

2014

Friday December 12th 2014

Holiday Greetings!

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

Last night I had four drinks and two weimaraners.

One of those was excessive and one was not. We were at a 12 person holiday dinner party in a private room at Staple and Fancy in Ballard and the waitress kept asking if I'd like another. Each time I'd calculate: I'm not driving, I'm taking tomorrow off (today, to do this), I'm not slurring my words, the cocktails are pretty and festive looking (Negronis, a warm red color with an orange peel), and soon I'll be sleeping with two 60 pound dogs for as long as I liked with no alarm clock jolting me at the other end. So each time she asked me I'd say, "Sure!" with enthusiasm.

Hours later David and I were home and on the couch in our current TV room with Opal and Coco (the two weimaraners) watching *blackish*, a new sitcom I find very clever and funny, and I felt odd. Nothing happened, I didn't get sick or anything, I just felt odd and could tell I'd crossed the line by one. I announced to David that this was the last time in my life I'd be having four drinks in one day and I headed to the King sized bed with two very happy dogs for unending slumbers.

So far today has been very relaxed. I woke up easily at eight sandwiched between two dogs stretched out on either side of me. Heaven. Absolute heaven. I just don't even want to move much less get out of bed. "Flanked" was the word that came to mind as I slowly woke up, flanked by two warm solid sound asleep dogs. I felt great. I did not feel like I had four cocktails the night before. I made my cappuccino as always and ate my morning banana with Adams No-Stir peanut butter while reading the *Seattle Times* and the *New York Times*. Yes, real papers with pages you turn by hand that we find on our doorstep every morning. Every day starts this way. Days that don't start this way are bad days. I never want to be rushed in the morning. If I have a class in Lake Forest Park or a legal seminar at the airport that start early, say 8:00 AM (both have happened

this year), and I have to factor in what is becoming insane Seattle traffic, and time becomes an issue, and part of my routine has to give, well those are not days I like.

[An Aside]

You know I try to not get overly political in this letter. No one really cares what I think and telling people what I think just isn't that important to me. BUT shit is getting out of control out there. I'm sitting in our kitchen right now trying to think of the happy parts of 2014 while typing this letter. And I have CNN on as I usually do. And WTF !?! I look up and see ariel shots of another high school above the crawl. There's another school shooting, this time much closer to home in Portland, Oregon. And then I flash back to a previous Christmas letter. I have this memory of fighting to not comment on a school shooting while trying to be in an "up" mood while writing the holiday letter last year. So I went to google (I do this a lot). I was right but a year off. A year and two days. But the sad part is that I was right. This means this is the second year when this has happened just before Christmas. Today is the 12th. Two years ago it was the 14th. (Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut.) Every time this happens I just can't wrap my mind around it nor can I understand how the NRA can take the stance they do on these events. And POOF. My happy holiday letter has become political in a way I don't want it to. I'm certain I just lost 4 readers. Ah, well. Sorry.

Proofreading

There are a few people in my life who love to find errors in this letter. Typing errors, grammatical errors, spelling errors, spellcheck swap outs that I don't even control, all sorts of things like that. I welcome this because I just can't write this AND read it too in the few days I have to do it prior to Kinkos and bulk mail. It's a process that consumes a solid week of my life. To say it's stressful being the writer, the publisher, and the distributor on a short holiday deadline wouldn't be saying enough. These few people (Lisa, Janice, Alice, Merritt) (hmmmm, all women, go figure) often take a red pen to it, correct everything they find that they don't like, and then mail it back to me. *I love this.* It's the only time I actually stop and read this, when I get their edits. And, compulsive me, after the fact I go into the Pages document and make the corrections *that I like.* Anyway sitting next to me as a reminder of last year is Lisa's edit of the letter. Here's my favorite of last years comments:

"Your extra spaces make me crazy."

Lisa wants to re-educate me about spacing TWICE after every period. We have had that debate several times. She gets typesetters and graphic design people to weigh in on her side, she goes on and on about computers and the internet, etc. And I'm certain she's right. I just am not going to change. I like white space it seems. It seems to particularly drive her nuts when it's the bold heading above a paragraph, sort of my topic announcer, that I often double space *between the words* of. (Example coming up!)

Lisa drew arrows with her red pen from her comment above to all the extra spaces. Every time I look at it I literally laugh. I think she thinks this is a college dissertation (She edits those for Eastern Michigan University for a living). This is not a dissertation.

There's A Lot Going On !

I don't know how else to say it: There's a lot going on right now. In our lives. This week. This month. There's a ton of supposedly secret stuff going on. No one other than David and me is supposed know. Alas, the best laid plans . . . you know that old saw. But hang in there. It will all be revealed by page 27.

To start, let me jump back to yesterday, a fairly typical day for this holiday season. I have the mornings pretty much off these days as meetings at my office are on hiatus until January 5th when "school starts back up" again. But that doesn't stop things from happening. Before I could put the lid back on the Adams No-Stir peanut butter jar my phone was ringing and texts were vibrating. Agents needed me. Thankfully they didn't start reaching out until after "my coffee time" was complete. One agent was puzzling through the process of protecting her sellers from buyers whose purchase loan on a 1.1 million dollar house was denied. Notices had to be delivered, strategies decided upon. At the same time another of my agents working with a buyer had to deal with a devious yet somewhat stupid (traits that don't usually go together) agent on the other side that didn't know what constituted "delivery" in the legal sense. So I had to explain.

All the way from my kitchen to my desk at work it was one call after another between me and my two agents with the problems, and between two attorneys I consult with to be absolutely sure I'm giving the correct advice to my agents even tho' in both of these cases I was 99% sure I was. I like attorneys because after 19 years of management I'm smart enough to understand all of the legal *concepts* but the attorneys can provide me with *fancy terms* I can toss around. The fancy terms mean what I already understand but they are fun to know. It's like name dropping; I call it term dropping.

All of these back and forth calls didn't stop during my whole commute. Thus I was not able to listen to Marc Maron's *WFT* podcast in my car which is my favorite commute thing to do. And then when I got to the Downtown Dog Lounge to drop Opal off for her half day there, I had to be the guy who was on his cell phone WHILE whispering and motioning to the DDL staff while handing off my dog. I hate THAT guy yet I was forced to be that guy. It also meant I didn't get to smile and think sexy thoughts about the staff member at the DDL who I have a major crush on. He always has a huge smile for me and is so engaging and he seems to love Opal. I always seem to find a way to have him check Opal in. When David annoys me I remind him I'm certain _____ wants to run away with me and Opal and start a simpler, dog focused new life somewhere far from here. Not unlike how Olivia Pope did with Jake on *Scandal* ! David seems unfazed and goes on doing whatever he was doing that brought this up in the first place.

Here's A Not Very Fancy Term

While I try to stop thinking about _____ and get the image of us on a deserted Pacific island out of my head, I should tell you this (Why? For the sake of accuracy?): Washington State law changed and we're not supposed call real estate agents "agents" anymore. Now they are "brokers" and "managing brokers" There are no agents. I don't like this. I love the term "real estate agent" and think I'll always use it. I learned this business 29 years ago with that term. I like the sound of it. Whereas "real estate broker" leaves me cold. Plus I used to be the "Managing Broker" when they were all called agents. Now that they are called brokers my title changed (in the eyes of the State) to "Branch Manager." I don't know about you but when I hear "Branch Manager" I think of some sad guy locking up a car rental outpost at the end of a long day. I don't want to manage a branch. I want to managing agents. I love doing that.

