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# 2015

Thursday November 26th 2015

Hmmmmmmm.

I am exhausted. It's Thanksgiving but late at night so the event is behind us now. Thankfully we are not tired from the stress of it, just from the work of it and having been at it longer than usual today. This year David and I hosted 6 friends here in our tiny house in Georgetown so it was a table set for 8. For some reason, and for the first time in holiday cooking memory, the whole day was bickering free, argument free, and, yes, stress free. The Bickersons never arrived and the meal came off without a hitch. (People actually used to refer to David and me as "The Bickersons!" Can you believe that? Would it be wrong of me to point out we're married now while many of those who called us that are now separated or divorced? Probably.)

So a stress free day if you don't count the 10 minutes David started to freak out while making (or trying to make?) gravy. After 30 years I can tell when David is about to lose it. When I saw the breakdown clearly coming on, I called Greg over. It is very helpful to have Greg in the house when there is a mounting gravy crisis. Greg can do wonders in the kitchen.

All of the guests have left. Much of the mess is still up there. Fortunately leftovers are not. Through perfect planning, and because Greg took the carcass home with him, packaging and storing leftovers are not a problem we have. But we're both beat.

I just went down to the all new TV room now located in our lower level (a.k.a., the basement) to watch *Scandal*. It's Thursday, it's late, you're tired, you watch *Scandal*. It's what you do. But *Scandal's* not there. Then I remember seeing something about a winter season break just before the previews and credits last week. A winter season break. A Winter Season Break?

## **A Winter Season Break!**

I want one of those! Wouldn't that be great? I start to think about the next 45 days. I just stop and think what's coming in the next 45 days? A hell of a lot, that's what coming. Even tho' things slow down for both of us work wise (as in the real estate biz wise), things get awful busy on other fronts. Parties to attend, office parties to throw, shopping, year end wrap up stuff at work, mailings, databases that need fussing, starting to think about bookkeeping for tax returns that loom in January, family dinners, and then throw in not one but two refinances on two different houses because those aren't annoying or stressful, and then, if you are me, you get to write a letter.

See? My hard drive just crashed; my mind just exploded. I see a light though - it's called Martin Luther King's Birthday Weekend - and it comes just about at the end of the next 45 days. It's a bright light because we are always together in Palm Springs that weekend. Knowing that break from January's gloom is coming is always something to keep in mind while everything that happens during December goes down.

"The Letter" as my friends call it. I'm currently reading a book that is an extended letter from a man to his son called *Between The World And Me*. Can't I just read that letter and skip trying to make one of my own? Actually perhaps if everyone read that letter this year instead of mine the world would be a better place. I could do my part by NOT making one of my own and referring everyone on to that one. Now I'm even more exhausted than I was before I found out there's no TV to soothe me tonight. But I thought I'd move to my desk, fire up my laptop, and refresh my memory by reading the last 2 or 3 letters I've written. I have to confess . . . I couldn't do better than skimming them tonight.

But at least I'm starting to THINK about it earlier than I usually do each year.

More later. I'm gonna go see if I can read more that six pages tonight before I fall asleep with the lights on and a book on my chest. ~ M

**Weeks Later: Friday December 11th ~ Here's A Proper Start:**

*Holiday Greetings !*

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

Okay. Let's do this. I'm just gonna jump right in . . . . .

**Here's The Truth: We Don't Do Things Anymore**

We actually went out last night. We actually met Greg and Larry for dinner at 5:45 and then afterwards we actually went to see a show called *Ham For The Holidays, Who's Afraid of Virginia Ham?* It's a Peggy Platt vehicle. I could barely stay awake for the first half of it. I rallied for the second half but don't know why I bothered. If you think people taking songs that you know, very very familiar songs, and then changing the lyrics and singing the tunes you know with new funny lyrics is a great idea then this is the show for you. And, there was very little "holiday" in the whole show. I was expecting humor about the holidays. Not "scratch that ticket" sung to the tune of "crack that whip."

I could have been home having cocktails and savory appetizers, paying loving attention to two Weimaraners (ours plus one we're dog sitting one this weekend) and watching Seth Meyers go over the day's news.

Am I a 60 year old curmudgeon?

But I'm trying to say **Y E S !** more to things. Just like that. ALL CAPS, **BOLD** and with extra spaces and a ! thrown in to show I really want to do whatever I'm being asked. I was in Palm Springs last week when David emailed me to say Greg and Larry had invited us out. Did I want to go? I immediately hit reply and not only did I say, "**Y E S !**" just like that, I made every other letter red or green. Two were red, two were green. Oh yes, it's Christmas. Evidently both David and Larry were surprised I said yes so quickly. David especially since he knows I'm stressed about not having started this letter. (Well it's started now, so that stress is gone, but replaced by **new stress** I assure you.) Anyway I don't mean to be churlish here in anyway. I am grateful to have been asked; I am grateful that Larry arranged the whole evening.

But it's not just me. It is David too.

Over dinner in May, a full month prior to the event, our friend Julie told us about this guy who lives in a co-op apartment on Capitol Hill that he empties out once a month and then allows an artist to fill it with art turning his apartment into "an art gallery" of sorts. Evidently he's on the monthly Capitol Hill Art Walk and it's a one night only event. The artist being featured in June was Jeffrey Mitchell, someone we own several pieces of art by, someone we knew and socialized with about 25 years ago, and someone who two decades ago purchased a house with his with his partner at the time using me as their buyer's agent. So several historical connections, sounds quirky, I made a note in my calendar. *We should do this!*

The day of the art exhibit a reminder pops up on my screen and I alert David that this odd little event is today. I say we should go. David googles it and finds that it starts at 5:30 PM. At 3:30 PM David walks into my office and I make several suggestions about how we could fit this event into our afternoon, early evening. None of my suggestions appeal to David. I suggest walking the dog in the park near the co-op from 4 to 5 and then swinging by the event at the very start of it. He turns his nose up at me. He wants to take the dog to a different park so she can go swimming. He says I promised him we could go to a movie that night. I say can't we do both? He wants to have dinner before 6:30 (he's very "old" in this way now) and doesn't want it to be a late night. (A late night means past 9:00 PM - he's very "old" in that way too now.) I say okay you take the dog and go and I'll stay at work until 5:00 and then I'll go alone. He voices opposition to this plan as it would mean I'd be commenting home after 5:45 and that would delay his early bird eating schedule.

In the end we do what we always do: **We don't do the thing.** David takes Opal, the dog, from my car and leaves the office about 90 minutes before I do. They go to Lake Washington so Opal can swim; I try to wrap up the many to-do Post-It notes stuck all around my desk reminding me to do things before I leave for the day. By 6:30 we are eating dinner. David is happy. By 7:45 we are seeing a movie at Southcenter. We are home not too far past 9:00 so all is well.

Is David a 60 year old curmudgeon? Is David set in his ways much?

**More examples:**

A local actor has formed a small theatre company called *Letters Aloud*. It is a live reading series where Seattle's finest actors give voice to deeply personal letters written or received by regular Joes. It's Father's Day and they are going with letters written to dads and letters from dads to their kids. I think about my dad and what he's going through this year and think I should go to this. But I don't.

I scan the Weekly and the Stranger for news and what's happening tidbits. I pick them up on the Hill every Thursday without fail. I read the weekend entertainment section in the Seattle Times (we subscribe believe it or not) for blurbs of events.

**Here's one I remember:**

James Franco is in Seattle talking with local author David Shields. I like James Franco, I have seen many of his movies, and not only have I read several of David Shields books, his wife is an agent in my office. She works for me, she's fabulous. The blurb said this is a Q and A or something around a book Shields wrote, but not one I had read, or a movie they made, it was a long time ago, I'm sketchy on the details. Point is I had several reasons to try and get my ass to this event. But I didn't.

Some fringe theatre company is doing a mash up of songs by the Carpenters and a Judy Blume novel. The event is called, *Are You There God, It's Me, Karen Carpenter*. I adore Karen Carpenter, I should go to this. But I don't.

I could go on. I'm doing this from memory, these are just the examples that pop into my mind today. My point is people think David and Michael are out every night making the scene or going to parties or having dinner out with fun friends or whatever they imagine. So they don't call. Because they think we are engaged already. I think people are remembering the David and Michael from circa 1990 to 1999. We stopped partying like it was 1999 in 1996 however. So what I am I doing about it? I am trying to say, **Y E S !** more and more. And trying to get David to say it with me. But the appeal of our home is vast and the expectations of Opal are many. And it kills us to disappoint her.

