's loyalty to NPR's loyalty. Please.)

The only other thing that happened this summer was also gardening related but it didn't involve me working in our yard from morning to night. On Sunday July 8th - it's always the second Sunday in July - the many cool people who live in Georgetown hold what is called **The Georgetown Garden Walk**. The community throws this fun event every summer. I was not on the garden walk this year (but it is a goal) so I decided to throw a breakfast party.

First I went through my database and looked for all the people who I know who I know like gardening. If I knew you liked landscaping, gardening, looking at gardens, birds, chickens, bees, odd yard art, and a lot of walking then I sent you an email invitation to my Garden Walk Breakfast. The walk starts at 10:00 AM. I got up at 6:00 and got ready. I once had an egg dish called a strada at Michael Stewart's house and I always remembered it. I liked everything about it, including how Michael made and served it. So I emailed him for the recipe. (Michael was at our house in Palm Springs this week so he missed both the Garden Walk and my version of his strada.) I prepared it the night before and had it ready to pop in the oven. I ran out and got pastries from one of the three bakeries in Georgetown. (I don't remember which one I went to - we have no grocery store down here but we do have the main baking locations for **Macrina Bakery**, **Essential Baking Company** and the **Alki Bakery**.) (Don't let that sentence suggest I'm saying they are all equal. They are not.) I had boxes of coffee ordered and ready to pick up at Starbucks.

By 8:00 AM when the first guest arrived, I had a full light breakfast set up and ready to serve. There was champagne and orange juice also tho' I don't think one of those will help you make it through the entire walk. I think about 25 people showed up. At 10:00 AM we headed out with our maps of all the houses with open gardens. Let the day of walking begin. It was slow going at first (party guests slowed me down, they walk slowly, they get distracted easily, etc.) By noon most of my guests had drifted off and I could really start to focus on the map and what parts of the neighborhood I had not yet walked.

By 1:00 it was just me and David and we could really move through them. This was our first summer as residents of Georgetown and this was a great way to see our new neighborhood. We met many neighbors. There were 38 gardens open for viewing that day; I made it to 34 of them. At the end I was alone - even David pooped out on me as the afternoon wore on.

Today Is December 12th, A Wednesday

At noon today I asked Edgar, my newest staff member, to prepare to send out an email to the 74 agents who work in my office. I told him to get it ready to send and to send it at 12:12 PM on 12-12-12. I think my staff thinks I'm kooky, but in a good way.

Later I was at my desk and the group email popped up in my inbox saying, "Michael wanted you to know it is 12:12 PM on 12-12-12." I amuse myself if nothing else. And since there is no 13th month it will be like 100 years before this sequence, or one like it, would be possible again. I think. I should really check with Patrick Perkins before making statements about numbers.

Yeah, it's a few days later. I took a long break for work. I just opened this file back up and lord it was a mess. So I fixed it. I just paginated this letter. It looks so much nicer now. I wish there were more reasons to use the word "paginate" in my day-to-day life but I can't think of any.

Stupid Shit Is Making Me Cry

Something is wrong with me. I have started crying unexpectedly and more often than you'd ever imagine these days. I haven't told anyone this. Not even David. He'll find out about it if he reads this letter.

(Each year David complains that I ask him to sign this letter even tho' he hasn't read it. I think he's trying to suggest that he has, or should have, editing rights or veto power over what I write.)

I don't really know a better way of describing this problem, if you can call it that, than the heading above: Stupid Shit Is Making Me Cry. I haven't told anyone because I find it fairly embarrassing. I'm embarrassed and no one even knows about this problem. I should probably start by defining "cry." Remember the wonderful **Saturday Night Live** skit called **Coffee Talk**? Remember how Linda Richman (Mike Meyers) would start to get emotional about something and then dismiss everyone saying, "Talk amongst yourselves" as she composed herself again? She was verklempt. On the verge of tears. Floodgates about to burst. Choked with emotion.

I feel exactly that way too frequently. That's the problem: I get verklempt. Often. I am often getting overcome with emotion to the point that I have to stop and collect myself or I will start to cry. Mostly this happens when I'm alone and I hear or see something, TV or radio. It could happen while reading the paper. It could be a touching happy story; it could be a touching sad story.

Again, I take notes.

I got used to taking notes about myself when I was ill so I could have accurate things to report to my many doctors. So the first few times this happened I just blew it off. After it was clear this was a pattern with me now, I started taking notes.