Still yesterday. I'm at my desk at work before ten still solving these problems. Ten sounds great but keep in mind I've been working since eight or so. I think of myself as always working, on call 24/7. I have a stack of files (contracts) to review that I barely dent. I wander around my office checking in with my agents. (See, like spacing twice after periods, I like know what's right and wrong but then do as I please! Agents, agents, agents, agents.) Emails come in from everywhere with crap I have to then tend to. One email in seems to cause three to go out and then more come in on the same topic and on it goes. At 1:45 I realize two things: 1) I have not eaten and I'm getting shaky. I shake and get easily annoyed if I don't eat often enough. And 2) that at 2:30 I have an appointment with my dermatologist. Gotta go. I pack up my bag and off I go.

Where can you eat fast yet not eat crap? I love having this debate in my mind as my blood sugar plummets and time is running out. The dermatologist is on First Hill (duh) so what's between here and there? The Marination Station. But it's raining. This is a concern because the place has no seating to speak of inside. And there's always a crowd. I decide I'll eat in my car. I go and not one person is there. When I first walk up I think it's closed. I pull the door and it opens. I tell the guy at the counter that this is the first time I've been in there when no one was there.

I'm only three minutes late for the dermatologist. Every time I go to a specialist just for shits and giggles I call them on the phone the day of my appointment and say in my most cheery voice, "Hello I'm calling to confirm my 2:30 appointment today and make sure *you're running on time.*" Not one office has ever addressed the second half of that sentence. They all confirm but they never offer up about the schedule. When they don't, before they hang up, I jump in again, as they are trying to hang up and say, "And is the doctor running on time today?" I make them answer. Still I waited 26 minutes to be seen. I have something David and I call "Old Man Head." We have called it this for over 25 years. We started calling it Old Man Head when we were thirty and worked at Greenlake Realty and we were certain one of the agents there was about to die of it.

Young people can be so dumb. We are perfect examples. We made fun of Old Man Head and now we have Old Man Head. Still it's one of our many in-jokes that keep us together. So there I am completely naked with this young albino man who has a can of liquid nitrogen in his hands and he's "freezing" all of the red spots and blotches on my head and the tops of my ears that constitute Old Man Head. There's nothing that needs to be cut out of me at this time, my skin from neck to toes checks out fine, no required "procedures" this year. I have had two "procedures" in the past 10 years. I guess that's not too bad for a former redhead who's had many killer sunburns in his time and spends a good deal of time either gardening here or in the deserts of Coachella Valley.

David is picking up the dog at the DDL today. I'm not worried as I know that _____ only has eyes for me. I head directly home to my laptop so I can google this:

synovial cyst

The entire reason I wanted to see my dermatologist was for this. Of course I didn't know it was for that. I thought I had a sliver in my finger. When you google this you get all of this info about your spine. But I had a huge and growing thing on my finger. It started to grow a day after I spent a whole day spreading mulch barehanded in my winter garden. Sometimes wood splinters get imbedded and cause bumps. I don't know. But I have sharp objects like small scissors and tweezers and so I attacked. Nothing worked. Drew no blood from the sharp objects either - that seemed odd. So I waited a few days and it doubled in size and kept going. If you google it you have to do some digging (pun intended) to find an example of the synovial cyst on a finger. But there it was. Do not google it prior to a meal. It was less gross when my dermatologist did it than the video I found. When he did it it was a mild curiosity. Online it was disgusting. Anyway, mine is gone now. And I don't have to stop mulching with bare hands. Yet.

After my synovial cyst was a thing of the past, I asked my dermatologist what causes them. He said, "Birthdays."

On the way home I finished listening to Marc Maron's *WTF* interview with Julia Sweeny. One of the better ones I thought. Of course I love all the *WTF* podcasts that touch on *Saturday Night Live* in any fashion.

I got home in time to cut what's left of my hair, buzz cut, we own a pair of clippers, shave, shower, and get dressed up for the party at Staple and Fancy. Staple and Fancy is about 10 miles from our house, maybe 12. Guess how long it now takes to drive from one side of Seattle to the other on a Thursday night at 5:30 PM when a party starts at 6:00 PM? We should have left Georgetown at least 30 minutes sooner than we did.

The aforementioned dinner party was thrown by Janelle Steinberg as a thank you to some of the real estate agents she has worked with over the past year. Happily for me

all but two of them work at my Eastlake office, and one is my husband. So I got to attend as a “plus one,” eat wonderful food, over indulge on Negronis, and visit with some of my agents in a completely different setting than usual.

And that was yesterday. A fairly typical day in my life: Espresso, Opal, podcast in the car, work, life errands, personal hygiene, and some socializing. And a cocktail. Every day there is one cocktail, usually as we prepare dinner together and listen to Rachel Maddow start her show with a great winding story that always leads to her setting someone straight on something. We like her. We know someone who thinks she is smug however. She’s a gay.

[Another Aside]

Another in-joke from our 30 year span of joking: referring to people not as gay, but as “a gay.” We were once on a cruise ship that had a movie theatre. This particular cruise, for mostly old straight white people, was only showing Julia Roberts movies on at sea. We went to several of them. Were it not for this cruise I don’t think I’d even know Julia Robert’s oeuvre. After *My Best Friend’s Wedding* two very elderly woman were leaving from the front of the theatre passing us in the back as they left (it’s only like 8 rows of seats) chatting loudly. As old people do. They both loved the movie and particularly liked Rupert Everett. One elderly woman turns to the next and says, “He’s a gay you know.” We found this charming. Not judgement, just the fact. We have been saying this ever since.

Seth Rogen Is An Idiot

That’s all I have to say about that for now. I might have more to say about it later. Hang in there.

On A Scale Of One To Ten ?

How badly did I behave in this situation:

I needed to go to The Container Store. Truth be told, I look for reasons to need to go to The Container Store. And recently I found a great reason (more on that later). It’s in Bellevue. I have to cross a bridge to the suburbs to go there so you know I must really like it. Opal and I go. I pull in the parking garage and I get a ticket from the machine. I spiral down to level whatever and I park. I put the ticket on my dashboard. I head off to the elevators to go where I need to go. I shop. I spend hundreds of dollars. Some of what I bought is being shipped to me. Some I fill my Ford Escape with. I have two long receipts. I have bags. The bags are large and say The Container Store on them. Some things are too big for bags so they have colorful tape on them that says The Container Store. Opal is in the front seat and the cargo area is full up with stuff from

The Container Store. One look at my vehicle and it's pretty obvious I spent serious money at The Container Store.