## Being Old In Palm Springs

Now that we're older than we ever thought about being when we met, we often discuss the future. What does that look like? Where will that be? How many dogs will be involved? Will cats re-enter the picture? Can we get by with one car? Can I stand on my feet all day making perfect foam at Starbucks when I'm 73?

And will they even allow me to do it? And by that I mean don't mean allowing a 73 year old to work there, I'm sure they do that. What I mean is allowing me to make better foam than any barista they have employed anywhere can make? Will they say I'm slowing down the line? Will they say just BOIL that fucking milk and POUR it over that espresso in a huge cup even if the customer asked for a cappuccino and just move this damn line along?

I digress.

Whenever the discussion of Palm Springs surfaces I say, "I am ready." If I didn't need to work, which I do and will for many years to come, and if I didn't have the perfect job for my make up, I'd be there by now. David feels differently. He too needs to work. He also loves his work and wants to do it well into his 70s, or so he often tells me when this conversation starts up again. When we first arrived at the Eastlake office nineteen years ago there was an agent working there named George Carlson. George had to have been in his 80s. I never really knew, and it would have been so wrong to ask since I was then his manager, but 80s at least and then he was with me for about ten more years. When he died I think I was told he was 93 and as I recall that was only a year plus after he left my office. David used to always say, "God Bless him, I hope to be putting deals together when I'm his age." So David's been very consistent in his desire to keep working, even if there was no need. Which, let's be clear, there is.

And while on the Palm Springs topic let me toss this aspect in as well: People who don't really understand what really good real estate agents do say things like, "Well they have real estate agents down there!" or "Can't you just sell houses there?" Well I guess either one of us could **IF** we knew any people down there and **IF** we knew the housing stock down there. But we don't on both counts. Our family and friends and past clients who we rely on for referrals to keep delivering new clients to us are, for the most part, in Seattle. We only know about 7 people in Palm Springs and 2 of them are real estate agents and the other 5 already have homes. And even if they did not, the nuances of the housing market down there are very different from up here. It's not like selling a BMW on a lot in Seattle and thinking you could sell a BMW on a lot in Palm Springs. You could because strangers walk onto the lot and the BMW doesn't change. But types of houses, types of pest issues, types of roofing and siding issues, houses that have basements (here only, never down there) versus houses that have termites (there mostly), mold issues, radon gas - it's not all the same. It is, in fact, very different.

We're smart. Obviously we could learn it all rather quickly. Much of what we know from houses up here, and lord knows we know construction and remodeling, we could apply all of that there. But the people. We'd be starting over from scratch with the people. I hire and train and watch and mentor new agents every month. I know exactly how hard *this people component* of the business is. I can teach them everything else about the business but . . . well, have you seen *Glengarry Glen Ross*? It's all about the leads. It's all about who you know. And we know 5 people down there. Maybe 13. But not enough to not be starting over. And, as I've said, we need to continue working, not start over.

Again, though you probably can't tell, I am digressing.

I was talking about two things: us not doing things AND being old in Palm Springs. Here's where those two vectors cross: part of the inevitable discussion that comes up when we talk about a future in Palm Springs is David saying he's not sure he can retire there *BECAUSE HE'D BE BORED*. Palm Springs is too small a city. There *just isn't enough to do* there. He needs Seattle because of *all of the things there are to do* here.

Can anyone see how ridiculous this argument is?

We don't do anything here !!! **What do we do here?** We come home at the end of our day, we give Opal attention, we make cocktails and appetizers and watch Rachel Maddow, then one of us cooks dinner, then we watch stuff we recorded on the DVR while we eat, Opal is around, and then, at about 8:00 PM David goes down to watch endless amounts of TV shows that I do not follow: *The Walking Dead, The Knick, Downsyndrome Abby, American Horror Story: Hotel, Empire, The Strain, Masters of Sex, Game of Thrones*, and on and on and on. Something *Selfridge* about a department store. All of this *Masterpiece Theatre* crap that isn't *Sherlock*. Maybe there is *An Affair* or *The Affair*? It just goes on and on and on. NOT ONE of those shows do I watch.

What David doesn't seem to understand is all of this is available to us in Palm Springs because we have Direct TV in both cities. And a cocktail shaker and a stove in both houses. What we do here day after day we can also do there. It is the same, it's the same but with more sun. What David won't admit is that we don't really **DO** anything anymore. Maybe we go to a play once a year. They have plays in Palm Springs PLUS you could make a day of it and drive 2 hours to LA and see real plays and good theatre, certainly better than you can here. LA theatre options versus Seattle theatre options? Is there a contest there? Other things we DO NOT DO in Seattle: go to the opera, the ballet, the symphony, any choral groups, and most touring shows.

*We could just as easily NOT DO those things in Palm Springs, that's my whole theory.*

They have movies there. We seldom actually go to a movie here. Why? Because we have Apple TV and the Amazon Fire Stick here (and we can't bear to leave Opal home

alone). Guess what? We have those things in Palm Springs too. Already. They are down there not being used right now.

So the only thing left is our friends. Here we have friends. There we know 7 people. However look around . . . our friends here are leaving us all of the time. Our best friends, Cherese and Rebecca, are abandoning us for Austin. Others have moved to Issaquah which is almost the same thing. (Just kidding, we will visit you there! What should we pack for the trip and can Opal come?) Most of our other friends can only see us on Tuesdays or Wednesdays because they have weekend homes nearby that they drive to on the weekends. Thus we are regulated to mid-week things with them. Hardly special. Other people have kids and seem to only want to do things with other people with kids so as to kill two birds with one stone. (I am not complaining, just saying how it really is.) Once in a blue moon we get invited somewhere. (Just say **YES!** quickly.)

In Seattle we have small dinner events at our house, but we could do that in Palm Springs as easily (and with a pool).

So, see, I'm ready. David thinks he is not ready but only based on his delusion that he isn't watching TV alone in the basement 21 hours a week. He thinks he's out at some fancy gallery opening as the opening credits of *Game of Thorns* roll. (Please don't write me to tell me it's "Thrones" ~ It's stupid and they wear togas and sandals and there is a dwarf and dragons and I mock it!!!!)

### **Seth Rogen Is An Idiot**

I said this last year. I'll expound on it this year. Seth Rogen (who I have never liked in a movie) accused Macklemore (who I really like in everything and who I basically thinks walks on water) of being anti-semitic. This really pissed me off. I followed everything online around this event as it was happening. My first question was is there anything you have ever heard about, read about, or listened to (his music) that had to do with Macklemore that would make a reasonable person think Macklemore was the kind of guy capable of being anti-semitic? Is it likely the guy who wrote *Same Love* doesn't like or thinks differently about Jewish people?

To quote directly from Seth Rogen's Twitter feed:

"First you trick people into thinking you're a rapper, now you trick them into thinking you're Jewish?"

Ah, fuck you Seth Rogen.

## Egg Cartons

Does anyone want egg cartons? Does anyone know anyone who wants egg cartons? Perfect good, clean and dry, quality egg cartons? When we moved to Georgetown 4 years ago, we started saving egg cartons. Our neighbors here have chickens (like 6 times the allowed city limit on chickens but we'll never tell 'cause we love our neighbors) and Gary and Curtis were raising ducks out in Ballard. So we thought we'd pitch in, help out, and reduce our carbon footprint by saving and gifting for re-use egg cartons for those of you with fowl. Soon it seemed Gary and Curtis said, "Ah, we have plenty, thanks" and our neighbors seemed to stop wanting (or needing) ours. Did this allow me to stop saving egg cartons? No. My hoarding instincts are something I grapple with daily. Once I start collecting something it's hard for me to stop. I keep meaning to post something on [nextdoor.com](http://nextdoor.com) offering up egg cartons but I never remember to. I am remembering now as I'm standing at the island typing (I like standing) and I just transferred eggs to the egg holder in the fridge and now I'm holding a cardboard egg carton that I just want to stomp on and squash. But I don't. I take it to the Garden Shed (a.k.a, a one car garage that wouldn't hold most of today's cars that I've converted, along with the expert help of Geoff Murphy, to an insulated shed with a nicely finished interior. Plenty of room for stacks of egg cartons.) Email me if you want them. I deliver to zip codes that start with 981. Otherwise we'll have to work something out.