Here are some schmaltzy yet true recent examples ripe with maudlin sentimentality:

Katie Couric has a typical canned variety of a daytime talk show. I recorded the first few to be sure there was nothing new under the sun with talk shows (there isn't). One of the ones I taped had a dad on with his young son. The dad had made a video of his son's toy train, named Stanley, hooked to a balloon. They showed the video, I started to well up. They then interviewed the dad and it got worse.

There's a car commercial on TV. A young guy opens the door and a beautiful chocolate lab puppy sorta falls out. Next shot guy has a girlfriend and the puppy is a dog now in the back seat. Next show the dog is in the rear of the car and a baby is in the back seat. I don't care about the car. It is the shots of the dog.

There's a woman in Madison Park who is 85 and has two dogs about 7 years old each. I am asked to walk through the house to render an opinion. Both dogs are sweet and really respond to any attention from me like they never get any attention. A week later I hear the woman's daughter has put the woman in a home where dogs are not allowed. She doesn't like dogs so leaves the dogs in the house, now vacant, and comes over to feed them and let them out once a day. Just hearing about this behavior makes me start to see this from the dog's point of view and I start to cry.

David and I go to a 20th Anniversary Party for JAS Design Build. Fred Birchman (ah, who knew? A surprise 3rd mention in one letter!) makes a video about JAS Design Build and the people who work there. While watching it I am choking back tears. They get to the parts with Joe and Kim being interviewed and I'm really fighting it. I am in a room with over 100 people who don't know me. See how this can be embarrassing?

It can be really stupid shit: Watching the gay couple get reunited on **Glee**. Does it get more schmaltzy than this? What is it about Glee that often hits me this way?

It can be music: Alone in Palm Springs sitting on the couch listening to Bruce Springsteen's live version of **Jersey Girl**. Worth noting this can happen with several other songs by Springsteen - almost any one wherein he mentions cars, his dad, or wanting to do better.

It can be listening to Bette Midler's version of **I Shall Be Released**.

Hearing the many interviews with gay couples during the Referendum 74 campaign.

Now that I think of it, there's a certain kind of song that always pushes this button - many are songs by Melissa Etheridge, especially **An Inconvenient Truth**.

There was a video of two guys who had a lion cub, raised it, released it, and years later found it again in the wild and the lion seemingly recognized them. If there is an animal it in I'm gone, especially one reunited with its owner, I'm done for.

Oh - TV commercials wherein Sarah McLachlan is raising money for the Humane Society.

TV news segments with people being interviewed who have lost their homes to hurricanes or floods. If they have lost a pet, or if the news shows a rescued pet also.

Listening to **Morning Becomes Eclectic** talk about and play the many many songs of Hall David on the morning of his death. I was in Palm Springs, alone, and with each song I got more and more and more emotional.

I don't go to weddings often. But it happened at both of the last two weddings I've been to. At one, before the wedding started, a **Van Morrison** song called **Somebody Like You** was playing as the bride and groom came into the room. I got choked up the moment I heard the first few chords. And know what? I still do every time I play this song. At the other, Gregg and Elisa's, the vows they wrote were so cute and sweet it got me.

I could go on. Really, I could. This is a several times a week event for me now and I never know what is going to set me off. This is why I don't see movies a great many movies. Like **Schindler's List**; I'm still trying to recover from **Sophie's Choice**.

I have no idea why this is happening. It never used to happen. I remember it happening the night David and I had our 20th anniversary party at Canlis. It was before anyone got there and I walked into the room. We had hired a company to set the tables and set up the room and I was just blown away by it all. That was once however and it was 8 years ago.

I am concerned that this has really kicked into full gear after I got past the worst of the cancer recovery. I sure as hell hope that that experience hasn't done this to me. I don't know why it would have. But here I am. Everyone knows me as gruff, aloof, sarcastic, (Penny once called me scathing - ouch!), biting, witty, whatever term they like. But I can assure you that "softie" was never on anyone's list. Oddly there are many things that don't bring out the tears in me. The death of people, even the ones I know (so far), babies, children, the things other people find so touching about babies and children, all of that rah rah stuff during the Olympics, Calvin's pending death (he's 21 and not in very good shape), many things don't make me verklempt. But the ones that do, watch out.

