



2013

Tuesday December 10th 2013

Holiday Greetings!

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

David and I almost got married this year.

This is the wedding announcement that almost appeared in the Sunday New York Times the week we almost got married:



Michael Dennis Nelson & David Charles Updike were married Saturday at Canlis restaurant in Seattle. _____, a friend of the couple and a Unitarian Life minister officiated.

Mr. Nelson (above, left), 57, is the Branch Manager of Windermere Real Estate's Eastlake office in Seattle, Washington. He graduated from Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan where he received a Bachelor of Arts in English.

He is the son of Edward and Eileen Nelson of Grand Blanc, Michigan. His father, known as Mike, owned and operated an independent sign company designing, manufacturing and installing signs in the metropolitan Detroit area. His parents are now retired.

Mr. Updike, 56 is a Managing Broker also at the Windermere Eastlake office. He graduated from University of Washington and received a Bachelor of Arts in History.

He is the son of the late James N. Updike a United Methodist Minister. His mother is Dr. Elizabeth Keeler of Spokane, almost, but not quite, retired as an advocate, teacher and counselor on women's issues.

The couple met 28 years ago after David answered Michael's incredibly detailed personal advertisement in *The Weekly*, a Seattle news publication. Currently they have only one Weimaraner, a striking "blue" one named Opal, that is almost three years old.

As you can see, we were ready to go. But then a few things happened. And I'm gonna tell you about those things, but in order please. It's the end of 2013 and those things happened mid 2013 and everyone knows a good holiday letter starts at the beginning. That's a very good place to start. (And I'm humming "you know what" as I type this because I recorded the LIVE version of ***The Sound of Music*** on TV the last week and David and I are slowly watching it, 10 to 15 minutes a night, over cocktails with spiced nuts prior to dinner on the nights we eat at home.)

So we're back. We're still here and we're back with what hopes to be yet another upbeat, happy, amusing yet thought provoking, and highly informative year-end holiday newsletter. Since I'm the last person in America to make peace with Facebook (for the life of me I just can't get behind it), the contents of this letter should be news to you. David "is on" Facebook so it is possible some news and events from our festive year might have leaked out through him but he's really rarely on Facebook from what I can see so who knows. Since I'm not there, I have no idea how often David really is.

I am, oddly, on Twitter. I have a handle or user name or whatever it's called. You can follow me. If you do I'll get an alert saying you have started following me. It's a cheap thrill, but one that I like. You want to give me a cheap thrill, right? After all I've done for you? Remember free calendars for life? Com'on, follow me.

If you use Twitter you can find me here: @SeattleMichaelN

Someday I will figure out what a hashtag is and I'll be really impressed with myself. In the meantime I just picked several news sites and political figures, local and national, and some comedians, and the people I actually know who I could find on Twitter, to follow. Now if I'm stuck waiting I can open Twitter on my super smart phone and scroll through tweets from these people, comedians, and politicals. I essentially treat it as a custom news feed. This may not be its true purpose, but it works for me.

I say I am "oddly" on Twitter because you'd think if I took the time to figure that site out I would have surely mastered Facebook first. It didn't work that way for me. The concept of having "friends" that I don't know (or in some cases don't even like) was very troublesome to me. Whereas the concept of me following news or pithy sayings from Sandra Bernhard was not. I'm not claiming to be Sandra Bernhard's friend. Or Dan Savage's friend. Or Michelle Obama's friend. Or the Seattle Police Department's friend. They don't know me and I don't know them. But I'm interested in what they say and do. So I follow them and read short 140 character blurbs when I'm in the waiting room or in line or filling my tank with gas. Sometimes

I'm interested enough to click and go deeper, mostly not.

So Twitter's kinda okay to me. I do find it weird when random people I don't know and with whom I have absolutely no connection start following me. Why would they do that? They cannot be interested in what I say and do as they have no idea who I am. I can question them and their motives because I'm not Oprah Winfrey. You could argue that Oprah might have said the same thing the day she got the alert that @SeattleMichaelN was following her. But of course it makes sense to her that I'd follow her. She wouldn't question it because she's Oprah. I am not Oprah. I am not even a tiny bit Oprah. So why are strangers wanting to follow me on Twitter? I don't trust this.

As for Facebook, I have set a goal. I will be on Facebook before I get married. The two things have zero to do with each other, but if I say it the way I just did, connect them in a sentence like that, you'll jump to the conclusion they are somehow related. The real story is that I have set a work related goal that involves Facebook and my self-imposed date for meeting that goal is January 31st. And since I know I'm not getting married in January it's a surprisingly easy claim to make: I will be on Facebook before I get married.

Six Days Of Enchiladas

In ten days David and I will be flying to Zihuatanejo. I have no idea how to spell that. We've been talking about this place for several months now, ever since our friend Michael Stewart invited us down there, but still each time I need to write it I have to go back and look at my Alaska Airlines itinerary to see how to spell it. You'd think I have retained this by now. I think my smart phone is making me stupid. I love going to Mexico. I love the food. And I love that I get to have Mexican food three times a day while I'm there. David would object to that in Seattle. I've never been to Zihuatanejo. David has. David went to this same villa When Michael rented it a few years ago I think, back when I was ill. David has good things to report. I'm looking forward to doing nothing in a new place, and avoiding Christmas here.

You know how big a standard file box is? We have exactly 12 of them in the storage room in our basement filled with Christmas stuff. Christmas lights, Christmas ornaments, Christmas tchotchkes, Christmas candles, stocking for the mantel, Christmas mugs, that fabric thing you put around the base of the tree so you don't see the stand and so on. Then we have Christmas related things that won't fit in a standard file box: heavy tree stands, Christmas platters, a tall metal reindeer whose antlers are candle holders (jealous?). And then there is the truly collectible, totally authentic, mid-century modern silver metal Christmas tree we own. It makes no attempt to look like more than it is: many sliver sticks stuck in a silver pole. The saving grace here is a very hip four color wheel that sits behind the tree slowly rotating. As it rotates it washes the silver tree in one of the four colors for a spell. Remember those? Got it on eBay. So much Christmas stuff.

So much Christmas stuff we haven't used in years. Because we tend to go away that week each year. We miss Gary Sarozek's birthday on Christmas Eve and then we miss Michael Kuntz's birthday on New Year's Eve. And let's not forget missing Christ's birthday on the 25th, we miss that too. Best of all tho', we miss lugging all that Christmas stuff upstairs, setting it up, and then the reverse a week or so later. Thankfully as a rule the seasonal parties happen sooner in the month so we get to make those (if invited). Our office's Christmas party is in two

days deep in Ballard at a place called **The Gerald**. And even though it's been years since our major remodels with **JAS Design Build** we still got lucky and made the list for their party on the 14th, somewhere close to our home, deep in SoDo this year it seems.

I'm All Wound Up

So it's a busy ten days ahead of me. And stressing me out is getting this letter produced. I have to get it written, copied, stuffed inside of a calendar, those then into envelopes, sealed, then labelled correctly, sorted and mailed. About 550 times. It's no small task and it freaks me out. Now that I'm well again that is. When I wasn't well in 2009 and 2010 I allowed myself to not get all stressed about it and didn't even try to do it on time. But those days are well behind me and wound up "type A" Michael is back.

The Cookie Call

Midday each day David and I will check in with each other by text or phone. I call it our "cookie call" because one of the topics is always our four o'clock cookie. Can you get me a cookie, have you had your cookie, where are you going for your cookie, etc. For as long as I can remember, and that might be the full 28 years, this call has taken place. Sometimes we meet and have a cookie and tea together, (David has tea, I have a doppio espresso on ice), sometimes the dog is briefly walked, but mostly it's two guys on the opposite side of town checking in. This call always segues into "What's for dinner?" and whose shopping for food and making what. Try as we might we can't seem to plan a meal more than 24 hours away. We never have what we need because we never know what we want. So we have to touch base on that after the cookie debriefing. Then the talk turns to evening plans if there are any. If there are plans the dinner talk is scratched and replaced by restaurant talk. And then dog logistics. Nights away from home require making accommodations for the world's sweetest dog. Nights at home do not.