Look at the time. It flies when I get into the zone (as David calls it) of doing this. David has asked me several times since I sat down here if this was "a pajama day." Not anymore, gotta run. Tonight is our office's annual holiday party and I'd like to be early for it. Because I got off so easy on planning and setting this event up this year, I am sorta wracked with guilt. I am hoping a few gin drinks when I get there can help with that.

## Saturday December 12th

There were a few tricky steps at the holiday party last night. Deck steps from the bar area to a seating area. I may have stumbled once (or twice). But I wasn't driving and I didn't sing karaoke and I didn't tell any stories I should not have told. Cassie and Jeremy, the hosts, were wonderful and even though they did all of the work on this, they somehow made me feel not guilty. There are 62 agents currently working in my office and I just did a count in my mind (by reviewing the floor plan of their desks at the office) and I now know 31 agents showed up. Add spouses and dates and you're near 60 fast. Thankfully there was a great heated tent, plenty of room for everyone. Great food and a well stocked bar. Several people, including David and Laurie Shields, asked me about the status of this letter and I dodged those questions as best I could. And, though I may have stumbled on tricky steps, I did not ask David Shields any questions about James Franco nor did I play out *Six Degrees of Separation* using him as my leap to Hollywood famous people. I met Carly Simon a few years back, a direct connection, we met, spoke and I have a photo! So I've already gotten where I'd want any round of



six degrees to take me. Carly has a new memoir out. I want it. Maybe my husband will devine that by Christmas. We don't have a tree, but we can hand each other things. I already know what I'm getting him.

So one Christmas party out of the way, only two more to go. And those are both next weekend, the "prime weekend" for Christmas parties based on proximity to the big day. I am amazed we even got invited to two parties. Definitely going to both . . . and by then this letter should be in the mail (bulk) so I'll be super relaxed and festive.

I just thought of a very funny story, a three part story, that took place right here in our kitchen this year. I have decided to end this letter with it as it meant so much to me. Wait for it. As they say.

Here's something no one yet knows, not even David. I am going to tell you now. Right here, right now. Last week I received in the mail a renewal notice for my longstanding subscription to *People Magazine*. I opened it, I looked at it, I thought about Lisa, David and Mark Besta in that order, I looked at the cost of the renewal, I thought for a moment, and then, I still can't believe I did this, I took a thick black Sharpie and wrote **CANCEL** on the renewal notice, put it in the postage paid envelope provided, and mailed it back to them. It's been quite a year for me for "getting rid of things" and this bold move fit right in. However, as I said, I seldom stop things. I am loyal to things (and people) so this was, for me, a big deal. I thought of Lisa because 20 or so years ago I thought if I subscribed to *People* I could keep up with her and her wide ranging conversation topics, usually about people I'd never heard of. She, I'm sure, will tell this tale differently, she has some story about me and *People* and her, but despite whatever spin she puts on it, I know the reason the subscription started in the first place: Lisa. It continued over the years as I'm a devoted fan of pop culture and I like to keep up. Plus they were perfect for airplanes. I'd save them up and page through them doing take offs and landings. I thought of David because he is embarrassed to have *People* on our kitchen table. And I thought of Mark and Dirk because for the last year I have been handing stacks, literally 7 to 10 inch stacks each time, of weekly and monthly publications that we get, skim, seldom reading all of. We'd go to Mark and Dirk's house for dinner and I'd see very familiar stacks on their coffee table. Mark told me if not for me they'd never see "a current" magazine. We have plenty of others to give still, just not the mainstay.

My one lasting question has always been the same as when I used to renew: Why is an annual subscription to *People* three to fives times the cost of an annual subscription to *The New Yorker*? They both come out weekly. One seems to be supported by tons of ads while the other barely has an ad in it each week. Yet the cost differential? I also subscribe to *Entertainment Weekly*. I used to think this was a pale sad attempt to mimic *People* but then Robert Heuer told me it was not. He told me he made lists (what to see, what to get) from it. I was drawn to this idea ( LISTS ! ) and bought in. Again the cost. This one is even less than *The New Yorker*, and perhaps cheaper than *People* by a factor of ten times. It makes no sense to me. *Sunset Magazine* is like \$10 a year.

I am likely the last person on the planet who subscribes to *Sunset Magazine* thus no one advertises in it. Still it's \$10 a year. How can that be profitable?

## January

Perhaps I should tell you something we did this year, get that ball rollin'?

My Mom and Dad were married on the 10th of January 62 years ago. In December of each year I start planning my early trips to Palm Springs as there are several holidays at the start of the year I like to take advantage of, ones that make for 3 day weekends. While glancing at January a year ago this month and making plans, I noticed that the 10th was actually ON a Saturday. I thought I should take my parents to dinner! So I called my sister Lynn, said this is on, and bought plane tickets. Thankfully Alaska now flies direct Seattle to Detroit. I flew in on Friday the 9th, landing at about 3:00 in the afternoon. My hotel is no more than 40 minutes from the airport. Picked up the rental car, got caught in a snow storm on my way to my hotel and then had had my front driver's side tire blow in blizzard conditions. On a very very scary freeway. Just getting out of the car to see what happened I was taking my life in my hands. Back in the car, fast. I had a cell phone, an iPad, all of the necessary chargers, a full tank of gas and my AAA membership. How bad can this be? Not unlike Donald Trump it started out okay, a little annoying perhaps but it was still daylight and surely this can't last too long. But darkness descends and no one comes to help you. Long story short, I got to my hotel room at 10:00 PM that night. I sat in that rental car in a blizzard for 7 hours. Trust me there were not better options available to me.

Flew to Detroit on Friday, picked my entire family up and took them to dinner in honor of the 62nd anniversary on Saturday, and flew back to Seattle on Sunday. It was worth it.

On Tuesday January 20th the most significant event of the year, and likely years to come as it impacts *everything* now, took place. On that day we closed on and took possession of our new house in Palm Springs. It's not "new." It's a 1974-ish fixer, but it's new to us. The tax records say it was built in 1974 but the concrete on the front stoop begs to differ. In 1973, clear as can be, someone dedicated the house writing their name and 1973 in the fresh concrete. So I think it was built in 1973 and Riverside County added it to the tax rolls in 1974. I was just starting college when someone was writing their name in the front sidewalk of our new adventure.

I flew down there solo (well, with Opal) on the Thursday the 15th. My job was final move prep. We were still in our old house almost fully packed. We had to be out on the 20th. David flew in to join Opal and me on Sunday the 18th. We signed escrow papers on Monday the 19th (even though it was a holiday) and closed on the Tuesday the 20th. Movers were lined up for NOON that day. By 5:00 PM everything we hadn't given away or gotten rid of from our old house was carefully stacked floor to ceiling and wall to wall in our 20 X 20 foot two car garage at the new place.

We spent the next 4 days in meetings with Jesus. Really, our wonderful contractor, who has since moved to Arizona, was named Jesus. We went over the basics:

Please build a wall here, take that door out there, build a closet here, scrape all of that popcorn off the ceilings in every room, including the 20 foot vaulted ceilings in the main room (Or are they 15 feet? You know I don't know), can you add a pocket door here?, steam all that wallpaper off every frickin' wall, skim coat the entire interior so we have fresh new plaster walls, prime and paint all of the walls and ceilings, paint all of the trim and doors white, oh, and, well this is kinda last minute but how much would it add to also jackhammer ALL of the uneven Saltillo Mexican restaurant tiles in the house and haul them away? Please take it down to the concrete slab. Thanks, here's the keys and some money upfront, good luck. And then, on Saturday the 24th, David and I flew back to Seattle with Opal hoping for the best.

We owned our first Palm Springs house, the tiny one, for 14 years. We turned it into a little jewel box by time we sold it. It's going to take every day of 14 years to make this house a jewel box I'm sure. Size alone . . . it's almost twice the size, 3 bathrooms to do instead of 2, a larger kitchen to do, and so much jackhammered-pocked concrete to decide what to do with.

And currently there's really no usable outdoor space. A pool yes, but a bad one. No spa (this kills me as it's my favorite part of being there). Only 2 trees. No sitting areas. No landscaping. No wall on the west side of our property, no wall between us and a challenging neighbor. No wall? No permits to do any work by the City until there is a wall.