I drive to the pay booth and hand my ticket to the ticket taker. It is rare that I go to The Container Store during the week. It's rare that I go "over there" to begin with, but usually I would do this on a weekend. Parking is free on the weekend. Parking is NOT free during the week even tho' it's Christmas shopping time and I have crossed a bridge to this god forsaken place to support this one store. I hand him my ticket. The man says, "\$8.00." I hand him my two very long receipts (one for what is in the car, one for what's being shipped). He says, "Your ticket is not validated." Really? I say I'm not paying. He says I am. There is a discussion. A very polite and calm one. He explains the free parking only on the weekends bit and he wants the ticket validated or \$8.00 today. I explain that I'd have to park again and take elevators and such. I point to the cargo hold area. See? I really was in The Container Store. Still he thinks I should just go back upstairs with my receipts and have the ticketed validated, no big deal. I decide to stand on principle. I roll up my window up *and turn my car off*. I get out my iPhone and start doing things, checking email, texting people, etc. What we have here is a stand off. Sometimes a minute can seem really long. In less than a minute he freaks out and motions for my window to go down. He says I can't do what I'm doing and points behind me (I'm holding up a growing line of 3 cars). I point at all of my Container Store bags. We are making little progress. Again he says I cannot do what I am doing. And then I say one of my favorite things in my most pleasant tone of voice:

"Call the police and have me arrested."

I start to roll my window back up. It gets almost to the top and he motions again, hands me back my receipts, and lifts the bar to let me pass. My ticket is magically validated. It's a Christmas miracle. "Happy Holidays," I chortle as I drive out!

Saturday December 13th

Hey. It's 12-13-14. If I were at work today I would be reviewing files and I'd get to write "12-13-14" on each one for the date reviewed. I heard it will be 89 years before this happens again. I'm not making plans that far out at this point. Calendar dates are fun though. I comment to Tracie each time one comes up that is special in some way. Remember all of that end of 1999 stuff? The internet and all the machines in the world were going to crash. Remember that? It didn't happen.

The local newspaper today was full of good news. The old PCC (the one we go to now) is moving to Columbia City next year. It will be over three time larger than it is today. That's good but even better the old PCC is becoming a Third Place Books. I still love bookstores and the Third Place Books in Lake Forest Park is great but far far away. And the *New York Times* has a long article about the return of low down payment loans

for houses. 3% down? It's coming back! I find this hard to believe. Getting a mortgage these days is not like it was in the old days. I know, I did a refinance this year on our house in Georgetown. I was hoping as I did it that it would be my last mortgage application ever. It's just painful. The whole process is painful. But 3.625% fixed!

Secretly I Want Two Dogs

In the meantime I dog sit. If you have a nice dog ~ a plus sized dog ~ that can give Opal, a 58 pound weimaraner, a run for her money, well I'm your guy for short slots of time. I'm perfect for that weekend out of town, or when you're having a party and need your dog outta there for a day, or you're moving, things like that. We have a fully fenced secure yard, it's covered in cedar wood chips, and I happen to be where that copycat on TV got the idea of "dog whisperer" from. Not many people know this but he totally stole that from me. I whisper best with dogs over 40 pounds (and by this I don't mean fat dust mop dogs). No dust mop dogs please. And no "gay" dogs like laberdoodles. That should not even be allowed to be a thing. I guess just no dog that I'd be embarrassed to be seen walking on the street. I make judgements when I see grown men on the street with any dog that might have the adjective "teacup" associated with it or that were obviously picked out by their wife or girlfriend or mistress.

This weekend I have Opal's sister Coco. Brianne, Coco's owner, has gone skiing for a weekend. I am home all weekend (good timing is a part of this offer) so it worked out. Coco loves me and loves coming here. You can just tell. I often remind Brianne to get me in her will so Coco will be taken care of. People ski into trees all of the time you know. Don't make me name names or cite examples. Because I can.

I took a break yesterday from writing this letter to take them to a dog park I recently found just off of the Kent-Des Moines road. Just down I-5 a bit. I've only been there twice now, once with Tim Allen and yesterday with David. Maybe it's just that it's new, but I like it much more than the park at Magnuson. It's far though, about 14 miles to get there. But it's all I-5 with no lights, no side streets, and no crosstown traffic. The park is basically at the freeway exit. So very it's fast. Or it seems faster than driving to Magnuson. Certainly it's *less annoying* that driving to Magnuson. Plus, to quote this year's best song, "I'm all about the south, bout the south - no north."

I'm Torn

I love Lizzy Caplan. I have been a fan ever since she showed up on a short-lived TV show called *Party Down*. And I like James Franco. And I like politics. They have a screwball comedy coming out about assassinating Kim Jong-un. The topic appeals to me. The previews appeal to me. She appeals to me. But there's a problem: Seth Rogen is in the movie.

Kiss 2014 Goodbye

Let's get to it, shall we. It's been 9 years since I've enjoyed a year as much as I did last year. Last year, 2014, was a great year for us. Many small victories. Some large ones. Plenty of exciting things happened. Some exciting things are still happening this as I write this letter. We both spent the whole year being healthy and happy and busy.

And busy is good, especially when it's busy with work. I don't mean to sound crass and make it sound like the year was only good because of money, but when there is work there is usually money. And money just makes things a tad easier. Especially when you're a 1099, self-employed person. When you're in a self-employed household, as we are, years like the last six are just brutal. Remember August of 2007 was when it all started to go into the crapper. Many people didn't figure this out until the middle of 2008, but housing sales stats clearly tell you that August of 2007 is when the financial crisis they still refer to on all of the news shows as the worst ever began. And though 2012 and 2013 were better in Seattle, nothing in those two years were like this year.

The real estate market in Seattle this year was crazy red hot. The first thing that came to mind as it was unfolding in January was, "Huh . . . this feels a lot like it was in 2007 just before the crash." Prices were going up each week it seemed. Not because the sellers or their agents were raising prices. It was because for every house that went on the market there were always multiple buyers who wanted to buy it. Thus what we all call "multiple offers," soon shortened to just "multiples," when we all talked to each other. As in, "I'm writing up an offer for my Georgetown buyers. Multiples again." Or "I'm presenting my fifth offer tonight for my Ravenna buyers. They've already lost out in four other multiples." That was how the entire spring went. And it just kept getting more and more intense. I don't think I talked to one of my agents who ever presented this year alone, as in one seller with a house and one buyer who wanted it. The question soon became just, "How many?" And we all knew what that meant, "How many other offers are you competing with?" The answer was sometimes shocking. Imagine the answer is 11. Or 19. Or 24. Even when the answer was only 4 or 5 - even that is tough. One of my office's listings was in Wedgwood. A modest house, nothing fancy, but evidently in the right school district. It had 41 offers on it. It was not uncommon for houses to sell \$100,000 over the asking price. Seriously. Sometimes more. Granted those were extreme cases. But still . . . \$43,000 over asking or \$27,000 over asking was becoming the norm. Buyers knew they would be paying full price. The real question was how much more than full price are you willing to go to get this house? And what protections for you are you willing to forgo? Financing contingencies? Forget those if you want to win. Inspection contingencies? Really? You expect to win with an inspection contingency? Title? Neighborhood review? You want to know what?