Anyway, my point was, I can tell time by this call, that's how regular it is. Even if we are in separate cities (Palm Springs vs Seattle the most likely scenario for this) this call takes place mid-afternoon. I count on this call. Eleven and a half months of the year I love this call. (Really, with 28 years of this call, who needs a marriage certificate? Isn't this call the whole point?) But there are two weeks in December when this call just makes me crazy. The call comes (I never initiate the call during these two weeks as I'm too preoccupied) and I try not to sound too irritated or exasperated when I say, "*Are you kidding me?*" with an exhausted tone. Then David remembers and he says, "The Letter" in the exact same way that Jerry used to say Newman's name whenever Newman thwarted him on the show. (I'm hoping you immediately realize that's a Seinfeld reference and know the exact tone I'm hearing.)

So 2013 is about to end and I'm about to tell you about it. It was a year both David and I really enjoyed. It's late, well past my usual bedtime, and I have no calendar at the ready to remind me what we liked so much about 2013, but when I think "our 2013" two things immediately come to mind. One thing, one topic, coincidentally, for each of us. Both topics, coincidentally, two words each. Ready? Here they are:

Topic # 1 = Koi pond

Topic # 2 = strong market

Go ahead, guess which topic goes with which one of us. And while you do I am going to stop this for the night and hit the sack. It's only 10:30 but many nights I climb into bed with Opal around 9:00. There was a stretch a few months ago, during David's "Rescue Me" days when I was going to be at 8:30. And I sleep until 8:30 AM.

I have mastered the art of sleeping. I can do it for way longer than anyone I know. With no appointments and nothing I absolutely have to do, and with Opal pressing up against me (she's a narcotic), I can easily sleep for 14 hours. I rarely get to do this, only a few times a year, but I can do it and love it when I get to. My record is 16 hours but that was back in 2009 during my dark days. Still I remember being happy I was able to do it. I remember looking at the clock in a pitch dark room and calculating. I was pleased with myself. Most nights these days I'd say I get a solid 10 hours. If I have a really early meeting I can try to be happy with 8. The only circumstance where it would be less than 8 would be if I have to get to an airport to catch a flight. I love sleeping. I look forward to it in much the same way I do a really good meal.

Wednesday December 11th

The next day. And on only 9 hours sleep mind you. I was up later than usual typing this and I had some agent interviews, two of them, early in my day. And by "agent interviews" I really mean I was meeting with people who are not currently real estate agents, people who have never been real estate agents, but who want to be. One of the two was in the early stages of just wanting to do it, finding out more about it; the other person I interviewed was planning to do it soon. I think he'll be up and running by March. (And if not exactly "up and running" how about fully licensed and being trained, by me.)

David and I have been watching **The Sound of Music** in segments as we make dinner each night and it's now stuck in my head. There's no sound in the room and all of a sudden I'm hearing "How do you make her stay, and listen to what you say" and it's driving me crazy. I must say tho' this cast did an excellent job. I don't know who this blonde girl is - Taylor Swift? Kelly Underwood? I can't tell who is the one who sings, **Jesus Take The Wheel**? That song always makes me crack up. Really I have no time for these bland blonde singers. So as I was having my morning cappuccino a bit ago I saw and obit in the New York Times for Eleanor Parker. Who is she? I don't know. But I read things like this. She died in Palm Springs. Of course everyone does. That catches my interest. I read on. Turns out in the movie version of **The Sound of Music** she was the Baroness who gets kicked to the curb for Julie Andrews. What is with all of the **Sound of Music** stuff this week? And what is with about 2 or 3 songs in this live production that neither David nor I had ever heard?

January. Hmmmmm . . . January and February. And March and April too. When it comes to me, I just lump all of the days in those months into one giant garden waiting period. Let me return to that however. January had some things

Opal has a sister. She actually has 8 brothers and sisters, but only one that figures into her life now. We are friends with Brianne who owns Opal's sister, Coco. We met because I went to the breeder (in Oregon) and asked where the other 8 puppies went after we got Opal. Only one puppy was in Seattle. I tracked Brianne down and we see each other almost weekly since. The first time those two puppies were brought back together, after about 4 weeks apart, it was obvious they knew each other. I could go on about why this was obvious, but I

won't for fear of sounding like a boring dog nut. (Tell me, do I sound like a crazy dog nut?)

Anyway . . . on January 2nd Brianne came to our house for dinner and we put party hats on the dogs, gave them doggie cupcakes from some place where crazy dog people show, and we celebrated their second birthdays. Because, as Brianne likes to say, we can. Today Brianne emailed me a photo of Coco sitting looking directly at the camera with a long stringy pink wig on her head. All the email said was, "Because I can." I'm still laughing about it. Because, spoiler alert, I just might be a crazy dog nut.

As Joni Mitchell once famously said, "Back to the garden." Here's the deal, when I don't have something I absolutely have to do, something scheduled like a movie with David or dinner with friends or going to work, when I'm not required to be doing anything else, I'm in the garden. The whole point of this house for me was the completely vacant full sized building lot to the north of us that came with the house. We have one mortgage on all of it, but the tax records show it as its own lot, its own parcel number. It even has its own water meter and hose bibs. (Prior to this house, even with all of the years I've been in real estate, I had never seen a water bill that ONLY has water on it. No sewer. No garbage, no recycle. Just water. It seems way cheaper to me but I have not compared to see if "irrigation" water is less than "household" water. So even tho' it was winter from January to April, I was in the yard every moment I could be. In January I designed (in my mind only) what the fence should be like and then "our Flora guys," a.k.a., Ted and Geoff started fencing the 8,000 square feet of heaven that I have here.

I don't do construction but I hover, I second guess, I point, and I ask for extra little things. I'm sure all of the hovering costs me more in the end, as a matter of fact that extra fee I see on invoices for profit and overhead is likely punishment for having me stick my nose in things all of the time. I do do landscaping and I have my guy Jose (very hard to get, I got lucky last year and got him virtually every Saturday). Jose would show up on Saturdays at 8:00 with two guys. Four of us would launch into the day's project. My job during the week was to prepare for Saturday's project. Weather be damned, I was out there every day at least an hour or so organizing and thinking and doing what I could alone. I lived for Saturdays when real progress could be made. I wanted to get as much done as I could before the second Sunday in July. I have a target date each year. Next year I have to take it seriously. More on that later.

Here's what I got done last winter:

- All but 40 feet of the property fully fenced with our super cool "White Stripe" & iron fence
- Garden lot divided with the same super cool fence with a rolling barn type door between
- Barn donor dividing fence integrated with upper deck off kitchen
- Finished upper deck off kitchen complete with new stairs down to ?
- Replaced landing & stairs off back door with longer landing & new stairs down to ?
- Beautifully designed railing on upper deck and stairs
- Hidden storage shed under upper deck for all garden tool - again with its own barn door
- Underground sprinkler system with 6 separate zones properly & professionally installed
- 12 large feed troughs brought in, placed, filled with drainage gravel then soil
- Purchased large rocks & boulders in Ballard, brought them home, built a retaining wall
- A "rough" planting of food in all the feed troughs and plants and trees in beds along fence line
- Had several deliveries of cedar wood chips to yard and distributed for dog mud maintenance
- Scored a great iron outdoor table and chair set at Second Use in Sodo for cheap
- Kept the bird feeders filled with seed and out of the reach of evil squirrels

- Kept the hummingbird feeders filled with safe nectar (clear nectar, no red dye or coloring)

And that was my year. HAH!!! That was just my year prior to July 14th, which was the second Sunday in July. That day I took a break. More on that later.