And get this: The backyard? Over the years, and obviously using different people with varying skills, the previous owners covered the entire yard with concrete. Or worse, something down there they call "cool-crete" which is worse looking than even badly done concrete. And I don't just mean concrete around the pool here. No, I mean every bit of the 50' X 100' backyard. It didn't all match, sections were not flush or level with sections near them, it was ugly. So far we have spent \$8,250 just to have it removed. I had to hire two different guys at two different times. Each guy had crews of 2 or 3 men. In July and in August different crews were there each month with jackhammers and, when our challenging neighbor complained, sledge hammers and wheel barrows. Imagine breaking up concrete into large chunks, picking them up by hand, putting the chunks in wheelbarrows, wheeling them out to the street, transferring them to a trailer, and then hauling it all to wherever you can legally dump concrete. In August there was a period of two weeks that even the locals were calling a heatwave. Temps got up to 120° days on end. It was during those days the second crew was doing the half the yard the first crew didn't get to in July. If Donald Trump had his way I'd never have been able to find guys to do this job. It was worth every cent of \$8,250 - that money was spread out between 6 or 8 men, over at least a 10 day period, and it included the dumping fees. Try to do that in Seattle for the same cost.

Now the concrete is 100% gone. Now we have a 5,000 square foot backyard of sand and rubble surrounding a pool we don't like. It's like a beach with concrete rubble strewn everywhere you'd want to be. The last lot was 6,000 square feet; this lot is 12,000 square feet. See, there's simply a lot more to do. And we're a bit older than when we were taking on the first house. And the money doesn't flow as it did in 2005 and 2006 and 2007.

Yet, I couldn't be happier. It's going to take years and yet I couldn't be happier.

### **February, and March, And Let's Toss April In As Well**

I miss our old "At A Glance" wall calendars. We used to keep a wall calendar made out of paper. (I have them all saved ~ that's useful, not hoarding.) We kept them until we stopped writing on them. It took 2 years of me looking a mostly blank days page after page at the end of the year before I stopped buying them altogether. Video killed the radio star.) I just opened the calendar app on my laptop and tabbed through the next 12 weeks of the year. Things are color coded (take that At A Glance) by nature of activity. All work appointments are blue. Opal time is green. Time with family is purple. And so on, there are 13 colors. Going out to movies is a different color than watching a movie at home. Going out to dinner with friends is a different color than having friends here to Georgetown for dinner. It is many layered.

Most days in a week look the same. There's always too much blue. (Windermere, BLUE, that was the start of my color assigning.) Most days are mostly blue, starting with work things. They then have park component around 5:00 for the dog, and then there's the home in the kitchen for the rest of the day part. The work appointments vary, the home cooking dinner part seldom does. Most days look like that.

In February there was a notable exception on Monday the 9th. Our friend Michael Stewart, upon hearing we planned nothing at all for our 30th Anniversary, put together a lovely meal at a place on Eastlake called *The Blind Pig*. It's in a strip mall storefront kinda place. There's a *Subway* next door, that kinda storefront. This one happens to be where *Sitka and Spruce* started out years ago so it has good history. Anyway Michael booked the whole place and there was a lovely dinner. Memory fades but I think about 10 or 14 people were there. It was a special, lovely event, one for which we are still thankful.

Two days later, and taking advantage of a holiday weekend (President's Day people), David and I flew to Palm Springs. It was a late at night flight. Trying to be frugal (?) I called ahead to Roy (our agent there) and Jesus (connected) and asked them to pull a mattress out of the garage and put it on the floor in "the middle bedroom" ~ we now have a house big enough to have a middle. David and I get there late. It's cold, it's dark, the house is completely unfamiliar to us, and but I think it would be meaningful to go right to the house and spend the night in it on the day of our 30th Anniversary.

Though the construction was supposed to be done, and it was, it was dusty, dirty, and uncomfortable in the house. Phase One as I call it started on January 20th. We slept on floor on February 11th, that's 22 days. Jesus did everything we asked for to make the place bearable in only 22 days). We probably should have stayed in a warm comfortable guest house or hotel that night. God knows there's plenty of those to choose from down there. Concrete floors in the desert are colder than you can imagine. The mattress on the floor thing just isn't as fun at 60.

David and I stayed for 8 days (I love those 3 day weekends!) and began mostly cleaning up dust. We put some beds together, pulled some things out of the garage, but mostly it was 8 days of cleaning. Construction dust is hard to get rid of.

We returned to Seattle, went back to our usual routine, and then ended the month in Greg and Larry's "cabin" on the river. I don't know which river, even though David sold them the house, one of those rivers near Index or Highway 2 that is capable of flooding. We planned the trip to coincide with Fred and Robin spending a weekend up there. Since there is no TV, no wireless, and no phone reception, I like to go best when there's a group to provide the stimulation I can't get electronically.

A full month later, towards the end of March, Lisa, from Michigan, was going to be in Palm Springs. I'm thinking she drove, pretty sure of that. She does it so often, I can't keep track. She drove there in September I think as well - did she really drive this twice in one year? I don't know - she can write a letter of her own I guess to explain. All I know is I flew there to meet her. Wait. Yes, she picked me up at the airport, she had a car, she did drive there twice this year. Wow. Lisa and I were there 5 days together. I tried to not focus on the house the whole time. I had, after all, company.

A full month later David and I flew to New York City for 5 days. I don't feel like we travel much and then I look back as I write this letter and I think, "GOOD FOR YOU!" you're traveling more than you think you are. We love going to Manhattan. It's the one thing we've done more than any other thing when it comes to travel. (Going to a second home isn't travel, often it's just a different kind of work so it does not count.) This NYC trip wasn't really planned, we were invited last minute by Rebecca and Cherese who were going there to meet up with and celebrate Donna's 50th birthday. Donna, and her wife Lorelei, are the friends in Austin who Cherese and Rebecca are abandoning us for. Somehow we passed muster and were included in the lesbian New York festivities. The only person other I know other than David who gets such a kick out of dining out, and who does it so well, is Donna. So this was a fun 5 days. Meals ruled and everything else was worked in *around eating*. The last night Donna took us all to *PRUNE* (google it) and treated us for a lovely dinner on her 50th. Other than meals it was seeking out espresso shops and walking the Highline. We did not get to see *Hamilton* off Broadway while we were there. We did get to see *The Curious Incident Of The Dog In The Nighttime*, the new production of *The King and I*, and *Fun Home*.

Along with the meals enjoyed with Donna and the girls, David and I had two solo meals that we always have when we are there. (We had them solo this time, we're happy to have them with others, I remember eating at both with Michael Stewart years back). Our NYC haunts: *Esca* at 43rd and 9th Avenue and *Gramercy Tavern* on 20th Street near Broadway. Those must be our favorite places because we eat at each of them every time we go. *Gramercy* is always our LAST meal of the trip. The Alaska flight back to Seattle leaves Newark around 6:00 in the afternoon. We always pack that morning, check out of our hotel, and take our luggage with us in a cab to *Gramercy*. They are always nice enough to check our luggage into their coat room and let us dine and pretend we don't have to go home in a few hours. We go for a late lunch, say 2:00, linger over cocktails and then order and eat slowly. There's always desert and then we catch a cab directly to the airport. I never eat the airplane food on this day; there's no need to. We have done this many times - it's a flawless last few hours in Manhattan.

And, somewhere in the first quarter of the year, we fell back in love with our tiny house in Georgetown and decided to throw some money at it to show it we still care. When we moved in, a very hard to believe 4 years ago this month, we called our kitchen relocation in this house "temporary." Because it was "temporary" we started out with only one cabinet, the sink cabinet. Everything else was that Metro Industrial Shelving, often called "restaurant shelving," that you can only really get at *Storables* in U-Village. You will see it for sale elsewhere but it's cheap knock-off shit. Trust me on this, I've done all the research. So we "made a kitchen" where there was no kitchen before with metal shelving. We could configure it any way we wanted to, we could move it around, and remove it if this new kitchen location ended up being a mistake. But, turns out, we loved the new kitchen location. Over the years we have added 3 more sets of cabinets randomly as houses closed and new needs presented themselves in our new space. By living in the space for a year or two before committing to real cabinets we really got to know what we needed.

So this year it was time for more. We hired Nathan Hartman, who owns kerf Design, the only place we ever want cabinets from, and got a new tall cabinet to keep liquor in, a much larger kitchen island, and a top board for our fireplace mantel. Nathan made drawings of what this kitchen could look like if "finished" (meaning more cabinets in and the metal shelving out). Nathan's floorplans and drawings are stuck to the fridge with magnets waiting for some random house to close.