People out there think agents or sellers create these conditions. They do not. Buyers who want that house at any cost and with any risk create these conditions. If I had a dollar for everyone who asked me this year, "Is it because of Amazon?" We could buy a

bigger house in Palm Springs and pay for a full remodel after we did. It was not because of Amazon. That would be like living in Atlanta and blaming Coke or CNN employees if the housing market got hot. In Seattle it was simply because of supply and demand. Seattle is a fixed size and surrounded by bodies of water. It can't get bigger, it can't sprawl out. There is a limited supply of houses. And tons of people, not just Amazon employees, want to live here. It's as simple as that. Plus what about the Boeing employees? The Starbucks employees? No one blamed them. It's just supply and demand. And this year, 2014, had HUGE DEMAND.

People out there also think agents love these conditions. Really? Think about this for a minute. If you are an agent and you're lucky enough to have buyers and you present an offer for them on a house and they don't get it because they were only able to pay \$10,000 more than asking and they are crestfallen, how do you think you feel? You end up counseling them in matters less to do with real estate and more to do with life and you take them out again the next day shopping for a new house. Now repeat that seven times. Imagine you lose out once, then twice, and then five times and now you're on your 7th offer with them. How do they feel? How do you feel? And how much money have you made so far? It's brutal for everyone involved. Agents were working their asses off and making no income. Buyers were devastated to keep losing out. There was a lot of plain old sadness in the air. Also think about this: once you lose out five or six times, how determined are you the next time? What risks will you take to not lose out again? How much will you go over asking this time? AND suppose there are 14 offers on one house. Only one buyer (and only one agent) gets the house. What do you think happens to the other 13 buyers? And the other 13 agents? The frenzy grows. That's what 2014 was like, start to end.

Bringing this around to our careers how did we fare?

Well for me it turned my job into one of a grief counselor at times. Often one of my agents would be the agent with the buyers who lost out in multiples repeatedly. I ended up trying to cheer people up, keep them in the game, and keep them liking their career choice. Occasionally things would escalate to where a buyer or seller demanded talk to me. This is very rare but in a market such as we had this year, it did happen several times. So all of that in addition to just MORE work. More of literally everything. More legal questions, more ethical questions, more rule monitoring, more advice, more files to review, more problems to solve. Just more of everything at a much faster pace. It kept me busy in a way I was not during our recent great depression, a.k.a., the Dark Years.

But David was even busier. As you know David is partners with Kevin Gaspari. And I can say that now with no possibility of confusion. I no longer need to put the word "business" in front of "partners" as David and I are no longer partners. Now I only refer to David only as "my husband" and the partner word is now relegated to business context where it always belonged. Life is linguistically easier for me. I can't say I'm paying any attention to the terminology David uses so I can't say if it is for him or not.

Back to Kevin and David. They had an astounding year. To avoid bragging and being boastful I won't say how many real estate transactions they had this year, but I will say they set a "personal best." (Which is a phrase I only know because of some cheesy movie that started Mariel Hemingway that I once saw called, you guessed it, *Personal Best*. I think it was about sports. It is likely the last thing about sports I have ever watched. There might have been a gay in it, perhaps that's why I was conned into watching it in the first place.) Ah . . . oh, yeah, back to David. So their year was good. Thankfully they were often the agent with the house to sell so they had the happier task of receiving multiples, the right end of that stick. They did have buyers as well and yes they lost out a few times, but, well, they're really good at this and mostly their buyers got the house. Or condo. Or townhome. Or not yet built new construction project. It didn't matter, they often won and thus had their best years (each of them) ever. Let me leave the work aspect of this year now. Suffice it to say the market was red hot and both David and I were busier than we could have ever imagined going into this year. We were expecting 2012 all over again, something just ho-hum average. We both got something completely unexpected but very welcome and gratefully received.

January, February, and March

Well Opal turned 3 on January 2nd. For her birthday we adored her. Thus she couldn't tell the difference between her birthday and any other day of the year. David went to Spokane for week to see family and help his mother get settled. I stayed home alone and worked in the yard when I wasn't toiling at the office. And, of course, we turned the three day Martin Luther King Jr birthday weekend into a six day weekend by adding on a Thursday and a Tuesday and we went to Palm Springs. Here's the thing: we always go to Palm Springs over the three day MLK weekend. It always ends up being six days and we're always there. This was true before we bought our house in Palm Springs, we'd visit and stay in hotels. Then there was MLK weekend in 2001 when we stayed at Rick and Tom's house and it rained and we had nothing to do so we wandered into an open house and bought it. THAT was MLK weekend too. And since we've owned the house, which will be 14 years on the MLK weekend coming up, we always go there then. It's our thing. I don't see it ever changing.

We Upgraded Our Stove

Which stove? Well if you remember, and why would you, we have owned a house in Palm Springs for 14 years that has never had an oven in it. We had a gas cooktop but no oven. We took out a wall and the oven was in it. That was 12 or 13 years ago. No oven since. But since we always eat out when we are "on vacation" we didn't care. This year the trip was all about putting our kitchen back together again. Remember we ended 2013 with a broken sewer line under the kitchen floor, jackhammered terrazzo floors and the slab under them, a mess. It got put back together but not the dishes, appliances, and all of the stuff. So MLK was our put the kitchen back together again trip. But just prior to this trip, literally a week or so prior, our friends Matt and Maggie

Carroll closed on a townhome they bought in Palm Springs. I fished around to see if moving things from here to there was in the works. It was. They were taking stuff down there. How much stuff? In a truck? I saw an opportunity. We had a stove here. It was gas. We liked it. But it was no Wolf range. We had a Wolf range once. A Wolf range was a friend of ours. You sir are no Wolf range. (A bit mangled but does anyone recognize that?)

It took more than I thought it would to convince David to do what I wanted to do. I thought we should ask Matt and Maggie if we could put our current range on their truck and deliver it to our house in Palm Springs. Our house and their house can't be more than a mile and a half apart. I figured we had to buy a stove somewhere eventually, why not up here where we live and seriously cook and why not get the stove we know we really want? And our cheaper stove would be perfect as a stove we rarely use. I worked to timing angle on Matt and Maggie's truck, I worked the super low low simmer angle on the Wolf range, I worked the "Don't worry about it, the year's starting out pretty good" angle. I had to sell him on this. It was an odd reversal of our spending roles! So we now have a fully functioning kitchen in our vacation home. We have yet to bake anything there. But it gave our usual MLK weekend a purpose it doesn't normally have.

My Google Searches Are Sad These Days

I find myself googling things like "rectal hydration." I know being dehydrated is a bad thing so at first blush I wasn't sure about this one. Hydration can be good. Rectal can be good. So is rectal hydration bad? What kind of world are we living in where I have to research these things to understand the talking heads on CNN and MSNBC (and occasionally FOX for the fun of it). Although if I really want to learn things I can just stick with Jon Stewart and Steven Colbert. And Bill Maher. Three of the smartest guys out there. Of the three, if I had to pick just one to run things, Bill Maher gets my vote.

Hey Did you see that there was a fire at a hotel, I think it was a fire, just recently and everyone had to be evacuated to the streets? Or was it a bomb threat? I don't know, that's not the point. Evacuated. The video of the crowd in the streets showed regular people, people like you and me, and then many other people in costumes. Like animal costumes. Like furry animal costumes. "No! It can't be," I say to myself as I dive for the volume control. I quickly turned the sound up as what's happening dawns on me. Sure enough there was A FURRY CONVENTION at the hotel before the whatever happened and all of the furries had to go into the street with the regular folk. You might have to google that now. See? See how this happens? If it were not for once *CSI* episode years ago followed closely by an *Entourage* episode, I wouldn't even know what this is. See TV is important. But what kind of world are we living in? I don't know. Neither does spell check since it objects to the word "furries" and wants to change it to "ferries." At least spellcheck didn't try for "fairies" as I would have found that, and I'm only talking for me here, insulting!