Credit goes to Ted & Geoff for all the fancy barn door & iron fence & deck construction. It's flawless (actually there is one flaw, one thing that only I know, but I can't get it out of my mind . . . this is what happens when you DON'T hover and go to work and leave them to make decisions without your constant input). And credit goes to Jose Brito for the entire sprinkler system and the preparation of the raised beds for planting (a.k.a., feeding troughs).

And credit goes to me for pushing and organizing to get all of this to happen. I did the things I could. I made several trips to Ballard to haul rocks home in "my truck." I built the retaining walls and placed the boulders in the garden. And I rented a U-Haul truck and drove to Monroe Farm and Feed (guess where this is at) and selected and loaded up the cattle feeding troughs. These are not your cute little metal things you see at Hardwick's or City People's once in a while, ones anyone could pick up and move. No. Mine are huge. Most are eight feet long and three feet wide. Some are rounds. One is a six foot round. I have 12 of these, various sizes. I did one run to Monroe for the really odd shapes. Then Tim Allen did a run for me with his truck for the oblong shapes that could fit width-wise in a standard pickup and stick out the back. And I'll take the credit for the bird feeders that take seeds.

But the real credit in all of this, not just for the awesome daily attention to the hummingbirds, has to go to David for bankrolling all of my garden projects. I can pay the mortgage and health insurance each month on what I take home and still have enough left to get some kibble for the dog. It's what goes on in David's world that makes things around here move really forward. David's off every Saturday showing houses and condos to people I've never met while I'm here with Jose planning patios and paths. David's off every Sunday holding open houses and talking to strangers and I'm here talking to Opal while planting things, weeding beds, and making runs to Ballad for stones. We jump in my modified Escape and go get shit we need. We stop for iced espressos and have cookies and dog treats along the way. It's a system I've really come to appreciate. Fully. I fully realize and appreciate how good I have it.

It's a winning combination . . . David's earning and my force of will. The garden moved at a fast clip the first half of the year. Looking back at that list you gotta admit that even routinely sleeping for 11 hours a night doesn't stop me from getting shit done. I sleep well and when I'm awake I am in constant motion. Except for when I'm watching TV. And I watch a boatload of TV.

Other Things Happened Last Winter

Tho' much less frequent, the house in Palm Spring did get used. I went for a weekend in January alone - the 3 day MLK weekend, I always go then. David went with Robert and Jason in February for a week, perhaps a bit less, there's no paper calendar anymore to remind me. The paper calendar died in 2011 and was buried in 2012. You might think it odd that David and I go to Palm Springs but not with each other. Not so odd. First of all remember, 28 years. A break for what we call "alone time" is always welcome. And tho' we call it "alone time" you're never really alone when you have an intelligent Weimaraner to spend time with. Yup, the dog. The dog figures into everything. Sometimes it is just easier on short trips for one of us to stay

here and take care of the dog and the other to get a break. We have friends, notably Tim or Brianne, who are always happy to take the dog, but we hate to take advantage too often.

What else, what else . . . in February the day that **A Good Day To Die Hard** opened (a.k.a., the 5th Die Hard movie) I was at the box office before they opened. I had invited everyone who works for me in my office to the first matinee. I do this about twice a year always for what I perceive will be a blockbuster movie. I am nurturing the 14 year old boy within. Ah, the child within. Anyway anyone who shows up, I buy them a ticket. I'd say this could break the bank but it never does. I'm not dumb - I'm only paying for tickets; they are on their own for sodas and popcorn. I had about 75 agents in my office at the time (I'm down to 67 now) so with agents and staff that's about 80 tickets I could be buying. But I never get more than 25 to 30 at these events. Don't know why. You'd think that seeing a first of the day matinee once or twice a year on a Friday would be the kinda perk that draws you to this career. It did me, 27 years ago. I bought (did I?) a Regal card. Still not sure why as we don't go to the movies very often, but now I have this card I got that day. The ticket guy convinced me. Later that year, alone in Palm Springs, I went to a Regal movie house alone and was given popcorn. Cheap thrill.

Beyond sleeping and watching TV and the aforementioned outdoor accomplishment list, there is still other shit to get done. Like getting rid of most of what you owned when you lived in a 4,300 square foot house with an additional 400 square feet in the attached garage. This is what you do on severely rainy days (on slightly rainy days you still work outside). So 4,700 square feet of space to stow shit there; 2,240 square feet of space here. That is really less than 50%. Stuff has to go. Along with a child within, I fear I have a hoarder within. I am drawn to collecting odd things. Tho' my collections of things amuse me and remind me who I am. Yet I am not a fan of clutter. And this is a very tight little house.

So in the first half of this year I spent rainy days purging books and records. I'd box them all up and make the rounds to those reused book stores and sell them off. What one store would not take I'd re-box nicely and head to the next store. Opal would drive with me, we are seldom apart. I hit every store that resells used books from **Third Place Books** up in Lake Forest Park all the way down to **Half Priced Books** on lower Capitol Hill (now defunct). I got rid of all of the old vinyl albums ~ 100% gone! I went to many places with albums but **Silver Platters** on lower Queen Anne bought the most. Other places were, ah, "surprised" by how many musical sound tracks and Broadway shows were ever put on vinyl. There is nothing quite like being 57 years old and have some overly pierced somewhat dirty tatto'd kid wearing cloths I'd think twice about doing a dump run in pawing your copy of the original Broadway production of **The Act** starring Liza Minnelli. I was pleased with what great condition the album jacket was still in. The first three shops rolled their eyes and wouldn't even give up a quarter for it. **Silver Platters** bought it. If you need a musical soundtrack you could check there first. I'm sure most of mine are still there. But in 2013 **buh-bye** albums from our little house on Flora.

(I saved 4 vinyl albums actually, 3 framed for display near the stereo and one just for the feel of an old school album cover in pretty damn good condition that opens up and has ALL of the song lyrics printed inside and some decent cover art and photos. I really miss things like this. This album I saved to pick up and admire every once in a while now sits near our desk here at home. You might think it's clutter, but it's not.)

I got rid of well over 50% of the books that David and I had been lugging around since college.

Two points here:

One: I know it was over 50% that I purged because before we left the house in Matthews Beach I measured the linear feet of shelves in the whole house that had books on them. Seriously. I did. And I added it all up to get a number. I write things like that down. I always keep a “moving journal” (well I used to, I don’t plan on moving anymore, please don’t tell David) of all of the notes and to-dos and start and stop phone numbers and the utility company numbers and so on. I write stuff down. I am my mother’s child. So when putting the shelves up here it was clear before we even got the books from the storage locker what I’d be facing. I just compared the new linear feet number with the previous one and got a little sad.

Two: I know we had been lugging these books around since college because it seems we both took the same art history courses. (This must be why we are so compatible huh?) We had duplicates of several of those large art history text books, those huge oversized heavy ones, with our student ID numbers written in them and notes and scribbles. David would try and draw in the margins of his; I knew better.

I was ruthless in this book purging. I had literally hundreds of hardbound theatre scripts. I kept about 10 of them I just couldn’t part with and donated the rest to a non-profit theatre group. Trade paperbacks, hardbound books, all of our college day books, so many books now gone. The house feels a little lighter.

Can He Do It ? Can He Keep Up The Purging Momentum ?

Next up - boxes of “the stuff” from the old house. Not books, not records, but all of the other stuff. We moved 12 of these boxes, large boxes, 30 inches square, the kind you get from U-Haul, from the storage locker to the garage here. But I need that garage for equipment to operate the pond and my tools so even more stuff had to go. (Plus I want to be able to fit a certain car in there. The car is 11 feet long and not very wide, it’s small and I don’t have one but I covet one.) I would spend raining days in the garage with two folding tables from Office Max Depot. I open a box and start. Could we fit it here? Could we use it in Palm Springs? Can we trick Elisa and Gregg into thinking they need it?