I'm not sure what to do about this. After all I've been through I sorta don't really care other than the embarrassing part of it. And possibly getting a reputation as a softie. But I don't care that much so I'm just gonna come out of the closet about it and then watch as it plays itself out. I'll let it run its course and monitor the situation. The next big test is a movie called **Any Day Now** that is coming out soon. First of all the title of the movie is one of the main lyrics of **I Shall Be Released**. (See above.) **The New York Times** makes it sound like a complete tear jerker. And article in the **Wall Street Journal** said that **Alan Cumming's** version on **I Shall Be Released** in the movie is heart wrenching. David read the review today and said, "You'll never go see this." But he doesn't know about the new me yet. It seems as if I'm a kinder, gentler Michael whether I want to be or not.

A Weekend In The Country

We spent the third weekend in July on Lopez Island. Our good friends Rob and Marci (Rob Thesman being *our former CPA* and Marci Flanery *being our new CPA*) have built a house on Lopez Island and were having their housewarming party. We got a save the date card months in advance - very helpful - so we called Joe and Kim to see if we could worm our way into a weekend with them at their place on Lopez Island. That way we wouldn't have to arrive for the party on the day of the party. It seems that for many of our friends Lopez is the place to end up. So we made a full two night weekend of it - went up early on Friday, parked our car and didn't try to take it on the ferry, Joe picked us up on Lopez and we went to a nice lunch and then on to their place. Can I say "magical" here? It was a wonderful weekend. Mainly because of the entertaining - which up there is drinking and cooking and somehow there's always 17 people at the table yet they pull this off as if it were dinner at home for 3. There was a deep fryer. It had hot oil in it. I became fascinated with whole sardines and something Kim was doing that I helped with but forgot the name of. Opal was an awful guest. She pick one of our host's 3 children to bark at and try to bite. She has issues with kids. Not babies, not adults, not teenagers. Kids. I don't know what to do about it other than keep her away from kids. You'd think staying a Kim and Joe's is a cheep weekend but no. Kim turned me on to a food magazine called **Saveur**. I had to have a subscription. From there she was showing me a heartwarming cookbook and telling tales about the two women on the East Coast who have a company called **Canal House Cooking** and wrote the book. Within a week of being home I had subscribed to **Saveur** and had

gone online and purchased every volume (seven of them I think) of **Canal House Cooking** that existed. Then I set up a subscription for those.

We were glad to be able to borrow "the island truck" from Joe and drive ourselves to Rob and Marci's party. It enabled us to calmly get there when it started, stay as long as we like, and not crash our boat into shore. David and Paul, our former house partners on Guemes Island who were also invited to the housewarming party, decided to get in a little boat they have and motor over to Lopez from Guemes. I don't know what happened exactly. Rocks, shallow water, a propeller, something. They hit ground directly in front of a boat repair shop. Rob and Marci's house is easy walking distance so they dropped off the boat and walked to the party. Nice party, great food spread (huge food spread), all from a local Lopez business. Stunning house, finish work like you wouldn't believe and a stove it would take me 20 years to learn how to use.

Five Minutes Here, Five Minutes There - A Dog You Love Is A Time Suck

So here's the deal: I am completely crazy in love with our dog Opal. I am obsessed with our dog Opal. I don't like being away from our dog Opal. I am constantly stopping whatever I am doing and getting down on the floor with her and telling her how much I love her, what a good dog she is, asking her what I would do without her, petting her, rubbing her belly, wiping goop out of her eyes, fussing over her coat, asking her where her toy is, and so on. I can barely walk by her without stopping. I seldom - almost never - leave the house when she doesn't come with me. If I do leave the house without her, even if David is here, she runs around in a panic looking for me. David tells me so. Dogs are not allowed in my office but she comes with me to work every day and sleeps in the Escape. She'd be sleeping on her dog bed alone if she stayed home. This way she just sleeps on her dog bed alone in the Escape. But I use my car all day long. I'm touring, seeing houses, running errands, going to lunch or coffee, and she gets to NOT BE ALONE all of those times. She'd be alone more and longer if I left her behind. And many days I drop her at the **Downtown Dog Lounge** on Capitol Hill when I'm having lunch or running an errand. It depends on the kind of day I have and how many meetings or classes are in my day. I buy 5 hour blocks at the **DDL 20** at a time. It's so easy. It's near my post office box. And it's near two great Pho' providers (my lunch of choice about 3 days a week).