### **Sunday December 13th**

This worries me. On Sunday mornings, after I'm up, after coffee, after reading two newspapers (real papers, delivered here), after reading all of my email, including a newsletter one of my agents puts out weekly about local politics and goings on, and after spending time with the dog I return to our bedroom to tidy up and make the bed. I have an FM radio in there (yup, really old school, a small radio you can pick-up and move around and extend the antenna on and try to get the static out of by playing with

the station tuning knob, one of those) and I always turn it on. And it's always set to KUOW so, around this time on Sundays, I end up hearing *Prairie Home Companion* on National Public Radio. The worrisome part is that I don't rush over and turn it off as I used to do. When I was younger and this falderal came on I'd say, "No, no, no." All of those cheesy radio skits and the wholesome guests and the main guy narrating as he does. Nothing says, "I'm an old fart" quite like *Prairie Home Companion*.

I'm pretty sure its intended audience are people older than Diane Rehm sounds, and that's like really old. Every time I listen to *her* show I think, "Pay attention, this could be her last broadcast." I admit I like her show, I listen to it whenever I can, but I could park RVs in the spaces between her words. It's all so, ah, halting. Anyway, I now catch myself (dare I say this?) not just listening to, but enjoying, *Prairie Home Companion*. I think this started back when I was going through the cancer treatments. Then I didn't have the energy to rush the radio. I'm going to blame my cancer time because I can't believe all people have to listen to this once they hit 60. That can't be a thing, right?

### May and June

There are certain days I always remember. Or should I say dates? I always think on December 7th what that day is. Ditto with December 9th, February 12th, January 10th, September 11th, January 2nd, etc. Dates that mean something to me that I just always remember and think about as I mark their passing. January 20th will now be one of those as an example (the day we bought our new house in Palm Springs). May 6th each year is one of those days. That was the last day I had chemo and radiation for the throat tumor at Swedish. In 2009. I think about that episode in my life less and less and less each year. And with good reason, it's been full 6 years now. Still I'll be writing a check to pay a contractor (that's why we still have checks, right?) or at work reviewing files, and as I write "May 6th" on the review sheet I stop for a second and think quietly to myself, "Oh, yea . . . wow." And then I move on with my day, as I did this May.

### A Full Spring And Summer Ignoring The Yard

I am the landscaper in this household. The yard was nothing when we got here, a disorganized mess with no inviting places to go sit, a sad blank slate. I focused on nothing else for the first three years and with sheer force of will I made it into a yard I like with six places to wander to if you want to sit and contemplate plants and birds and fish. I am also the gardener in this household (though I see a glimmer of hope that that is changing). I have been here 3 summers (2012, 2013, and 2014) and have toiled in the soil all of them. But this year? This year I took the summer off. No major projects. No planting other than food. Why? I'll get to that later.

I bought a small pick-up truck the summer before (sadly after most of the landscaping projects were finished) and the most I did this year summer was drive my truck about a mile from our house, have it filled with mulch at this great place Curtis told me about,

and then return home to weed the beds and cover them in mulch. I did this about three times this summer. I took the summer off essentially. Instead of major yard projects this year, I spent my time wandering to the six sitting areas I've created and just sitting. Some days that would be sitting by a fire, other days that would be sitting and feeding the fish. But most times it was just sitting and thinking about all that I've done here. Or not thinking at all, just sitting.

### **Monday December 14th**

Well . . . I didn't get much done yesterday (on this letter) as there are many distractions on Sundays, the final one being that *The Good Wife* is on Sunday nights. That is the one time each week I can accurately predict David and I will be together in the same place. Plus we cook more on Sundays. I always make breakfast, usually a frittata using potatoes I've cooked days in advance, and we watch *Saturday Night Live*. We are never awake at 11:15 PM, even on Saturday nights, so we DVR it and enjoy it with breakfast the next day. We are dog sitting Opal's sister this week so there's time focused on dogs and taking them to parks. And then there's cooking a more involved dinner than we would on a Tuesday. And then *The Good Wife*. It's a full day.

Thank god my office slows to a crawl this time of the year. I'm not going there today. Instead you are getting all of my energy here. It feels so, I don't know, liberating to NOT be going to the office on a Monday. Though I'm never liberated in December until this letter is in the mail. Only then can I relax, Christmas shop, enjoy parties, or do anything to help David with anything around the house. Ask him what it's like while I'm doing this. He has many crosses to bear and he's willing to tell you all about them.

Once this is in the mail the other thing I can do is open my digital calendar, look at January and February, and start to obsess about the next year. Mostly it is work obsession, but it does occupy my thoughts and time.

### **More May and June and Some July, Oh Heck, Let's Just Call It Summer**

So I just tabbed through May and June and July and most days those months involved at least an hour set aside for, often two hours, and, on the weekends, solidly blocked out hours . . . all set aside for one activity. I'll get to that in a bit here. It really was the defining thing for me about 2015. Wait for it.

In May I went to see Marc Maron with Rebecca. He was doing standup here in Seattle. Maron's WTF podcast is the only one I try to listen to thanks to Rebecca. I like it, I just don't have the time for it. I try, but I don't have that kind of time.

There was a lot of dental work in the summer. There was dental work up to and until my insurance benefits for dental work were maxed out. I'm on hold again until January. But - oh boy, yippie! - I have something to look forward too coming soon.



We threw several work related cocktail parties here in Georgetown. I “give them away” as door prizes at the first office meeting of the year. (That’s Monday January 11th this year.) Lucky agents who win these door prizes get to invite up to 14 people to a nice party. (Based on us having 16 martini glasses, no plastic cups at these events!)

Like everyone else in Seattle we interviewed a heating and cooling company to see what a whole house air-conditioning unit would cost. And they say there’s no global warming! Turns out those are complicated to install (for us). And that money could go towards floors in Palm Springs, or kitchen cabinets here, and really . . . was it *really* that bad last summer? See, you don’t even remember now. You’re so cold right now you don’t remember it ever being hot. And really, what’s a few days of heat?

We took Opal and spent a weekend at Jason and Robert’s house in Port Townsend so I could try to assemble a 50s wall shelving unit I gave them a year or so back. It was when we were giving up our 20’ X 20’ storage locker in Interbay. We loved the unit but no longer had room for it (really, it’s a tiny house here), we wanted to stop paying for storage, and we didn’t know the Amarillo House was in our future. The last time it was put together was 2005 in Matthew’s Beach by Monte Schaaf. Back then I watched and handed parts to Monte as he took the lead. Monte can put anything together. Me? Not so much. It was much harder this Port Townsend go round. (The Amarillo House is how I refer to our new house in Palm Springs. It’s on East Amarillo Way and I painted all of the exterior doors a YELLOW color that is shocking.)

On the *First Thursday* in July we made it to the funny little art show in the vacated for one night co-op apartment on Capitol Hill. As you know we missed it in June despite my efforts. But in July David had to go as the artist in residence that night was our dear friend Julie Heyne. Had a fun time. People living in the building visited the show (obviously) and at one point I found myself chatting with people who purchased a co-op that I had listed for sale (located directly below “the art gallery”) about two decades ago. I remember my nightmarish client, a crazy woman from Canada referred to me by an artist from Canada who I had a connection to through Greg. I remember a super controlling and officious gay nut on the co-op board that I had to deal with. Trust me, no one can do “officious” quite like the gays! Some real estate deals are seared into your memory.

Also in July I made the final move in a large chess game I was playing all summer. We went to the showroom for the Sliding Door Company on 4th Avenue, or 1st Avenue, one of those, in Sodo. We looked at the floor models, picked one, and set an appointment. The guy who measures showed up in Georgetown and I took him into what was then our TV viewing room and told him what my plan was. These sliding doors are made in China or Italy or some place overseas and then put on a slow boat to LA. They call you when the doors are in LA. Expect to wait at least 12 weeks from the day he measures.

## **We Are No Longer Living In Sin ANYWHERE**

**June 26th 2015**

So I'm home alone on a Friday morning finishing up my espresso and reading the New York Times. David is at the gym. It's a beautiful summer day, one of those days where it will be 90 degrees by 4:00 PM but the morning starts out with glorious weather. All of the windows and doors are open as I turn on *The Today Show* at exactly 6:58 AM because I like to hear the opening music and headlines. (Yes, really I like that, I try to hear it every day.) What is the top thing they are talking about? I just like to know before Opal and I drift away from the kitchen. And this day the top thing was the Supreme Court ruling in favor of gay marriage throughout the 50 United States. It IS the story of the day, it has the banner BREAKING NEWS and SPECIAL REPORT splashed across the screen, and all of the talking heads are reviewing the ruling, while special correspondents come and go explaining what this means to people in less progressive states than the one David and I live in.