At the start of the year there were 12 boxes in what I now call “the pump house.” Now there are two. I won’t get to them this year, but they will be divided and conquered by the second Sunday in July. Then the pump house will be free of all items inappropriate to a pump house and garden shed. Then I’ll have to turn my purging attention indoors again. What is going to happen to the **Twelve Boxes of Christmas?** (Oh, my, that was clever!)

Change That Can Change Your Life

And the last major game changer in the first half of the year? Opal got a dog door. I shopped for the best quality dog door possible, I bought two of them, I threw half of each one of them away (kinda like buying two bagels, cutting them in half and then keeping only the top halves with the good stuff on it) and then I hired Geoff Murphy who has infinite patience to use the best parts of two dog doors and make one slightly better dog door, with twice the insulation and two weather flaps, not just one. I didn’t think this up myself, I think Tim Allen gave me the idea. It was a good one. Geoff made a perfect cut perfectly centered in the solid core backdoor and fussed with these cheap-assed dog door parts until it was installed perfectly.

Less than four minutes with a hand of dog treats, a super smart Weimaraner and one of us on each side of the door and our lives changed for the better. Now we don't have to lie in bed pretending to be sound asleep while listening to Opal whimper and whine wondering who will break first, get up, and go let her out. Of course now a raccoon or small child could get in the house when we are not here. But then the security system would fire up, so, ah, whatever. There's less to steal here now anyway. And I often pee in the yard late at night to keep the raccoons at bay. So what happens happens.

Thursday December 12th

Tonight is my office's Christmas Party. Yea. And today is the day we get to dog sit Opal's sister for a long weekend. Double yea. Secretly we want two dogs. We both know this; we both know someday we'll end up with two dogs. In lieu of this right now tho' I offer to dog sit other people's dogs (especially if they weigh 50 pounds or more) (and I don't mean a grossly overweight Chihuahua or any other dog that could be referred to as a "toy dog" breed). So yea, Brianne is going skiing or something and we get Coco for four or five days.

You know I often send this letter out and then people I know call me and say things like, "Hey what about the time you and I went to" or "I can't believe you didn't include when" All I can say is I can't remember everything in a year and if you can then write your own letter. I do the best I can without notes or a paper calendar. However I did just scroll back through my Apple calendar on my laptop and I'd catch hell I'm sure if I forgot these two things:

In early April my cousin from Michigan flew to Palm Springs and we spent a few day together. She's a teacher, thus spring break. She can't sit still and tries forcing me to hike and stuff like that. I try to get her to sit and read or float in the pool and generally be still. No one wins. We talk of many things, often of our parents who all in their mid-eighties now and how that's gonna play out. Marsha was in a same sex relationship for 20 years. When that ended she decided she is straight. There's a topic. Now she's dating on Yahoo and Matchmake and places like that. So there's another topic. I'm waiting for her to try **Christian Mingle**. It could happen. (Let's try this for 20 years, okay now let's try that.) Christian Mingle is the best internet dating site ever. I love the name, I love to say it, and they have the best commercials on TV: "He's my second chance."

The other thing I need to mention is that less than a full week later Lisa, my BFF from my college days, flew to Palm Springs. Lisa's also from Michigan, and also involved in education but I don't know if spring break figures in here or not. Most likely not as Lisa is in the grad school proofing the dissertations. Whatever . . . she flew to Palm Springs to take me to see **Leslie Gore** who was performing with the soon-to-be-closed-forever **Palm Springs Follies**. After the show we stood in line so Leslie Gore could sign something Lisa brought, an old CD I think, I don't know, but we met her. Lisa loves Palm Springs and seems to make the long haul often - she has driven it at least twice that I remember.

Making two back-to-back, rapid weekend trips to Palm Springs is a lot easier for us now. David and I went thought the long time consuming process of getting what's called a "Known Traveler Number." I can't explain it, or how we did it, Michael Stewart walked us through it. I know it involved our passports, a long long long application on the internet, a good deal of waiting, and then being summoned to the airport mid-week to go to the office of, you know I'm not sure - Border Patrol? - it doesn't matter, google this if you want, but the end result is we

have KTNs now to put on our tickets when we buy tickets online (just like you put in your mileage number). And we go to the special "TSA Pre Check" line at the airports and if we get 3 beeps when they scan our ticket we fly through security. No belts and shoes off, no laptop out of bag, no pat downs (which I used to always get as I would only go through the metal detector, not the hands up in the air revolving x-ray machine . . . the moment you say no, pat down.) this TSA Pre Check thing is great. Well worth the time it took to get it if you travel often. I'd like to get to our house in Palm Springs in the same or less amount of time it takes to get to Lopez Island. Honestly I think it's close.

In May we traveled to Spokane for David's mother's 90th birthday. Of course we drove so we could road trip with Opal. We stayed at the stunning Oxford Suites and we had a great time. All of David's sisters, their kids, other relatives, the whole gang was there. It filled a big room. A nice time was had by all. (If we tired to do this back in Michigan with my family there'd be all of 12 people in the room.)

The Second Sunday In July

These days, now that we live in Georgetown, I see the year in two segments. There's the segment before the second Sunday in July, and then there's the segment after. The second Sunday in July is the day of the **Georgetown Garden Walk**. Many residents in the 'hood put themselves on a master map for the day, open their gates, and let the public from near and far wander aimlessly through their yards. Artists get involved, all of the shops in Georgetown are open and supportive, it's a huge party. You come to the info booth in the **B of A** parking lot, there they hand out large maps with dots where a yard is open, and off you go. I think the booth opens a bit before 10:00 and the gardens fling their gates open at 10:00 and are on display until 5:00.

Somehow I was not aware of this event when we purchased our house here. I admit it. I'm not trying to act like I'm some long time Georgetown expert (surprisingly some of that goes on here). I'm the new kid at the new school trying to make friends in the playground. So I'm not an expert on this walk, but I friggin' love it. The first year we were here for this I had a bunch of garden lovers over for a light breakfast at 8:00 and then at 10:00 we all set out on the walk. That year there were 42 houses on the walk - spread fairly far apart too - Georgetown really has "two parts" to it separated by an off ramp and play field.

That year I made it to 38 of the gardens. After breakfast we started as a group but (honestly) that didn't work so well. People move at different paces, there are literally hundreds of people strolling around, groups fall apart, people get lost, it was like herding cats. By noon that day our group was down to about 8 people. By one it was down to me and David. By two it was me. David and I were passing near our house on the way to a garden and he said let's take a short break. So water, bathroom, rest a moment, nibble on something leftover, and I'm ready to go again. But when it was time to go, I was going alone. In the end, by 5:00 when the gates all shut, I was 4 gardens shy of seeing them all. That year I stole an idea from one of them (I admit it, I plagiarized a garden idea!) and have not recycled a red wine bottle since. It's been a year and a half. We seldom have white wine bottles. I seldom drink red wine. Yet you should see how many red wine bottle are in our garage. David drinks a boatload of red wine.

[**Side note:** This is the first year ever that I've allowed David to proof the letter before printing it. Two reasons for that, 1) I hate criticism, especially his, and 2) he's usually sleeping when I

finish it at 3:00 AM and then drive it to Kinkos. (Oh yes, that's been my pattern, complete with him signing blank pages and me cutting and pasting, the old school way, when I was finished.) So when he proofed this letter just now, before going to the dog park with Coco and Opal, he objected to me making him sound like a drunk at this point. I pointed out that it seems everyone with the last name Updike seems to drink a lot of red wine and that no one would take it the wrong way. Right? Plus I'm not a saint and I'm not trying to sound like one: I drink every day of the week, I just don't often drink red wine since the cancer bout. I'm a hard liquor guy now. Gin or bourbon every day of the week at or near 6:00 PM]

I Forgot Where I Was Oh, Yes! My Year Two Of The G-town Garden Walk

This summer we did the same thing. I did the light breakfast here again, always looking for garden loving people to invite, and then we did the walk. This year I stole no ideas as I'm still awash in empty wine bottles - I haven't implemented that stolen idea yet. And this year I didn't count how many gardens I made it to. I decided to try to take my Type A / OCD behaviors out of a laid back community event. It's about gardens. It's about socializing. It's not a race. So I stopped counting.