Facebook

You can find me there. In last year's letter I think I went on and on about being the last person in the world to not be on Facebook. And I promised I would be on this year, and, oh, who cares!?! I did it. I joined Facebook. I am on Facebook. You can find me on Facebook. My name is Michael Dennis Nelson and I live in Seattle and I think with that info you can find me on Facebook. If you want to keep me at a distance, or want to avoid having lunch with me, if you don't want to meet me for coffee some morning or for a cocktail at 5:30 some day, if you never want to call me or see me again, you can now maintain a full relationship with me on Facebook. If you find me and ask, I'll be your friend. For life. On Facebook.

We Are No Longer Living In Sin

David and I got married. Being the guy who does all of the paperwork for this household, I went to the King County office where you apply for marriage certificates, which is the same place closed real estate deals are recorded, I got the paperwork, prepared it all, then had it notarized and took it back to get our license to marry. On the day of our 29th Anniversary, and that was February 12th of this year, David and I dressed up in suits, put on boutonnieres, and met up with Jennifer, Cherese and Rebecca (our witnesses) at City Hall and got married. No big fanfare. No party. No event. We debated all of that but kept coming back to our Canlis event in 1985. We figured we had done the event already in style and couldn't figure out how to do it any better now. Plus the year was starting off good, but *not that good*. Plus an event or a Wolf range? We are so materialistic! We went for the range over sweet and touching moments with our friends. These Wolf ranges last for decades you know. Evidently friends can de-friend you. After our ceremony, Canlis played into the picture again for drinks and dinner. I'm 59 years old and I'm finally married. We are now almost finished with our 30th year together and we are finally married.

In March I flew back to Michigan for a few days with my parents. And that was the first quarter of the year. I need a break now. And these two dogs really want to get out of this house. Off to run some errands and get them to Ruby Chow Park for some low flying airplane fuel and time with the orange ball.

Sunday December 14th

The next day. Yesterday's break for errands and dog time morphed into a few chores around the house and me finding the two Christmas trees stands I've been tripping over in the garage for the last three years. I *knew* they were out there. They're heavy and I bang into them often when doing yard things. David went all the way to Wedgwood to buy a tree (he will only do this at the place on 35th) as I hit the storage room in the basement for the many boxes of Christmas stuff we haven't looked at since 2006. It has been that long since we have decorated any part of any house or put up a tree.

We tend to travel the last weeks of December and just never get this stuff out. I call these boxes “The Twelve Boxes of Christmas” because there are exactly twelve of them. Twelve standard file boxes all labelled with what part of Christmas is in them: cards, ornaments, lights and electrical stuff, prop boxes, stockings and those heavy things that keep them on the mantel, tree skirts, and so on. This year we are not only getting all of this out, we are opening and touching and evaluating each item. We are weeding through it and reducing it. Keep the best, give away the rest. Purge, purge, purge, purge. My goal is to have fewer boxes in the storage room in the basement. Only then will I feel good about our house and myself. Ours is a very small house; I am constantly fighting the hoarder within.

Call The Police And Have Me Arrested

Here’s where that came from:

Over fifteen years ago, when going to New York City was a very new and exciting thing for me (it’s still exciting), I was in high wide-eyed tourist mode. This was so long ago there were no cameras on (in?) cell phones. I don’t even remember if we had cell phones this trip. But I did have a camera. An old fashioned camera that you put rolls of film into. So we are seeing the city, and as I said I’m excited and wide-eyed and in such a good mood and loving every minute of it, and we go to Soho. There is a Dean and DeLuca on a prominent corner there and we all went inside (me, David, Rebecca and Cherese). It was beautiful. I was in wonder. I had my camera and I started taking photos of produce and cheese and the many displays. Having such fun. Until an employee comes up to me and says, “You can’t take pictures in here.” Talk about raining on someone’s parade in Manhattan! I looked at her. I thought about how stupid this was. And I took another photo. She is adamant this time: “You cannot take pictures in here!!!” And I don’t know where it came from or why, but I slowly turned, looked her straight in the eye, and said, “Call the police and have me arrested.” And then, just to make a point, I continued to take a few more photos. They can’t possibly have that policy today can they? Everyone in the store has a camera now.

[You should know that I had another very cute sentence after “has a camera now” as the end of that paragraph that made me laugh. But I looked at it, thought about the turmoil over the hacked Sony emails this week, and thought, “Should I?” and then I deleted it. More on this later perhaps.]

April, May and June

In April David took six days all by himself and went to Palm Springs. Good for him I say! If I were him and could do this as often as I wanted to, I’d go alone often as well. I stayed home and held down the fort (as I often say, don’t know why I do) and cared for Opal. Later that month Lisa, from Ypsilanti, went to Palm Springs and waited for me to get there. After she had been there alone for a few days I joined her for five more

together. Then it was May and it was time for our annual Memorial Day Palm Springs trip with the girls. Cherese and Rebecca and David and I spend the last week of May there every year. It's a thing. Or they've made it a thing. Lot's of eating out. No baking.

My Year Has Two Halves

For the last three years my year seems to divide into two parts and the division happens on the same day each year. **The day is the second Sunday in July.** That is the day of the Georgetown Garden Walk. It's a big deal. My year feels like a run up to the big day, then The Big Day, and then this relaxed "I'm not going to lift a finger to do a thing" second half of the year. We bought our house after the big day in 2011 so we missed it that year. We were not on the garden walk in 2012 or 2013 as there wasn't much of my vision established yet. But this year, boy . . . this year we were on "the walk." It was our first time.

I used to be a volunteer usher in Seattle, here and there, play and movies. This is pre-David so over 30 years ago. I got one of those things that you can hold in the palm of your hand and click a lever with your thumb and it counts. I guess it's called a counter? Don't know if it has a name. A clicker? It clicks. I hung onto it after my ushering days ended. When I was a real estate agent I'd count traffic at my open houses to report back to my sellers. As we were having a small breakfast party on the morning of the Garden Walk we were talking about traffic and I think it was Penny who said something about a clicker. And it dawned on me - I still have one in my glovebox! I rushed out to get it from my car mere minutes before the 10:00 AM start. And I discreetly counted all day long. 652. And I did not count children.

I was exhausted at then end of that day. Many people wanted talk to me about the pond, the koi, the plants, the decks, the food planters - everything. Every little thing. And it's not a short day: 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM. And my voice is good on a good day for about 2 hours of non-stop talk. This day pushed my vocal abilities plenty. If I had a dollar for every person who asked me about raccoons and heron, I could buy . . . well, no . . . I'd just have \$652. That conversation wears thin so fast and I swear I had it 652 times that day. I know what raccoons and heron are and what they can do. I'm not a complete idiot. But in seven hours of small talk with the public I never said that once, and I never took a tone with anyone. Even the most annoying ones.