David is definitely equally in love with this dog. David is the dog park guy. Every day he tries to take her, usually around 4 to 5 in the afternoon, but earlier now that it's dark at 4 to 5, to the park. Opal runs, she is amazing with retrieving those orange Chuck-It balls, and she swims in the lake repeatedly to get those balls if you chuck them out there.

My desire to be with Opal round the clock led me to a road trip to Palm Springs for Labor Day. I stayed until the day after David's 56th birthday. At 5:00 AM on Wednesday September 29th Opal and I pulled outta here. I have many dog parks along I-5 marked in my Garmen. We drove, listened to music, stayed in cheap motels (the kind that leaves the light on for you), we hit the dog parks. Arrived at our house there on Friday the 31st at 4:30 PM with 1,301 miles logged. I watched most of the Democratic convention at night in my motels.

When I got there I taught Opal to not be afraid of the swimming pool. It's not like a lake and she did not like it. At first. But those orange Chuck-It balls swayed her. By the time we left to drive home she would fly into that pool to get one. I have photos.

On the way home I knew I was going to roll over to 89,000 miles. I love watching those numbers on the odometer roll over. Though there is no rolling anymore, not with LED light. But I knew the day it would happen and I kept watching until I saw the exact moment when it turned. Cheap thrills, I'm like that. The total trip, round trip, was 2,599 miles. I took stuff down in the Escape. I brought other stuff back. Did I mention that I took the rear seats out of the Escape and threw them away? (See Tom? I am not a hoarder !!!)

I cut out the seat belts, threw them away.. Tossed the headrests too. Tore out the carpeting. Lined the back of the vehicle with OSB. It's a truck now. I was at the point where I needed to make a decision. I own it outright. It's coming up on 8 years old. Do I trade it in? Try to keep it nice in case I do? I want a truck. Should I sell it and buy a truck? Or do I make this my own? I opted to make it my own. I never plan on selling this car. It's now up to 93,000 miles plus and I'm planning on driving it until even KUOW won't pick it up for free. It's like a covered truck - you don't get wet. Opal is at home in it.

TRICK OR TREAT

The day before Halloween I found myself at home alone carving a face into a 28 pound pumpkin, filling the inside base with raw Quaker Oats, and evenly arranging 5 candles in a most stable way on the dried oat base. I know our pumpkin was 28 pounds as I saw weight the night before when I purchased it at the PCC. Minutes after my test lighting of the 5 candles I was separating a paualtry amount of seeds from the goop inside the pumpkin and pulling up roasted pumpkin seed recipes on the internet.

While doing both I kept reflecting on how I traditionally don't do holidays at all (except for the one true holiday, Thanksgiving), I don't dress up, and how I hate Halloween and won't participate. I also looked at the perhaps cup of pumpkin seeds and compared this barely full cup of seeds to the time I was spending with my hands in orange goop. Then I thought of how cheaply I could buy a cup of pumpkin seeds at any store. Still, here I was participating. Yes, something is wrong with me. I am still the person who will mock this sort of thing, yet here I am doing this sort of thing. I used to mock growing vegetables. What a waste of time I'd say, the have those at QFC. Now I spend my time planning a garden.

On Halloween day I was buying bags of quality candy. Candy that, post cancer, I can't really swallow or enjoy anymore. I only bought 4 bag of candy figuring no one will be trick or treating in Georgetown. Boy was that a mistake. It was busier than when we lived on 17th on Capitol Hill. Halloween night **Patrick and Irene** came over for dinner. We ate the pumpkin seeds with cheese and pate during the pre-dinner cocktails and we passed out candy during dinner. We completely ran out of candy before dessert.

Today Is December 14th, A Friday

I'm so close to the end of this letter - I can feel it. What I really can feel is having no obligations tomorrow and Sunday. So I would have liked nothing more today than to get up, make my cappuccino, and sit at the kitchen table and write until I was done. But the news on the TV near the kitchen table was nothing but bad. I needed to get out of the house, breathe some fresh air, and think about something else. Like my job. So I went into my office. There's an interior remodel going on there, lots of stuff happening there, some changes for 2013 that are all good for me.