Fully Committed

As I toil to bring definition to our garden spaces, neighbors walk by. They all stop and we chat and they inevitably say you should be on the garden walk. I say, "Oh I will be someday." But they mean now, next time. I look at the sad unfinished unplanted state of our yard and I just say that's a bad idea. Their point is many people come to this walk year after year after year and they'd like to monitor the changes and progress. My point is I'd be embarrassed.

But I have mentally committed to this. On July 13th next year our gates will be propped open for this walk. Last year, for the fun of it, I had a banner made (online, super easy to design and lay out, cheap, and 2 of the price of 1, shipped to my door in no time, who knew?) The banner said:

Coming Soon: **White Stripe Gardens and Koi Sanctuary**

I think it also said, inside a star offset on the banner, "**On tour in 2014.**" The banner had a lovely background of waving bamboo and it was all in shades of green with the letters in dark green. I remember just before breakfast on the day of the walk Cherese and I zip tying one banner to the front cyclone fence and one to the cyclone fence on the alley. (People WALK the alleys in G-town.) (The cyclone fence is now gone thanks to Ted and Geoff.) The gardens are named after the fence. And why not? And I say gardens as there are two of them. The vacant lot is divided by a section of fence with the Ted Munro rolling barn door gate that creates two different yards.

One is the "Opal free garden" where we are trying to learn to grow food. It is the sunny part of the yard, the only place this food thing could work. The other side of the rolling barn door takes you into the people and dog garden. No raised food beds here. Instead it's patios and decks and furniture for people and wood chips for the dog. It's the shady part of the property from about noon on. So I refer to "gardens."

And the bottom line here? I'm fully committed. Come hell or high water, come rain or shine, our yard is going to be on tour this summer. I put up banners saying so. I can't back out now.

Oh, and by the way, why is the weather always stunning on the day of the Georgetown Garden Walk? The past two years it has been simply amazing. Closing out this topic let me just say this: between the moment I put this letter in the mail and July 13th 2014 all I will be thinking about is what can I do to get the yard ready for the **Georgetown Garden Walk**? And it means *I won't be going on the walk next year*. I'll be in my yard dealing with the public. And, if there's one thing David and I have learned after 27 years of open houses, it's that the public can be dicey.

Friday December 13th

I used Uber for the first time last night. Our party, deep into the small crowded part of Ballard, went late (for me) and I had several drinks more than I usually do per day (usually one). David left hours before I did as we are housesitting Coco, Opal's sister, and they were at doggie day care at night. They charge you \$15 extra for that. And, honestly, he'd rather be home in front of our big screen with a movie and two Weimaraners anyway. Who wouldn't at our age? He came to the pre-party party with me, and he was at the actual party for over an hour, and then quietly he slipped out. For the rest of the night when people asked me where David was I'd say, "Oh he's here somewhere." It was a very crowded space; you can get away with this. When it was time for me to go I was going to call a cab but Kent (husband of Kevin who is the partner of David) loves Uber and he said he'd get me a car. He did. I got home. David and I watched **Scandal** together and then tried to fit two 59 pound Weimaraners in our bed.

I started to work on the letter yesterday but didn't have much in me, I still was tired. But you know what? The most amazing thing. This letter GOT SHORTER yesterday by quite a bit. I was playing around with it and I changed fonts. I had it in the same font I used last year: Veranda. I changed it to Helvetica. And you know what? It immediately shrunk. Same 12 point font size, but it lost about 3 pages or so. So see . . . last year's letter was not too long. It was just the font. Or, look at it this way, however long this year's letter ends up being, it could have been much longer (even with the same amount of words.) The best part of this is that I then had to go through the whole thing and paginate it all over again. And then whole paragraphs had to be reformatted. Reformatting and paginating. Much more fun than writing. And don't you just love the sound of the word "paginate" or its forms like "pagination?" I would have changed fonts sooner had I known just so I'd have an excuse to use those words!

Saturday December 14th

Today. Got up, made espresso, grabbed the papers. The lead story in the Seattle Times (which they will give you for free at Christmas time in an lame attempt to "increase" their circulation so they can up charge all the Christmas advertisers - I am convinced this is the racket) was about the Seattle City Council being about to pass a law basically banning car service apps, like Uber or Lift, or at least rendering them useless. Previous to my career in real estate I had a job at the City where one of my functions was to understand the rules around taxi cabs and how they are licensed and to issue and renew those licenses for cab drivers. I get Uber. It's fun and cool (and I think it should be allowed) but I knew the very first time I heard about Uber or Lift that this was gonna be a battle. I'm only surprised it has taken this long. Change can be a hard thing for people.

I'd like to take this letter to Kinkos today so I can rake leaves tomorrow (and I'm serious in that). Let's get to finishing this so I can have a guilt free day off on Sunday.

Let's Talk About David

Really. Enough (for now) about me and my yard. Let's change topics. Let me think. What do I remember about David this year . . . hmmm. Okay, two things. One, he had a great year selling real estate (strong market) and in the middle of the year, as I became obsessed with construction of the Koi pond, he became obsessed with the TV show called **Rescue Me**. Oh! And he got a new car. As in brand new, a 2013 vehicle. This was dog driven, like so many things in our lives now. I had what was called "the dog car." I had (still do, always will) a 2005 Ford Hybrid Escape. I have literally taken the bottom parts of the back seats out of this car and thrown them away. I still have the fold up and fold down parts, but they are almost always down. I have plywood fitted to the interior of the car - it's like a SUV truck now. I keep dog beds, dog toys, dog food, water bottles, tool boxes, etc in the car at all times. I haul things around. And I don't care if there are nose prints on the windows and dog claws on the seats.

David does care. He cares about cars in a way I never will. (Ditto clothing.) I kept telling David that he owned his car outright and he could make it into a dog car if he wanted to by simply letting the dog in the car. Let go, let dog. (Which is like "Let go, let god," only better.) How hard is that? But his car was a damn nice 2006 BMW sedan, the big one, the 7 series, and, tho' he bought it used, it was in MINT condition. He couldn't bring himself to let it get torn and tattered. I guess I understand - I feel this way about books.

The result of only one dog car was that we were always swapping car keys mid-day and going through complex negotiations. Ask David's partner Kevin about this. And that's "partner" as in Gaspari, as in UpdikeGaspari.com. One great thing about getting married will be the death of the word partner. When I say "David's partner" in conversation with people not as familiar with his career as others they often get all confused and think there's something going on that's not going on. I don't know if this comes up for Kevin and Kent or not, but David had two uses for the word "partner" in the past. Soon he will have only one and can substitute "husband" for the other use.

Anyway it got to the point where Kevin was making fun of us. Each day I'd stop by David's office with my car key and we'd have to work out who was leaving first, who was picking Opal up from doggie day care, etc. Sometimes the cookie call would morph into key swapping. It was a complication David hated. So his solution was to trade in the BMW for a new SUV. David of course wanted a BMW but I was not so pleased with that. I lobbied for something that would still allow landscaping to continue at a brisk pace, yet would get him a new car. Yes he was having a good year, and yes it seemed as though it would only continue getting better, but it was still early in the year and we've learned to be more cautious since 2007. We still painfully remember the August 2007 market crash and the resulting 5 years of market misery. So he settled on a Ford Escape. Yup. It's not a hybrid, but we are now a two Escape family. His is brand new, white, and has all of these bells and whistles on it. Very fancy with the seat warmers and the iPhone an iPod links and fancy movies of what you are hitting as you back up. But I don't like it. I like the body style of my car, I find my car pleasing to look at. The body of his car is too much like all of the other cars similar to this one on the road. Ford had a great body style and now it's too much like Toyota's or BMW's and the rest. But he likes it. And Opal's happy. And we are no longer swapping cars thus leaving sunglasses or wallets or paperwork in the other person's car. It was a hassle. And Kevin no longer has to witness the daily key negotiation.