This was all happening live. It was 7:00 AM here but 10:00 AM in Washington, D.C. so I was seeing it unfold live here. I gotta say, I got a little choked up. There I am alone in my kitchen getting a lump in my throat and feeling a tear or two come on. As Mike Meyer used to say on *SNL*, I was verklempt. It was the start of Gay Pride Weekend in most states around the country (due to extreme heat in July the City of Palm Springs has it's parade in November). Rather than my usual routine of standing at the island and reading the days papers and barely paying attention to the news, I sat down and was momentarily transfixed by the TV. I was overcome. When I was grappling with the fact that I was gay in the 1960s and 70s it never occurred to me that this would be possible. Yet I'm watching it unfold live. David and I were already married, but only in Washington state. Now we're married in Tennessee and Texas. And Utah. And Ohio and Oklahoma. Yup, now we are married in all of those states. AND Kentucky.

**Wednesday December 16th**

I missed a day there. I didn't write yesterday, I decided to go to my office instead. I hoped to be there very briefly and then come back home to this but I should have known better. Once again my job interferes with my personal life. Even though it was just me and my staff, barely any agents are there these days, there are still things for me to do. I got lost in emails and payroll issues and reviewing files and arguments about closing dates (not me, I don't argue, I referee) and the Landlord Tenant Act and before I knew it it was dark outside. So it was 2:00 PM. (That was a joke, get it?) Once it started to get dark I went to Starbucks to get a cookie and two shots of espresso over ice and then headed off to "the steep dog park near where Amazon used to be" on Beacon Hill. This dog park is conveniently located on my secret how to avoid I-5 route home! I always have a dog in my car. Yesterday I had two. (Right now I have two dogs on my feet, one on each side of me.) Anyway, I didn't get to write and wrap up more of

my year. Missed a full day. And people are asking. I get calls, emails, and now a new fresh hell, comments on Facebook !!!

There was more travel in August. The first few days of August were spent in the Veteran's Hospital in Ann Arbor, Michigan. My father was having a tumor removed from his colon. My father was 89 at the time (although, like me, he always rounds up). I rented hotel rooms near the hospital for my mom and sister and I to stay in. My mom and dad and sister live about an hour away from Ann Arbor. No one wants to add a 2 to 3 hour commute to the already stressful hospital stuff. So I got rooms to use as a base camp. As many of you know, this hospital stuff with the elderly is not a picnic. But we got lucky. My dad was in on a Monday, surgery on that same day, and we had him up and walking the halls the next day. The tumor had not spread, they got it all out in one try, no chemo or radiation needed. See? That's lucky. I flew home back to Seattle on Thursday; Dad was home in his apartment with mom watching TV in his chair by Saturday. Dodged a bullet.

On Friday the 28th of August Opal and I got in the car with David and we took a lovely road trip to Vancouver, BC. It was David's 59th birthday. When I asked him what he wanted for his birthday the basic answer was "remarkable food." So his birthday was planned around meals as it's always about *where* we are going to eat. We had dinner that night at *Le Crocodile* a very French restaurant we first ate at in 1987. We have been going there for 29 years now. Since it was David's birthday I agreed to eat Indian food the next night. We went to a place we had heard many good things about called *Vij's Restaurant*. This same place tried to open in South Lake Union in Seattle, under a different name, now forgotten, but failed for some reason *Vij's* was a scene to be sure. Obviously very popular. Long wait, crowded bar with a weird cocktail menu, but in the end it was well worth all of it. Great food. Amazing Indian food. My new rule is if you want me to eat Indian food you have to take me to *Vij's* in Vancouver. Do not try to get me into an Indian restaurant anywhere the 98105 or 98115 zip codes in Seattle. Don't.

### **A Shameless Plug For Me**

You know how things in my digital calendar are assigned colors? I have a special color for the 60 to 90 minutes I block out to interview a prospective new real estate agent. As I tabbed through the summer months, and well into the fall, I see that block of color at least once a week. Here's the thing . . . remember the total world crash that started in August of 2007? I do. I live the after effects of it every day in some way. In all of 2008, and all of 2009, and continuing on to 2012, during all of those years, NO ONE called me up wanting to explore becoming a real estate agent. Slowly these interviews started to come back. This year I'd say they are firmly back. I have had many first time agent meet and greets (and explain, explain, explain) this year. I wouldn't say we are at 2006 levels again, but these employment inquires are returning. In 2005 and 2006 and the first 7 months of 2007 I got a phone call or a resume every few hours. It was crazy. At

one point I had 105 licenses hanging on my wall. Today I have 62. I'm not shooting for 105 again, though 80 would be comfortable and nice. I can manage 80 people.

I'm always telling our family and friends about what David does, about his career, about his listing and selling houses. It occurs to me that I've never really delved into what I do in this letter. *I manage 62 people who do what David does.* I help them with legal issues, contact issues, marketing strategies, and working with buyers when there are 14 offers on one house (the story of 2015). When they are one of the 13 agents who didn't get to sell the one house, I keep their spirits up (or try to). I help them keep their moral compass pointing in the right direction when so many agents out there seem to have a moral compass whose needle won't spin at all, stuck in a very bad spot.

But first, before I can do any of that day-to-day stuff, I need to HIRE them. Thus the special color block in my calendar. I meet newbies all of the time, I explain how this career works, all of the numbers involved and what the pitfalls are and what the very high upside can be. I try to save them from starting somewhere else pointing out the many values items working for Windermere provides. And I try to convince them that I can do this - *that I can train them*, mentor them, coach them, and make them fully functional and independent usually within a year. I have 62 agents working for me, and all but a few of them were newbies when I first met them. They seldom call me anymore. When it starts out they imprint like ducks on me; now most only call me once every month or two and never to say, "Hi, can I buy you a drink?" Nope! Mostly now they call only when they have hit a wall. They have a problem. They call me. But 62 of them never have a problem in the same week. That's why I could handle 80. (I could handle more if I didn't have to go to meetings!) Do you know anyone who wants a career change? Send them my way. Seriously. I have agents retiring. I have agents moving to Texas. I need replacements !!! And I'm ready. Or I will be on January 12th (I'd be ready on the 11th but I just found out I have meetings ALL day that day.)

### **Lisa Drives Across The Country A Lot**

At the very end of September Lisa and her husband Eric arrived in Seattle. Lisa was on her way to Palm Springs. They stayed here. We don't quite have a guest room yet, but we were working in that direction. On the last Sunday in September we threw a small party here for people who are friends of mine who have met Lisa on Facebook. I'm serious. She's wormed her way into the lives of people I know via Facebook and she wanted to meet the people she plays Scrabble trades post with. This is the world we live in. Anyway it was a great party. I cooked. David tended the bar. And the two tables we have here were enough to sit all of her Facebook friends. A very nice event.

### **The Cutest Father And Son Photos Ever Taken**

So my dad turned 90 on October 9th. I turned 60 on October 11th His was a Friday; mine was a Sunday. And David and I were leaving for Hong Kong on the Tuesday,

October 13th. Even though I had already flown to Detroit once this year, and even though we were about to leave on a two week vacation, I felt I just had to do it again. I needed to squeeze in another quick Detroit run. So I called Lynn. She was willing to plan and host a party for dad on the Friday. I would fly in on Thursday, attend the dual birthday event on Friday, and then fly back to Seattle on Saturday. Again, thank god for this direct, non-stop Alaska flight! Distant relatives I was sure I would never in my life see again were there. There were two cakes (great cakes both made by my sister). Photos were taken. There are the world's cutest photos of me and my dad blowing out candles on my Facebook page. At 90, and after a recent hospital stay, he has more oomph in his lungs than I have in mine at 60. I have breathing issues still, he does not. He blew all of his out twice as fast as I could mine. I was on a plane back to Seattle the next day, Saturday, so that I could be here on Sunday for my 60th with my "Seattle family" as it were.

And I was. David and our friends Mark and Dirk were taking me to dinner at *Lark*, the "new" *Lark* in that up and coming yet seriously weird southern part of Capitol Hill, near the I-Hop. I have lived in Seattle for 37 years and I have never been in that I-Hop. Should I? Prior to dinner we had drinks with a few friends in the Melrose Market in a much less weird part of the Hill. That morning we read the New York Times and then took Opal for a walk and played chuck-it ball with her. A perfect, quiet, relaxed 60th birthday with a few friends and the two loves of my life: my husband and my dog.