So I'm at my desk working, the front desk pages me and says "Kim Clements is in the lobby to see you." Huh? Kim has never been to my office before. I go out and she's got a gift wrapped in bright red paper. She comes back to my office and says I must open it and it's so cool: It's the latest book by the two women behind **Canal House Cooking**. They were in town for a book signing. And there was a dinner. And Kim got to go to the dinner. She stayed for quite awhile entertaining me with stories about Christopher and Melissa, who else was at the dinner, and some great dish she learned. We talked about a shop in Manhattan that is run by the sister of one of these women. It's called **Prune** and guess what? I'm gonna go there within the next ten days. More purpose for New York. I open my new book, about the size of a slightly large bible, hardbound and covered in a bright red cloth and a joy to hold (let's compare that to a digital book on a device) to find that Kim got the two women (by the way, Christopher is a woman) to inscribe the book to David and Michael. I can barely finish this letter now as all I want to do is read my new cookbook. My "free" weekend is filling up already.

It's Saturday The 15th Now And This Is Cutting Into My Free Weekend

Okay I'm not done yet even with the all-nighter I almost pulled last night. But today's the day.

When I Was There I Had No Right To Work

My Dad's 87th birthday was the 9th of October and my 57th was the 11th. So I flew back to Michigan. Obviously I had no right to work there when I was there. But if I went there today I would have a right to work. Isn't that great?

It was fall. I was there a full 7 days and in those 7 days I put 987 miles on my rental car. I did this just visiting family and friends. Every one you want to see, every thing you want to do, is 48 miles from wherever you are. One day I got up and drove from my hotel into the very heart of downtown Detroit to go to an espresso shop. It was 52 miles. The espresso shop was something I found on the internet. There's a lot of cool stuff going on in Detroit. I follow it on blogs like **Curbed Detroit**. They are building a **Whole Foods** at the corner of John R and Mack. I explored the heart of Detroit. I went to an area where there were about 20 Mexican restaurants and picked one for lunch. It was a fun day for me.

I spent a day babysitting with Lisa. She babysit's her granddaughter two days a week. I offered to come and sit and visit all day - we talk a lot. We put the baby in a stroller and walked to lunch - this time on the edge of Detroit where her son lives - at a great diner. There is plenty of stuff in Detroit to like. Lisa lives in a city called Ypsilanti, they have a choir, Lisa's in the choir, and I took my parents and my aunt to their performance on a Sunday afternoon.

I spent a day with my sister Lynn 40 miles north of where I was staying, we went to a great lunch spot called **The French Laundry**. This cracked me up - if you are a foodie you'll get the joke. I spent a day with my cousin Marsha 20 miles in a different direction. I spent a night with my cousin Susan in Ann Arbor. I saw my parents several times and my Aunt Geraldine several times as well. Aunt Geraldine took the whole family out to a very nice dinner on my birthday, including my two nephews, I think we were a table of ten that night. It was probably my best trip back to Michigan of all the ones I have made over the years.

Hmmmm. I think that's it. That was the year.

Once I was back in Seattle all roads lead to two things: Thanksgiving Dinner and this letter. David and I hosted Thanksgiving here on Flora. We cooked. Guests brought things. Our guests were Greg and Larry and our friends Tim Allen and Michael Stewart, so a nice simple dinner for six. Our kitchen worked just fine (this was the first Thanksgiving test) and our dining room (a former living room) held us all comfortably.

I say all roads in the fall lead to this letter BUT this year there's a wonderful thing they also lead to. Michael Stewart long ago organized a trip to **New York** for 5 days over Christmas for 6 people. Or 4. He organized for 4, but two lesbian friends of his from California, are joining his group in Manhattan so we will be 6. David and I were not a part of this. We heard about the planning stages of it, but we were on the B List I jokingly tell David. However once this trip, which was about 10 months in the making, was all planned and all set and the tickets to **The Book Of Mormon** were purchased and the hotels were reserved, after all of that, a couple who much of this trip was planned around and for, dropped out. David and I were on First Avenue in the new Flor store checking it out and David's phone rings. I hear only parts of David's end of the call: Oh hello - pause - oh that's too bad - pause - that's a shame pause - really? are you sure? - pause - well that's so nice of you, let me check with Michael - pause - this is just too nice - I'll get back to you as soon as possible. It was then I learned that the couple on the A list completely bailed on this trip and Michael wanted to know if we'd like to fill the gap, replace couple A.

David has wanted to go to New York for a long time now but we didn't have the resources to pull it off, and we didn't really have the time in our schedule. But we had no plans for Christmas Day and it is the slow time for our industry. So we jumped at this amazing offer. So we get to go to Manhattan, be with 4 other fun people, and see a show on Broadway we've wanted to see for a long time now. We are so excited. Planning emails and reviews of show and clubs and restaurants have been flying back and forth between the 6 of us. Everyone is excited. And David and I are beyond grateful. And the miles for this trip will push us both over to MVP with Alaska for 2013. Can this get any better? Well, yes. The six of us could have dinner on **Christmas Day at Le Bernardin**.