So let's get to the STRONG MARKET that I've cited as one of the two defining elements of our 2013. It was strong. People find out we are in real estate all of the time and it's always the first question they ask, "what's the market like?" It has been the first question every day of every year since 2008 when you meet people. And in the past the answer was complicated and multi-layered. Not any more. Now the answer is simple very strong. David and Kevin closed a lot of real estate deals in 2013 and very few of them were situations where there was only one offer at a time. It could have been a house, a co-op apartment, a condo, land, - really, it didn't matter - there was generally always more than one offer at a time on everything.

And not just one. It could have been 8. Or 11. Or 4. Always multiple offers. All around the office, day in and day out, I'd hear my agents saying to each other as they talked about what they were working on, "It's a multiple." If I had \$5 for every time I heard the word "multiple" in 2013 then David would be driving a BMW and my pond would have 100 large Koi in it, not the small ones. I have near 70 agents working in my office (the State calls them "brokers" now but I'm an old dog and I hate this new trick). These agents stop by my office all of the time. Never did an agent come to me about an offer they were going to present and say they were the only one. I really don't think that happened in 2013. All multiples, all of the time. That's how it felt.

Another strong market indication was what seller's were getting: well over asking their asking price. And there was the indication was that sometimes buyers would "lose out" on a house four or five times before they were able to be the best offer. This was depressing for buyers and hard on their agents. That was the one sad part of a year like this one. But the strongest indication of the market this year is this: we track how many closed files my office has each year. Tracie (the real manger of my office) has all of the numbers written down somewhere. I'll check in each month or so and ask where are we. What she and I like to do is compare the number of files that actually closed to a date this year to the same date last year. We're not so much into the dollars here. It could be a \$200,000 studio condo on Capitol Hill (if you can find those anymore) or a 2.6 million dollar house in Medina. We don't care. We like production. We just like activity, we like files closed. For the first part of the year we were running like 20% ahead. However by mid-year (sadly after David already settled on the Escape) it was getting hotter out there and I think we were 28% or so ahead YTD. I think we have ended the year with about 36% more closed properties this year than last. Everyone's happy. Everyone's in a great mood. Which is such a relief after 5 years of me trying to keep staff and agent spirits up and agents focused on the road ahead.

If anyone knows how much the strong market is back, it's David. He and Kevin had a great year. Constantly busy, constantly getting new clients, and constantly closing files and delivering keys. They had some super low price point sales (South Park) and they had some well past the million mark (Leschi). David sold a super cool mid-century modern house two doors south of our old mid-century modern house in Matthew's Beach. He had to compete to get the listing but that's the kind of property he excels at. He got the listing, did an amazing marketing job, had great online photography and printed materials, and the seller got - and we both remember this exactly as we had many conversations about it afterwards - \$127,000 more than the asking price, roughly 18% more than list. It was that kind of market, that kind of year. You often hear the public in general blaming agents for inflated prices and crazy bidding wars. It is not the agents. After something like this the agents look at themselves and ask, "Was I that far off?" "Don't I know how to price anything anymore?" We honestly thought this house was worth the asking price and I remember David worrying that perhaps even that was pushing it. Then it goes \$127,000 over in a multiple offer bidding war. A crazy hot market.

One of David's most fun things this year was helping his niece Elisa and her husband Gregg buy a new house. They're a family of four now, Gregg, Elisa, Sam and Max (plus a wild-assed dog), and they were essentially living in a one bedroom house on 31st - an arterial. Sadly for David they bought the dreaded FSBO (for sale by owner and this particular owner refused to pay a commission to anyone). David sold it anyway, or at least handled all of the paperwork as Gregg and Elisa dealt with the little old lady. It's a great house, so much better than the one they had, and it's on a great part of 32nd in Mount Baker, near their old house but one super quiet and safe block off of the arterial. It is almost an exact duplicate of the house I sold to Robin Updike about 22 years ago (I'm guessing). Every time I go there I think I'm at Robin and Fred's house.

What's that phrase about turning a pig into a purse? David then did wonders with the house Gregg and Elisa had. He got it painted, somehow staged it (himself), again with the amazing photography online and in print, and again multiple offers happened and then a sales price greater than the asking one. He then gouged them on the commission to make up for the FSBO he had to endure and everyone's happy. I kid. But everyone is very happy.

And we all hope to be as happy next year. I keep telling David sooner or later I will run out of projects and he can save the money he makes. He keeps saying he hopes it before the real estate market runs out of buyers. Then I say our home repairs keep the economy moving. (We are currently having our house prepped for painting so we can paint when it gets warm again.) David worries that the economy might stall again. I say I'll offer up more yard projects to infuse it with cash. Back and forth we go. I'm a full on optimist, all optimism all the time. David's an optimist 70% of the time, and whenever he is in Nordstrom.

What Happened After The Garden Walk

The year was one big run up to the walk. I think I've established that. Once it was over both David and I moved on.

Here's what happened the last half of the year:

- My pond obsession
- David's **Rescue Me** obsession
- A huge shake up in my working world
- Starbucks did me wrong (and I'll never get over it)
- We lost our housekeeper
- David went to Manhattan alone (without me)
- We called off our marriage
- We took a 17 day vacation (which I'll never do again, now there's 9 day cap on these)
- We spent a long weekend in Walla Walla's wine country (with Opal)
- I went to Michigan for my annual visit with my folks
- We had a significant disaster in Palm Springs (David took the lead on this one)

And that brings us up to today. Each of those bullet points could be a page or two on their own in this letter and since I just hit page 16 and I have the JAS Christmas Party to go to tonight, and I don't want to be doing this tomorrow, let's hit them fast and get this over with.

Marriage first. Since day one of the real possibility, back when Gavin Newsom was making waves, I have wanted to get married. But not for the romantic reasons you want to assume. No. For me this was a political issue. 28 years ago perhaps it would have been a lovey-dovey romantic issue but not now, sorry, but that's the truth. Another truth about us is that in 27 years, those being the years before real marriage sanctioned by the government became a remote possibility, neither David nor I ever entertained the idea of what we call (and we'd never say this in public for fear of dissing what others may choose to do or have already done) "mock weddings." We were both of the same mind on commitment ceremonies and the like. (We're so compatible.) This is likely why we seldom ever got invited to them, perhaps our friends could read us like a book. Once Gavin Newsom started making same sex marriage seem possible, David all of a sudden starts saying little things about not wanting to get married again, he's done this already (I haven't!), and so on. Move forward a few years and as more states moved to the same sex marriage camp, David's objections become more frequent.

However in 2009 we did fill out the paperwork to become Registered Domestic Partners. We did it for the numbers to be recorded, I said it would help the cause. (Tho' in retrospect I wish we had not this). Then there was a spell when David kept pointing out that everyone in his wedding party, including his ex-wife, had died, or several of them had. I was wondering if he thought I'd think that was an omen. Anyway we're going along and **boom** it becomes legal in Washington state. Now virtually everyone is asking me / us / David, the same question: "When are you going to get married?" I'd respond with, "As soon as someone asks me" or, if David were present I'd say, "Ask David, I'm ready."