### **Really It Was All About The Ride**

Two days later we flew to Vancouver, BC and then got on a Cathey Airlines flight to Hong Kong. People keep asking about this, as in "Hong Kong?" Backstory first: We wanted to do a longer, somewhat out of the ordinary vacation this year in honor of both our 30th anniversary and my 60th birthday. Originally we were going to take a 10 day cruise on a ship of gays that started in Hong Kong and ended in Singapore. These plans have to be made almost a year in advance. We booked the cruise and put down our (refundable) deposit and then bought airline tickets. And by "bought" I mean David spent hours and hours on the phone each month negotiating how to use some of the 600,000 frequent flyer miles we had amassed. They don't make this easy. Thankfully David has the patience for this as I do not. Up to me I'd only fly in these United States. So everything was booked, dates were set, almost a year in advance. It rolls around to March or April of this year and we're not feeling as flush and I'm looking at the whole length of this trip with stays at either ends of the cruise and it's 24 days. I think about my work load, the cost of the extra lodging, and David thinks about his pipeline and presto the cruise deposit is refunded and all of that stress is off our shoulders.

But then David says so what do you want to do now? And I say, "Well you have FREE FIRST CLASS SEATS booked from here to Hong Kong so . . . let's go to Hong Kong!" For how long? I say 5 days. (Because 5 nights of hotel bills is generally more than I can mentally handle.) Then he asks is that it? And I say, "Let's go see our Amarillo

House!” And that became the vacation: 5 nights in Hong Kong followed by 5 nights in Palm Springs, and hours and hours and hours and hours of time spent in the air on planes. But this is where it gets fun.

I have zero interest in making travel plans and certainly no patience for it. David, on the other hand, does. Using our huge block of frequent flyer miles, David spent hours and hours online, and on the phone with airline staff, making flight reservations. He’d make some, wait a few weeks and then call back to see if he could do better. He’d get new ones, wait a month more, and call back and see if something else opened up. Literally this went on all year, right up to a few weeks before the trip. So we were first class from Vancouver to Hong Kong. Then David got the idea to see if we could fly around the world in the other direction (instead of coming back from Hong Kong the way we went). And could we do it - for free - on Emirates Airline? God knows how he did it, but after hours of effort we had FIRST CLASS tickets from Hong Kong to Dubai (8 hr, 10 min). Then we had 4 hours in the Emirates first class lounge in the Dubai airport. Then we had first class again for the flight from Dubai to San Francisco (15 hrs, 20min). So we flew the other way around the world in first class luxury and we didn’t pay a cent to do it. Go David! Go David! Go David!

Google this: **Emirates Airline Jennifer Aniston**. It’s a You-Tube commercial for the plane we were on. A-380. Two floors, coach way below evidently, and then where we were. When I just googled it the link below the one I wanted said the airlines had to defend the “snobbiness ad ever.” People need to lighten up. The Aniston ad is cute and she’s quite funny in it. And the bar she goes to? That bar just like that exists. I went there twice to visit and have a drink and to just have place to go . . . you have 15 hours to kill!

Best airline flight ever. Dom Perignon as you board and get settled and anytime you want it in flight. Cocktails any time you want them. Caviar service. Amazingly good food. A freaking BED that goes FLAT and has down pillows and comforters and when you push a button the doors close around it so you are in a little private room of your own (see Aniston video), tons of movies and TV shows on demand anytime, AND THE SHOWER. The bathroom on the plane was larger than the bathroom in our house and much nicer. The floors were heated. HEATED. And we took showers in flight. It is unlikely we will ever in our lives get to do something like this again. Our formerly huge block of frequent flier miles are now gone and it will be years before we could ever pull something like this off again. Plus the airlines seem to work to prevent you from really getting any value, much less joy, out of the miles you have. David has tips on how to work the system if you care.

It took 34 hours and 25 minutes from the time we closed the door of our W Hotel room in Hong Kong until we arrived at our front door in Palm Springs. I timed it. Carefully. Every step of the way: subways, airports, lay overs in lounges, waiting, boarding, flying, customs, baggage, more lounges and waiting, next flights, rental car, all of it. All timed.

I turned the bluetooth connection between my cell phone and my watch off so my watch would not change time zones as my cell phone did. And I took careful notes. I timed each segment and wrote it down and kept a running total. I doubled check my math several times along the way and saved my final tally *as I knew you'd want to know this*. 34 hours. 25 minutes. Door to door.

### **Thursday December 17th = Where Was I ?**

Well, it's official: This letter is going out about 5 days later this year than in years past except for the cancer year when it was like a month late. I could have written all night last night or I could have gone over to Julie's with David for a few wonderful bowls of cioppino. I got not too late but avoided doing what I should be doing by poking around on Facebook (the world's greatest procrastination tool).

Where was I? Oh yes, we get home from the Hong Kong / Amarillo House trip and, well, it feels like the holidays are upon us. It's November. I barely have sat my suitcase down and I flying again! This time on a float plane with my Windermere colleagues to a lodge on the Hood Canal for an overnight \_\_\_\_\_ retreat. I'm not filling in the blank but possible words might be: corporate, bonding, growth, special, getting to know you, getting to know all about you - WAIT, that's a song from a Broadway musical, more words, we need more words . . . send me your favorite word for the blank. Everyone by now knows or has heard of events like this (from standup routines likely). I actually had a nice time, great food, but still it is in my nature to mock things like this. So I do.

### **Hmmmmm. Is There Anything Else You'd Like To Mock Michael?**

As a matter of fact . . . .

### **Out Of Step With Humanity Once Again**

No matter what route we take when coming or going to work, downtown Seattle, or Capitol Hill, we have to pass by Seattle's two stadiums. I see them there. I ignore them. I remember that each time I had a chance to vote on whether the city's tax dollars should be spent on them I voted no. I'll support tax dollars (and land) going to these when I see support for dog parks IN EVERY PARK in the city that I pay taxes in.

I remember that over 50% of the voters agreed with me each time I voted against those stadiums. Both lost the popular vote; both were built anyway as officials ignored the popular vote. So it goes. But I don't go. ***I have never been inside either*** of these structures. I don't know what goes on in them and I can barely tell them apart. And don't get me started on a third one for basketball. Especially NIMBY. Can I be a NIMBY now too please? I have no idea what it would take to get me to go into any of them. I think I'd sooner wear a costume or dress in drag or sing karaoke in a public place.

And then we come to that period of time each year when I buy a sandwich for lunch at *Pete's*, the deli near my office, and as I'm leaving the guy who makes my sandwich, the guy who knows me only as "Nelson," and knows I like liverwurst, shouts at me, "Go hawks" after I pick up my sandwich and say, "Thank you." I say, "Thank you" and he shouts, "Go hawks." **W T F ?**

Once this period of time starts it goes on and stretches into a period of weeks. Soon people are making very unfortunate clothing choices, the same unfortunate clothing choices wherever you look. One day, we find out the hard way this is the day of a game, we go to **Island Soul** in **Columbia City** for breakfast. Most of the tables have "Reserved" signs on them at 10:00 AM on a Saturday? We get the last unspoken for table. As we read the **New York Times** and have breakfast the restaurant fills up with people. Some of them have painted their faces to match the same colors of their very unfortunate wardrobes. I feel completely out of step with humanity. Nothing confuses me more than periods of time like this. I am the 187th Man. I am so far from 11 it can't even matter.

What would these 12th men think if I walked around constantly shouting "**Go Meryl**" the week prior to the Academy Awards? A year or so ago my super smart friend Merritt and I were discussing this and she said something I liked and I said I was going steal it and use as my own in this letter but now, well, I'm not stealing it. What she said to me was that this horrific period of time for us let's her know what it must be like be Jewish and have everyone saying, "Merry Christmas" every time you make a purchase or turn around. To be surrounded by all of this Christmas claptrap when you might not feel a part of it.

On the other hand David just came home from a morning of holiday hostess gift buying and as he came in the door laden with bags he said to me, "No one says Merry Christmas anymore." So you can't win. And I certainly never win when I can't escape this hawks crap. It's like the Blue Angels, you just can't not hear it.

I think I'm done now. Look! I avoided talking about politics, gun control, 9 year old girls who use an uzi to kill their gun instructor at the gun range, Donald Trump, that evil clerk in Kentucky whose name I resent even knowing, homeless tents in Seattle, Paris, San Bernardino, Donald Trump, people who live in Georgetown and whine about airplanes and lethal dust in the air, the debates (I am the guy who has seen every minute of every debate for both parties . . . I listen to ALL of this stuff), traffic, construction cranes, what Amazon is doing to my city (please can we all give that a rest?), and Seattle in general.