Between January first and the second Sunday in July, when I'm not at the office working, and when I'm not in the desert wishing I could live there full-time, I am in our yard creating garden spaces and thinking about **what I need to get done before the second Sunday in July.** That is my entire mindset. And it's a lot of work because we have a lot of yard space here. We have the extra lot which is now half food garden and half patio and people garden. There's a ton of upkeep to keep it all looking tidy and nice and as if I have a plan. I'm planting things, rethinking things, moving things, weeding,

trimming, and planning patios and decks and staging areas. All the while worrying. Where will the composter go? Where will the pond equipment go? Do I want people to see this? What about that? I felt as if important company was coming with sole purpose of passing judgement on me and my yard. And I felt that way every time I was in our yard for six months.

The moment the garden walk was over this year I thought, "I'm done." I swear for the next few weeks I barely walked into our yard. I'd pass by and not even glance at it. But by August I was back at it. I thought I was done, but it sucked me back in.

Owned By A Little Old Lady Who Only Drove It To Church On Sunday

I got so lucky this year. David had a listing on Vashon Island. It was the home of the mother of one of our two current contractors. Mom is 75 now and moving on. David came home one day and said, "There's a little truck there." I immediately called Ted, the son, and said, "Hey, what's gonna happen to the truck?" He said his sister was taking it. Ah well. I completely forget about this. Weeks later Ted calls me and asks, "Are you still interested in the truck?" **YES! YES I AM.** I told Ted on the phone right then that - sight unseen mind you - I would buy the truck. He's gonna check blue book and values online. And I say I will buy it no matter what, if David allows this. David comes home and I say, "You want to make me really happy?"

A few days later Ted calls back and says mom said I could have it for \$2,000. OMG. So I now own a truck that I never would have picked out as one I wanted (a Dodge Dakota), in a color that I never would have selected (deep forest green), and I am thrilled. Ted's mom bought this truck new in 2002 and drove it to Vashon and it has never left the island. She used it for errands on the island, gardening - the things I plan on using it for. So I'm the second owner. Mom saved the sticker that was in the window of the truck when she bought new. Now I'm saving that sticker. The tires look beefy and good. It's filthy dirty. It came with \$20 to have it cleaned and I'm sure I'll get around to that next summer. (Actually Ted had \$40, two twenties, when they brought the truck over. His mom wanted him to have it cleaned after she and I did the paperwork. I didn't want to wait once she left for him to go do that - that was his plan, to run to Elephant, have it cleaned and then deliver it back to me - so I said you keep a twenty and I'll keep a twenty and I'll have it cleaned I promise. I need to keep that promise soon as it's a mess in there.) Okay, okay, now for the best part: It's a 2002 truck and it came to me with 28,188 miles on it.

Did you know the DMV can totally ignore your sales receipt now? I showed up there with our perfectly filled out paperwork and a copy of my \$2,000 check and the receipt from Ted's mom saying she sold it for \$2,000 and you know what? They said, "We don't think so," and proceeded to put my mileage, make, and model into the internet. They clicked around, looked at some photos and said, "Uh-huh" several times followed by, "Well would you look at that" and then out came a page with a value printed on it over

twice what I just paid for my new truck. They then based all of their fees and taxes on that value. I guess they got sick and tired of seeing bills of sale for \$10.00. Me? I was still silly happy to be the owner of any truck. I gladly paid and licensed it and drove it home. It sits. I don't use it often. But I can if I want to. Not long ago I was on my way home from work and I thought I'd stop at Home Depot (in my Escape) to buy BAGS of mulch for the weekend ahead. I was guessing 15 bags would be enou **STOP** You own a truck! Do not buy 15 bags of mulch at \$3.99 a bag. That would be a lot of money. Not to mention lifting and loading!) Instead the next day I used my Garmin to find Pacific Topsoils. Who knew, they are less that 4 miles from us in Tukwila. Opal and I set out. Great manly fun. Large equipment operated by manly men dumped almost a ton of mulch (the silver producing kind) into my truck. Cost? \$30 How happy am I?

Here's What I Want To See When I Walk Into A Starbucks

TWO LINES. I want one line to have a sign that reads, "One Adjective Orders," and the other line to have a sign that reads, "Two Or More Adjective Orders."

In my line, which moves quickly, you will hear things like this:

doppio espresso, iced latte, quad cappuccino, green tea, iced espresso

In the other line, which is filled with idiots who act as if they have never been in a Starbucks before and have never given any thought to the options available to them or what they might want, you will hear things like this:

Ah, yeah . . . ah, I want ah, <sigh> gimme ah, ah a venti soy latte with, ah, which cup is that? oh, ah, no, yeah that one, and ah, one splenda and three pumps of <sigh> vanilla and <long pause> no foam please and is, could you put the splenda in with the pumps?, and ah is that 2%, ah, what kind of milk is that? oh, yeah soy, ah, and could you make it extra hot?

Monday December 15th

Why I'm at the end of the year and I feel done with this and look how few pages compared to years past! Word purging perhaps?

In a few hours I get to go downtown to a holiday lunch at Tulio's thrown by Windermere for its Managing Brokers. Or Branch Managers. Yeah, that second one. I'm looking forward to it. Throughout the year we have a meeting in the middle of each month with many topics but no food. This meeting I'm hoping for good food and no topics. I think we get to skip the topics and just visit. Seriously that's one of the things I like best about this month, lots of just visiting with no purpose other than to visit. My office had its office party last week and tho' the turnout was lower than usual (did we pick a bad date?), the

party was one of the best we've ever had. Lots of visiting in an environment very conducive to that. It helps that I really like all of the people in my office. (Of course I interview and hire and train them so the odds of me liking them are pretty high.)

Consider Joni Mitchell

In 1975 *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* was released. Of course I bought it immediately but being a kid from the suburban Detroit area I had absolutely no idea what the title of the album meant. Therefore I didn't like it. Because, being from the mid-west, and young at the time, I didn't like anything I didn't understand. Now I think of that album almost every day. Why? Because I have a sprinkler system. Two actually. I have one in Palm Springs where everyone has to have one, and I have one in Seattle where, if you garden as I do, it's a super luxury to have one. And you know what? They hiss. They hissssssssssss. And now I understand. And I miss the hissing. I have the one in Seattle set up in six zones. And I have each zone programmed to come on at a certain time for 10 minutes (or so, depends on what's in the zone) starting at about 6:30 AM. After awhile I can tell time in the morning by where I hear the hissing. The front parking strip? It must be 6:45 AM. The planting bed on the north side of the back half of the vacant lot? It must be 7:00 AM. The raised bed food containers on the front half of the vacant lot? It must be 8:00 AM. All summer long I have the kitchen window open and I'm up making espresso and I don't have to look at a clock. And all winter long I seriously miss the sound and think of the title of that album. Thank you Joni Mitchell.

[Mini Aside: Somehow I knew that the release date of that album was 1975 WITHOUT checking it. After I typed the paragraph I thought, hmmm, I should google check that and 1975 !]