So I, and all of our friends with the questions, wore him down. So this summer he says okay, I'll marry you. Great. I get the applications, get them notarized, run down to the King County Recorder's office and get the license and we pick a random date. Jump back to page one where the wedding announcement that David wrote is . . . see the blank? We know three guys who could marry us: Gary Tucker, Joe Schneider, and Fred Birchman. Of the three Fred has expressed interest several times. Joe has mentioned it maybe once. Tucker not at all. But who to pick? David and I have known Tucker the longest. Seniority? Or desire? Fred seems to want to do this? What do do? Answer? The no fuss Justice of the Peace route Plus, really, internet ministers? We make an appointment at the courthouse for a random judge to marry us on a random day - it was a Wednesday at 5:30 PM (they are only allowed to do this after work when they are not on the City clock.) We have a plan. We are set.

Then . . .

Then

Are you sitting down?

During our cookie call one day David says to me, "Do you really think we should do this like this with none of our friends present?" And off we go. From there he's all like what about a special meal afterwards? Should we have a gathering at the house? Wouldn't a weekend be better? Our anniversary is in February. Valentine's Day is coming. I'm staring at my iPhone smiling yet groaning. I really don't want to plan a wedding. Or pay for one. I said to David, Canlis 2005 - **that** was our event - but let's discuss it later.

A few days later we were having Mark and Mario and David and Paul over for dinner because we were all about to travel together and Mark and Mario had never met David and Paul. We mention we are getting married the next week over dinner. Mario, a CPA, says, "You know if you marry at this point in the year it could cost you more money in taxes income tax for the year. Numbers are tossed around and I don't remember if I called Marci who does our taxes or not, but I think I did. You want some romance? Somehow the number \$9,000 got stuck in my head. I was in the middle of this massive pond project and \$9,000 seemed significant. And then there's David all back peddling on the lovey-dovey part of this. So I asked him, "Do you want to table this for now?" And the wedding was off. Our license to marry has expired and we must now start over. I don't think Bond's license to kill ever expires. Lucky guy.

The reason I'm not happy about the Registered Domestic Partnership thing is this: whatever stupid day you mailed in that application is now your wedding anniversary as far as the State is concerned. On June 30th of 2014 all RDPs will automatically convert to marriages. And your marriage date will be the day you got the RDP. For us that was in the middle of my worst times with the cancer crap. I remember filling it out at our kitchen table. But what day was that? I had to go check. Even if you get married on a day you pick now, the government will still revert to the RDP date. In our case December 2nd 2009. Dumb day. The situation is, as David and I like to say, "Stupido." Our current thinking is we are going to get married before the State automatically converts us to being married. I hate having my hand forced even when it's a good thing they are doing but I want some control. Next month when I start working on our tax returns it will be the last time I'll be doing them separately. And that's romantic.

My pond obsession. Once the walk was over I looked at the yard, I looked at David's pending sales and said to myself, "It's time." I have always known I wanted a proper Koi pond. And I have known where. And I'm planning the entire yard around it. But there's only so much I can do planting wise until it gets there. So many things fall like dominoes, there's an order, and I SEE THE ORDER in my mind. I see the order, and I see the finished product. So I started. First I had to find a guy with a back hoe to dig the hole. Then I had to order the lumber to form the box of the pond. (This is not a pretty pond with rocks and waterfalls all natural like. This is nothing like what I did in Matthew's Beach if you remember that.) Did you know you can get **60** fourteen foot long pressure treated **4 X 6s** delivered to your home from a lumber yard on the Olympic Peninsula, near Port Townsend for about **\$900** CHEAPER than you can from Dunn Lumber Company in Wallingford? Think about that: distance, gas, tolls and time coming and going . . . why was it so much less?

The day the lumber arrived they were filming a TV commercial 3 doors south of us in the alley. It's the one where the woman is taking out her trash and a raccoon flies out of her trash can at her. Need medical insurance? It was for some local medical insurance. They had the alley blocked with big 18 wheelers and food trucks, gaffers and a mini-restaurant (Skillset provided the food, we were all invited to eat). Thank god the lumber truck had a nice forklift. He parked a long block away and drove the **4 X 6s** down the alley in 3 loads.

Then I hired **Russell Water Gardens** in Redmond to send out two guys to construct the pond. Again not so much a pond as a 14 foot square holding tank. Think of popsicle sticks and a glue gun. Stack the sticks in a square with the ends overlapping and with each "rung" of sticks starting out opposite from the last where they overlap, alternating corners? Can you picture this? You are making a box out of popsicle sticks. Now imagine doing that in a deep hole with 14 foot long timbers stacked with the 6 inches going up. You end up with a perfect wooden

square half buried in the ground. It's five feet deep. Most women and all children would be underwater if standing it it. Yet it only looks 28 inches deep now. When I'm done it will seem even less deep. But it is deep. Raccoons and heron thus thwarted I hope.

I spaced every part of this project out by at least 2 weeks. I was carefully and slowly doing it, and loving every single minute of it - mostly all of the planning and thinking between parts of it. I wanted to hide all of the filter and pump and UV light and aeration towers in our former garage. Things had to be placed and buried just so. I was the one who figured all of this out.

A few weeks after the box construction they came back with the liner. We first lined the wood with old carpet that Tim brought from some house he was fixing up. Carpet first, liner second, no wood touching liner, liner in place, ready for water. David and I added gravel to the plant shelf first. And then we were ready for water. (He's always there at the end somehow.) We then left the country for 17 days.

During this pond period David couldn't get my attention for anything so he decided to use his new Apple TV device to stream every single episode of **Rescue Me** to our TV room. Day, night, whatever . . . he watched like, what? 7 seasons? at least 10 shows a season? 70 hours of **Rescue Me**? I didn't mind. I was deep into pond imagining. When I wasn't outside obsessing with that I started going to sleep at 8:30 or 9:00 for few weeks. My days were long.

Somewhere in all of this our housecleaner of I think 15 or 16 years, her name was Petia, retired. She and her son moved to Las Vegas. This was a shakeup that we are still adjusting to. We have a service now. However a service is not like a woman you have known for 15 years.

Change That Can Change Your Life In A Most Negative And Lasting Way

And somewhere in all of this (who am I kidding, it was June 4th, I have the date seared into my memory) Starbucks bought a mediocre bakery in San Francisco and decided to stop serving the cookies and pastries they've been serving for years. Now they serve crap. Crap from a bakery they own. This may help them but it has rocked my world in the most negative way. Now when it's afternoon cookie time I have to make two stops. One at Starbucks for iced espresso and another somewhere else to get a decent cookie. Starbucks used to have wonderful iced lemon pound bread. Now they don't. Now they have a bad version of lemon bread but with no icing. When I voice opposition to this he said, "Oh here's icing in this little cup." The old lemon pound cake you could eat while you were driving, it had great icing on it. Do they think I want to mess around with a knife to spread bad icing on mediocre cake in my car?

And the new cookies suck. And they are expensive for their size and quality. But they will heat them up for you. I don't want a cookie heated up, I want it to taste good. And heating it up is an affectation. It's like when they pour iced tea over ice and shake it. Really? What is the point of this? Is it to help justify the price of the iced tea? Whenever I order it I ask them to knock it off and just pour the tea over the ice. You are reading this thinking, "Oh my god he does go on and on about stupid stuff," and perhaps so but if you really want to know what gets under my skin it's bad change, pointless change with negative results. I'd stop going entirely but the problem is their doppio shot over ice is simply better than everyone else's. Mind you this only applies to this one drink. I'd never order a cappuccino at Starbucks unless I was on

I-5 between Bakersfield and Redding.

Oh, if you want a good cookie the absolute best cookie you can find in Seattle will come from the Wandering Goose on 15th or the Volunteer Park Cafe at 17th and Galer. Same woman owns both places (I think) and they have the same cookies and they are amazing. Not cheap either BUT at least bigger than Starbucks and a much higher quality. I just want my money's worth and these cookies deliver in a most satisfying way.

Ticking down that list when David was finished watching every episode of **Rescue Me** ever made he turned his attention to getting me to go to New York for a short trip. He failed. I could not leave the pond and there was stuff going down at work that I wanted to be present for every day. So he went without me. I took care of Opal and made great pond progress.