What else? What else?

I'm still managing a large real estate office for Windermere Real Estate. I have 74 agents and 4 staff. I hire, I train, I coach, I solve legal and ethical dilemmas, I manage. I am in management. Deep into management. I started this job in 1997 - I think this is my 16th or 17th year that I'm starting after the holidays.

David, along with his business partner Kevin Gaspari, are still selling real estate week after week. They admirably survived 2008. Then they survived 2009 and 2010. Then, as agents all around the country were dropping like flies, they survived 2011. Making as a real estate agent those four years takes a certain kind of skill and mastery of the trade. And now, they have survived 2012. And the market is changing. Most people still think it's bad out there but, well, the market in Seattle is roaring back. Almost every offer agents in my office make these days is on a house that has 9 other offers. Or 5 other offers. Or 2 other offers. I know of once case where a house had 17 offers on it. Buyers are competing, most houses sell for over their asking price. Kevin and David have several great listings lined up for 2013 (that is if Kevin doesn't sell them off plans before they are built) and several buyers they are working with. 2012 was the best of the last 5 years for them and it all looks like 2013 is going to be better still. It feels like we are out of the weeds now.

Rusty Doesn't Begin To Describe It

Last week David was in Atlanta when old clients of ours, the couple who bought my first house from me at one of my first open houses in 1987, the house we all used to refer to as **East Egg**, called out of the blue. They rent in Sunset Hills and they found a house near their house that they wanted to buy. Normally Kevin would just jump in, take over covering for David and I'd never hear about it. But this was **Randy and Judy Peck**. The history, the houses, the listings, the years spanning back to my first year in real estate. David wanted me in the mix. So I had to jump out of my management role and pretend that I could be a real estate agent again. I'm well beyond "rusty" when it comes to that. I immediately called Kevin and said I can't do this without you. But Opal and I drove out to the estate sale house, I showed Randy and Judy, we crafted and offer on a piece of scrap paper and I rushed back to Kevin who made it into an offer that an attorney would love. It was multiple offers. 5 offers. The house went over asking but not as far over as we were prepared for. Randy and Judy got it. This all happened on Monday and Tuesday of this week (which is why I didn't write this letter for two day days) and I was a nervous wreck both days. Until I got the call that they won the multiple offers my stomach was in knots. If you drove by the house David's sold strips would be stapled to the sign. But he was in Atlanta. Randy and Judy will be moving in 26 days.

Our Neighbors Have Chickens

We like the chickens. Opal is not obsessed with them even tho' they are all right there on the other side of a see through chain link fence. All fauna is good. Except for snails. I used to just hate slugs; now I hate snails even more. I carry either of them out to the middle of Flora and set them in the street and walk away. Our neighbors have bees too.

David and I are both really fascinated by this. I want to have bees but my plate is full with the hardscape. What I really want is for David to get bees. I want to marry a beekeeper.

I read the wedding announcements in the **New York Times** every Sunday. I love reading about the very rich or very accomplished people who the Times deems worthy of a blurb. One Sunday a gay couple went beyond "blurb worthy" and got a full page feature - they feature one lucky couple each week with a long long announcement, photos, etc. In this one one of the men was talking about his reluctance to get too involved with the other, how messy the end might be. A friend asked him, "*Why are you thinking of how to get out before you get in?*"

Later in the excessively long marriage announcement he explains, "It never occurred to me that not ending was one of the choices because I had never had a relationship that didn't end."

That's some bad logic. Or faith. It reminds me of something a friend from work once told me:

"If things didn't end badly they wouldn't end at all." ~ Mark Hobbs.

Maybe those things have nothing to do with each other. Maybe I just like thinking.

I hope I didn't forget anything major from the year. Like the year I forgot that Curtis and Gary bought a house - Gary Tucker actually bought a house, December 22nd 2008 to be exact. I forgot once but never will again. If our wonderful time together in 2012 was missed it was an oversight. I didn't mean to forget.

We're still here,

In better health and good spirits,

We love giving home and landscaping tours,

Real estate is our lives, we live for it,

Please keep in touch, the old fashioned way,

We love mail, and we still love phone calls,

Oh - and I'm willing to text now!



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