The Final Months Of The Year

Looking back we took no big vacation last year. We only do that *every other* year. And this was not the year. Last year we did the gay cruise around Spain with several friends. A big event. And next year David is working on something big as well. But this year we stayed home. Yes we made what we call "small runs" to Palm Springs, but those are not in the vacation category. David often objects to Palm Springs because he blames the house there for me not wanting go anywhere else on weekends. What can I say? I'm a homebody. I just have two of them.

And yes there were a few days in New York. Again somehow New York doesn't fall under our definition of "a vacation." We went to Detroit. Vacation? We were in Maui for a week but that was really NOT a vacation as it was a corporate Windermere event. A conference. You know, those rooms in the bowels of resorts where round tables have polyester tablecloths on them and 8 glasses and a picture of lukewarm water and notepads from the resort and cheap ink pens with the resort's name on them? I was in that room for what felt like days on end. David and Kim Hobbs (they were plus ones for

this event, surfing on the coattails of me and Mark) were exploring Maui by car, having lunch at fun places, and floating in the ocean.

To make it into the vacation category you need several things. Usually you need to cross an ocean at the very least. Somehow time on this continent just feels like a weekend road trip even if it is Chicago. So vacations need oceans crossed. But also NOT WORKING would be nice. Everywhere we went this year - Palm Springs, New York, Maui, Detroit - we were reachable. And if we are reachable we are working. David puts deals together long distance. I solve agent problems while walking in Central Park. We are always on. The phone rings and we jump. Emails ding as they arrive and we respond.

There were other small get-a-ways too. At the start of the year there was a nice weekend in Port Townsend at the home of Robert and Jason. Actually that was bracketed at the other end of the year by a weekend at Daybob Bay in a very cool house that David sold to our friends Mark and Mario. (Yes, David will work the Olympic Peninsula if he likes you enough. And if you do all of the work. You find what you want on the internet and he'll drive the car and buy you lunch while filling out paperwork!) And I say "actually" in the sentence above because the trip to Daybob Bay was actually a part of the wedding weekend of Jason and Robert. Yup, we went to our second "formal" gay wedding. But on the way we spent a night or two in Daybob Bay.

In a previous year we went to Greg and Larry's wedding. And we were at City Hall shortly after ours with Cherese and Rebecca for theirs. But Jason and Robert took it to a new level, the full on wedding event you hear jokes about on TV sitcoms. It was by the book if anything ever was by the book. There were save the date cards, there were formal invitations, there was a gift thingie online that told you what they wanted, it was at a resort in Port Ludlow, it had a soundtrack (a really good one, I asked for a CD but so far nothing), there was a processional, there were tables set with name placeholders, and there was a cake. Oh, don't forget this, there was a website. This event had it all. (Now I am wishing I was Stefan on SNL.) My favorite part? No, it wasn't just the hosted bar with gin. It was the thought that went into this. I realize David and I basically eloped because neither of us could have pulled this off at this level. In the end my favorite part was all of the perfectly matched up graphic design. God is in the details and not a detail was missed. I appreciated how the colors and images and font carried though from the save the date card to the website to some thing that was handed out at the event with their photos on it. I don't remember what that was, but I am (sadly) hoarding it.

Consider OJ Simpson

The only good thing to come out of OJ Simpson getting away with murder is this: It prepared me for all future completely asinine and shocking stories related to sports celebrities getting away with murder. I remember how my jaw dropped in 1995 as I watched the verdict come in for OJ. I was stunned. I don't follow anything - and I mean

anything - about sports (perhaps a screed on that later) until the behavior of one of those involved reaches the criminal level. Then I pay attention. And when I pay attention I give thanks to OJ who helps me keep it all in perspective.

Tiger Woods screws a slew of women other than his wife and when she finally figures this out and chases his car and beats it with a golf club it makes news? Really? Is that all you've got? OJ Simpson got to walk away from a double murder wrap and live to later strong-arm some guy in Florida who was hawking collectibles.

Michael Vick was breeding pit bulls so he could watch them fight each other to death? Shocking (and disgustingly sad) but OJ Simpson prepared me to take this news in stride. Some guy named Rice clocks his finance in an elevator, knocks her out and drags her limp body out once they reach the floor they were going to? That's all? Really? Please, OJ stabbed two people to death and walked.

And now Oscar Pistorius, who I guess is a sympathetic character because he has no feet and can run or something, he shoots his girlfriend after a heated argument inside of a locked fortress that no one could break into in the first place claiming he thought she was a burglar and he gets away with it. HE GETS AWAY WITH IT. Well that would be something rather upsetting to me were it not for OJ blazing this trail. So, thank you OJ Simpson for sparing me from shock and outrage. I'm used to all of this now. It's a great world. But I think I'd rather live in *South Park*. No, not the one near Georgetown, the one on TV.

South Park's "Happy Hogograms" Episode

So, let's go there. I won't watch anything with animation. I don't go to animated movies (that's the term they use, I call them cartoons.) I don't like things like *TED*. Everyone raved about *TED*, and I like Seth MacFarlane a lot, but I just did not want to watch a talking teddy bear. But David, who will watch literally anything, especially if he is on a plane, saw it and said it was great. And he was willing to watch it a second time with me. So we rented. I found it un-watchable. I just can't do it. The other night he wanted to watch *Guardians of the Galaxy*. I said, "Ah, isn't there a talking squirrel in that one" but he kept saying it was going to be great. It was not. In this case even he agreed with me. Animals that talk or are supposed to be actual characters, and animation, rule a movie out for me. I have found the child within and I have squashed him. I like real movies with real characters. Think *Chinatown*.

But I like a good cartoon. And I love *South Park*.

And last week was the season finale of *South Park* and it was everything I hoped it would be. In one half hour they skewer these topics roughly in this order: The younger generation VS old when it comes to "devices," trending, U-tube, online commentators,

tweeting, tweeting while watching a TV show and tweeting about it, the recent Peter Pan, Bill Cosby (this was priceless AND he was wearing a multi-colored Coogi sweater - another long standing in-joke for me and David), white cops, black suspects, hashtags, Michael Jackson, Lourde, someone named Iggy Azalea, Miley Cyrus, Taylor Swift, Tupac, Kurt Cobain (his hologram singing Christmas carols with a shotgun), the Washington Redskins (who in the show were hosting the holiday special called *The Washington Redskin's Go Fuck Yourself Holiday Special.*), and so much more. Some bits . . . One white cops says to his boss "We've got a problem, we arrested a black man (it's a hologram of Michael Jackson who keeps saying either "ignorant" or "allegedly".) "His boss responds, "Did you choke him?" "Yes." "Did you shoot him?" "Yes." and then the boss says, "So what's the problem?" Later the hologram of Tupac shows up and the cops freak out and say, "Shoot him! Shoot him and then choke him." It just hits everything that's been in the news for the past two months - talk about ripped from the headlines. There was stuff going on in this 30 minutes that I didn't even understand, so many references. But the absolute best part was the end my absolute favorite of all Christmas carols was employed. *Baby It's Cold Outside* as a duet sung by Taylor Swift and Bill Cosby. You know the song, right? A girl wants to leave the house and go home and a boy keeps finding reasons why she shouldn't go. One of the lines she sings is, "Say what's in this drink?" They changed the words some, and Bill Crosby kept grabbing at her, but you get the idea.