On September 3rd, the day after Labor Day, David and I met up with David Wertheimer and Paul Beaudet at Seatac airport and we all boarded a British Air plane, in full on first class, and we flew to Amsterdam. You might remember David and Paul from years ago during our Guemes Island days. We had to part ways back then when they arbitrarily started to pronounce "Guemes" in a way we didn't approve of. But we have stayed in touch. We don't see each other often, perhaps 2 or 3 times in a year at this phase of our lives, but we went to see them in January on the island . . . back to the house we used to own as a foursome. Sometime that weekend we mentioned we were thinking of taking a gay cruise in September and told them of the ports of call. Less than a week later they inform us by email that they have booked a stateroom on the boat. They are going. We had not done this, still stuck in the planning and worrying phrase but we took a leap and booked the same cruise. Once I was past the fear of doing it (of being gone so long a time), and once I picked our stateroom off a chart on the internet, I was done. I memorized the start and end dates and moved on.

The only thing I like less that shopping for clothes is planning a trip like this. But the two Davids, my god, they do seem to live for it. All of the flights, the hotel, the apartment in Barcelona we rented for 4 days, all of it was taken care of. It was like having your own personal travel agent who'd give you updates over cocktails every night at five. But every time my David would try to run something past me I'd say the same thing, "I will show up on September 3rd and do what I'm told."

So, we flew to Amsterdam for less than 24 hours and then took a taxi to a huge ship, it was a Celebrity, the ones the the big X on them. On the ship we connected with Mario Sybers and Mark Kontulis and their friend Brett. So there were 7 of us we could hang out with on the boat. It was soon-to-be Mark's 40th birthday and for his birthday he was getting two gay cruises back-to-back. Each was a 10 day cruise. We stopped at cities along the coast of France, Portugal, and Spain. We ended up in Barcelona. The photo on page one of this letter, used in our wedding announcement, was taken in front of the Guggenheim in Bilbao. The main reason I wanted to do this cruise, other than the joy of watching Mark on ship filled with gays, was to see the Guggenheim and see Barcelona. And did I ever see Barcelona! David and David and Paul forced me to walk and walk and walk everywhere and see many things I absolutely did not care about. On vacation I want to sit at a sidewalk cafe and sip cappuccinos and watch Spanish people walk about and listen to people saying things I can't understand. And then walk a few blocks and do that again at another cafe. This is not the experience I had. I'd detail all of the many things we did but I feel funny making people hear about my travels. (Is it because I know what my mind is doing when they tell me about theirs?) I don't feel

good making people look at slides either.

And we have slides. But not of this trip. This trip is documented on iPads now. One of the things eliminated from the garage this year was the screen and the slide projector I have had since 1972, and about 30 boxes of slides. David and I are watching tray after tray of slides one last time and then THROWING THEM AWAY. If there is a really good slide in the bunch we pull it out and save it. Most of these images are prior to our meeting, so 30 years older or more. There are a few trays of slides from our early years together. And so many pictures void of people, those all get tossed. All of these endless photos of nature or buildings people take. Trust me, 35 years on when you are downsizing you won't remember or care. We pull the decent images that have people from our pasts in them and literally pour the rest of the tray, hundreds of slides, into the trash. I'm not kidding here. We are about half-way through all of the trays. I have a small stack of slides culled. When we are finished I am going to mail all the saved slides to one of those places on the internet that will convert them to jpgs so I can put the keepers in one of those digital picture frames. That's the plan. Soon the slide projector and screen and all of these empty trays will have a new home at Gary and Curtis' house.

Okay, let me review. I think I hit all of the bullet points. Or the big ones anyway. No one really cares about change in my working environment so let's just skip that one. (You might be saying, "We're skipping this topic after suffering through all of that cookie baloney?")

Suffice it to say there was change where I work and it ended up not just being good for me, it ended up being great for me. The change was in ownership (no, I am not now nor have I ever been the owner) and who I answer to. A week or so after the dust settled (there really was no dust, that's just an expression), quite by accident really, I went to a meeting that I thought would not pertain to me. It was for my staff. But I care about my staff and I wanted to know how things were trickling down to them. At this meeting I found out that several different benefits were now going to be offered to them, *and me*. I'm sure to 99% of you this won't seem major but after 27 years in this business I am no longer buying health insurance on my own. (Real estate agents don't get any benefits at all - they are on their own unless they have a spouse with benefits.) I am now part of a group plan. This was possible with my former employer as well but let's face it, I had a pre-existing condition and the group offered to me before wasn't in line with all of my medical providers. My new employer now provides me with health insurance with the same company I had been with for 27 years. And guess what? David is on my policy now. I pay for David to be there out of every check but what I pay for David now is a tiny fraction of the crAZy number we used to pay each month when we were on our own. We are like other people. Finally.

A few months after this change at work there was meeting for owners (which I am not) and managers (that's me) in Walla Walla. A retreat, not quite a convention. David drove me over, dropped me at the hotel, and took off for Spokane to see his mom. Opal, of course, in tow. I had a full day alone in Walla Walla, then two full days of meetings, and then David returned for the big wine dinner the last night of the exchange. Everyone left the next day (a Friday) but David and I stayed on with Opal touring the town and having nice meals.

And finally in October I went home to visit my mom and dad and sister and other NON-distant family members. (That was only 9 people this trip as 2 of them live in San Francisco and couldn't be there, 9 were there, plus me, plus 2 in SF = 12, see, I wasn't joking before. Nelson party, table for 12.) Everyone is well. My mom and dad have a nice apartment in a little town

called Grand Blanc. My sister lives about 2 miles away. My Aunt is about 50 or 60 miles away. And everyone is still ticking. Everything there is about 45 to 50 miles away from where you are. My friends and cousins and family they think nothing of this. Me? I think driving 7 miles is a big deal at home. There I'm torn in every direction. I put over 900 miles on a rental car there on my previous trip home in 2012. Crazy.

Short trips to the homeland are hard since there people to see, who I'd like to see or spend more time with, and there just isn't the time. Plus there are things happening in Detroit that fascinate me (good things, not the bad things you read about). I'd like to explore there more, but time. But shorter trips are better than no trips and I keep trying to make it each year.

As I type this I have Coco, the sister Weimaraner, curled up on my feet. Literally. I'm at my desk, she's on my feet. So cute. Opal doesn't do this, she stays in bed. Opal, like me, would stay in bed literally all day if she could.

And now, look at that, I'm done with 2013. And I have 2 hours to take a short walk with the dogs, stretch a bit from sitting all day, take a shower and find appropriate party clothes for tonight. Joe always throws a great party and it's always a sincere pleasure to see Kim. So off we go. I hope to have this letter in the mail to you by Tuesday. And I am so looking forward to being on a plane to Mexico on Friday. And tomorrow I'm going to rake leaves and clean up the yard as much as I can.



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PS - Darn it all! Almost forgot the troubles in Palm Springs. How interesting that PS should become a PS. Our sewer line broke. Under the house. The house is on a concrete slab. In 2007 we had lovely terrazzo floors poured on the concrete slab. And now we had to have them jackhammered in the dining room to get to the break. This surprise happened literally 10 days after the hot water tank blew its circuit board and had to be replaced. Both of these things happened while our friend Michael was renting the house for two weeks. Not only was all this depressing (or should I do this again and type "depre\$\$ing" ?) David and I felt awful that Michael was there dealing with electricians and plumbers and the like. It was certainly ruining his time there and it was stressing us out back here. Michael was a trooper though and did wonders setting things up and overseeing some work. David then flew down a week later and interviewed plumbing firms, had scopes and camera work done in the line, and hired our old 2007 contractor, Mark Hahn, to make it all right again.

But even with troubles like this, we can only hope that 2014 is a good to us as 2013 has been.