I used to jokingly say my political beliefs could be summed up by carefully listening to Randy Newman's song *Political Science*. I might have to amend that and go with *South Park*. These guys will satirize anything. And quickly. Too soon? No, go for it.

A Few Small Victories

When there's work there's money. And when there's money you can get shit done. In 2011 when we bought and remodeled this house we were doing it on a wing and a prayer. We had no extra money, it was a very tight budget. And we ran out of money. So we didn't do things. We just didn't. We never put a railing up at the edge of the open stairwell. There was no banister on those stairs. We had an island in the kitchen but there were no lights over the island. We didn't have the money to buy track lights so we just stuck Romex wire through the ceiling where the end of a track light should be. On the end of the Romex we dangled a cheap \$1.50 porcelain light fixture with a naked light bulb screwed into it. We had wires sticking out of the ceiling with naked bulbs just hanging there. Some people actually thought we were trying to be edgy. We were actually just trying to get by.

So . . . now we have track lighting. We have track lighting in all four rooms on the main floor and track lighting in the library / office in the basement. (Soon to be our new TV room I think.) And we have track heads on the tracks. Big deal you say but we got the cheapest simplest ones you can get and still they are \$17 a pop. And we have a lot of them. See the \$1.50 porcelain thing was a smart move. We now have pendant lights

over our kitchen island. The kitchen has a chef's range (we covered this already). It's a nicer place to be now. We have different pendant lights over our dining room table. And we had Ted and Geoff design and build a railing for the open "fall and you die" stairwell. They designed it using the same material we built our outside fence out of, that grid of iron squares that people call rebar but it's not, only we took the iron grid to Ballard to Seattle Powder Coating. So it looks like outside, but it has the finish of inside. All of these are minor things, but minor things that have nagged at us for three years. We moved into this house exactly three years ago this week. We lived without lights in our dining room for three years. It worked okay in the summer.

And Finally A Major Victory

We have sold our house in Palm Springs. It closes on January 14th.

We have purchased a new house in Palm Springs. It closes on January 20th.

Our little jewel box of a house, where everything was perfect and redone and carefully thought out, went on the market the day after Thanksgiving (great marketing timing huh?) It had a full price offer on it within three days. Or two days. We waited three days to review offers, almost had two, but in the end only one. But it was full price and so really we can get by with only one. We have not met the buyer yet, a woman from LA, but she has been easy and a dream to work with. I plan on doing her many favors and leaving her things. We sold the house with the TVs on the wall included, so I will leave her other things. And the fridge will have champagne in it we we lock the front door for the last time.

The sellers of the house we bought, not so much a dream. I could go into it here in great length (ya think?) but I'm tired and this letter needs to be at Kinkos before midnight. We had plane tickets purchased and tried to line up closing to match up with the tickets we already had and the sellers, even though they don't live in this house, refused by 5 days. So the buyer of our house said we could close on time with her and she'd let us stay rent free in our house for 10 days until we can comfortably move out. Several bottles of champagne are in order for her.

Let's do some math:

We had a small two bedroom house, only about 1,500 square feet, on a 6,000 square foot lot with no garage in a good area but not really "a neighborhood" - we were more adjacent to neighborhoods. And we had a line of telephone poles marching across the back of our property, some with large transformers on them.

We have purchased a larger four bedroom house, about 2,200 square feet, on a 12,000 square foot lot with an attached large two car garage. And we are in, firmly in, the middle of a great neighborhood in south Palm Springs. And, this was the deciding

factor, in the new neighborhood all of the power lines, phone lines, cable lines, all of it, it's all UNDERGROUND. There is not a telephone pole in sight. Plenty of views of the mountains and palm trees, but no views of poles and wires and transformers. Oh, and it's a nice corner lot that is not on a main thoroughfare. It's at the opening of a cul-de-sac.

The house we bought cost us \$25,000 more than the house we sold. We get all of this, more space, garage, better views, better neighborhood, blah blah blah blah, for only a \$25,000 difference? And at a better interest rate?

How can this be you wonder?

Like my dermatologist, I can give you a one word answer: **CONDITION**

There's a lot going on this month. We have a lot to do. Loan applications are hard, interest rates and lock numbers are whirling around my head, escrow instructions are filling my inbox, utilities, security systems, internet, need to turn it all off in one house and start it all up in another, and do it long distance, we need new plane tickets, need movers, oh, yeah, we have to pack up a house - really I can barely function these days.

We couldn't have done this without the help of our good friends and fellow Windermere agents Jim Webb and Roy Rigsby. They found it. They wrote a few low offers on it for us. Our first offer was \$94,000 low. Our second offer was \$70,000 low. Palm Springs is not Seattle. They handled all of the counters offers until I finally gave up and decided to just overpay for it. The process took over a month. Palm Springs is not Seattle. In the end I just wanted it to end and I wanted this particular lot and location. So we're paying more than the current condition warrants. And now Roy and Jim are helping us get these things closed. When they are not in Mexico with Mark and Mario that is. Clients hate it when their agents vacation and abandon them in the middle of a deal.

I do like posting photos on Facebook. Facebook is great for getting photos en mass to your friends. You have my info in this letter. Find me there and be my friend. Find me there, and then you can link to David, and together we'll keep you fully informed in real time as we close and move from one house to the other. There will be photos. Really. I am good with postcards from the road on Facebook.

Kids Say The Darndest Things

In closing let me tell you the thing that most stuck with me from this year. I can't believe I'm saying this, it really dates me and makes me sound like a complete loser, but does anyone remember Art Linkletter and his TV show, *Kids Say The Darndest Things*?

Okay by now most of you have heard what's left of my voice from the radiation in 2009. We all have two vocal chords, and I still have two, but one of my two is covered in scar

tissue from the radiation and it no longer moves. The other one has less scar tissue and it does move, but just barely. So eating, drinking, breathing, it's all different for me than it is for you. And forget about singing. I can no longer do that at all. And my voice has strong days and weak days. And some days it starts out great but if I have to talk a great deal during the day it weakens as the day gets long. But I'm not dead. And the last time I went to see the guy who puts the camera down my throat to see if anything has come back, well, he told me to stop coming to see him. There is nothing there and he told me there was no statistical reason for me to ever see him again. So I guess I'm done with this episode permanently. Except for the scaring inside of my throat.

So in November David and I went to a Georgetown community meeting hosted by the City planning department. We walked as it was held just blocks from our house at South Seattle Community College. We got there 30 minutes early to see displays and mingle. An old client of David's - Justin Howell, David sold him his place in G-town a few years ago - was there. Justin is sorta in the know about G-town politics now and we went over to his row to visit. A row behind the row the three of us were in there were some kids. Young kids, all boys, like 10 to 12 years old. As we were talking one of the kids stands up, points at me and says, "You sound like Batman."

It was so cute the way he said it. He really hit the word "Batman" when he got to it. In just those four words I knew this kid and I were fans of the very recent *Batman* movie series, and I knew exactly what he meant.

Michael Nelson

michael@nelsonupdike.com

206 . 328 . 2145

David Updike

david@davidupdike.net

206 . 329 . 0484

[Both of these are cell phone numbers and they get both texts and emails !]