Let me say one thing: I love Seattle. I love it more this year than I have any year since I arrived here on June 13th 1978. You will not hear me at a party going on about the homeless camps or the construction cranes or all of the new buildings going up or blaming Amazon employees for anything other than fashion issues, or the slowness of light rail coming, or what they have done to Broadway, or bike lanes, or traffic.



You won't hear me whining about how Seattle used to be a small town and now it's just not anymore. You won't hear me griping about how Georgetown has changed or that I don't recognize Broadway anymore. I love it here and this has been a completely exciting year for Seattle. It's not that I don't notice these things, and it's not that I'm not inconvenienced by some of these things. Take traffic. I live 7.2 miles from my office and about 7 miles from the place I go the most, Capitol Hill. I'm completely impacted by this one, yet I don't complain. I turn on NPR and I give it extra time. Sometimes if I remember I play a Marc Maron *WFT!* podcast. And sometimes I'm late. But whatever, I do not complain. This city is growing. These are called growing pains. I don't even look at them as growing pains, I look at them as exciting. It's my 37th year here and I'm excited about being here. Still.

### **Bring It Home**

I have a party to attend in a few hours and I want to arrive there not having to come back to this. All the while I have been doing this I have been hot and heavy on the phone and in emails with Bank of America. Scanning countless documents into pdfs, emailing those, dealing with Identity Affidavits, finding paystubs and tax returns, all of the stuff Tom Martin used to call "my dossier." I am doing not one, but two refinances with them right now. Crazy huh? The holiday, millions of things to do, hundreds of mailing labels (for this letter) to fuss, and in the midst of it all I started two refinances.

And, as some would say, with the devil. I'm sure my agents would think me insane to be doing this with B of A. But I'm not purchasing, I'm refinancing. I don't care when (or if) these loans close. It's not like I'm buying and have deadlines to meet. I have banked with them for 37 years and they've never made a mistake. (Really, in all of that time I have only opened one bank account . . . it was with SeaFirst in the U-District in June of 1978, B of A bought them years later, I stayed and have never moved. They let me keep my account number, that was all I cared about then. Loyal? Not a quitter? Hard to stop things? That's me!) Anyway as a loyal customer (and not because we have any money there, only the 37 years thing, they seem to like that) we are getting .25% off the rates on each house. I have them both locked at 3.25% FIXED and I'm slap happy. We locked 4 days before the Feds raised the rate today. Both loans are for 15 years, that's what I asked for and we're okay with that. If we don't fall down we will own both of our houses free and clear when we are 75!

I'm looking forward to this next weekend. This letter will be out of my life and I'll get to do what I want both days. If it's not raining what I want is to start pruning all of the trees in our yard. I planted every one them, most 2 years ago, and now that all of the leaves are completely gone from all of the trees I can see the trunks and branches and twigs clearly. I can shape things for and look forward to spring.

I am also totally looking forward to opening a new application I just bought. It's Quicken 2016! I have bought it online, immediately installed it, but have not allowed myself to

open it yet. I see many nerdy hours ahead of my transferring files and setting things up and tweaking it so I like the look of it. Pure joy.

**Look around, look around at how lucky we are to be alive right now!**

I am also looking forward to David's birthday NEXT year. He will be 60 and just today we bought tickets on Alaska to fly there for 5 days. Why are we planning this so far in advance? *Hamilton*. Everybody who is anybody has seen *Hamilton* by now. And let's be clear, by *everybody* I mean, in this order, Kent Thoenke, Barack Obama, Kevin Gaspari, Michelle Obama, Greg Kucera, Larry Yocom and, of course, Gary Sarozek. David is bereft to not be in that list. David is dying to see this show and is completely envious of those who have. I was all, "Who cares, we'll see it someday as a road show." I was all that way *until* I bought the Broadway soundtrack.

I know nothing about Alexander Hamilton. He's on the ten dollar bill yet I had no idea why. I was so uninterested in history in grade school. As soon as I could get away from history, I did. So here I am, 45 years or so later, putting the first disc of *Hamilton* in the CD player in my car as I commute to work one day. By time the first song was over I was crying. I thought it was that good. As it I moved through the numbers I realized I was learning American history that I should have learned in 10th grade in my car at 60. And as it went I was astounded that anyone could (would?) pick up a biography of Alexander Hamilton and read it while on vacation and then come up with this. I'm astounded when anyone reads anything other than cheesy mystery novels, which is all I seem to do. I certainly can't imagine reading a biography of historical figures (well, of anyone really, not a biography fan here). But the genius and creativity and ~ well just *everything*. Everything that went into this just filled me with joy and I was becoming verklempt in my car.

This happens often to me these days with a wide range of stimulus. It can be a TV commercial, it can be a movie, most anything. Definitely every time I hear the first few chords of *Same Love*, and now whenever I hear certain songs in *Hamilton*.

Broadway *Hamilton* tickets are hard to get. The soonest David could get seats, and not great ones at that, was August 30th, a Tuesday night. So he bought them. At least we know we are going to see it, and on Broadway, though most of the original cast will likely have moved on by then. No matter. I have the original cast soundtrack and I will have most of it memorized August 30th. I play it over and over and over in my car now. It almost makes me want to know more about American history. Almost. So theatre tickets and plane tickets are purchased. Now we have one thing planned for 2016. David's birthday will be in Manhattan and we will see *Hamilton*. And there will be great meals at our favorite New York places. We're excited and that's good.

### Google It: Marilu Henner Has Superior Autobiographical Memory

All I have is an iPhone and 29 large *At A Glance* wall calendars that I am hoarding in my basement. Still I can recall things with great specificity.

At 1:48 PM on Wednesday June 24th, six months ago, Jim Woods, or Palmer-Woods, called me. Why do I remember this? Is it because, like Marilu Henner, I have what they call “superior autobiographical memory?” Is that why? No, that is not why. It’s because I still have the voice mail message Jim left on my cell phone, I have 8 saved voice mails, his is the oldest. When Jim called my phone was in my lap and I saw that it was him calling and I wanted to answer it (he calls me so rarely these days) but I did not. Why did I not? Because at that exact moment I was in the cab of a large U-Haul truck trying to get used to driving it. Tim Allen was behind me in his truck, he drove me to the U-Haul place in Interbay to get my big truck. I was merging from Dravis onto 15th and just thought I can’t take his call now, this huge truck is scaring the shit out of me, I’ll call him back later. And then my BIG 2015 project took over my life and I never called him back. But saving things on my iPhone is one of my “to do” list methods. I never delete anything until I’ve dealt with it.

Let me just quickly deal with Jim’s voice mail now: **1.** Yes I have very fond memories of seeing the first *Mad Max* movie with you at the Egyptian oh those so many years ago, **2.** Sorry I didn’t see the new *Mad Max Fury Road*, with you BUT I would have been bad company anyway as I hated that movie, it couldn’t end fast enough for me. I especially hated the guy with the guitar on the truck playing awful music that was way to loud and the plot was annoying in it’s lack of depth (I’ve aged Jim), **3.** Okay my bad, I’m sure I lost your holiday letter, it won’t happen again, keep me on this list, *especially* if the letter is “being written by your dog” as letters written by pets observing their humans hold a special place in my world, (I once received a letter written from the perspective of an ornament hanging on the Christmas tree, that was a keeper!, and **4.** Sorry I won’t be on the *Georgetown Garden Walk* this year because . . . . because . . . . because . . . . .

### The Best Thing I Did In All Of 2015

. . . . . because I’ll be driving a U-Haul truck through the parched California landscape on my way to the Amarillo House in Palm Springs !!! Yes, a road trip in a big truck through the desert (very *Mad Max* now that I see the sequence here) in the height of the summer heat. Opal was my co-pilot. Along with everything else Opal’s crate was on the truck. I returned it down there as soon as it was empty and she flew home in her crate on my flight. I left on Gay Pride Day knowing that no matter what route I took to Palm Springs I would be married all along the way. I was gone over the 4th of July and didn’t return in time to participate in the **Georgetown Garden Walk** (but I will be on the Walk in 2016). I love a road trip, especially if only with a dog, and I listened to Marc Maron’s *WTF* podcasts the whole way there. Many stops at many parks with Opal.

You might think, “Big deal you moved some stuff in a truck to a different city, people do this every day of the year, so what?” Well here’s the thing, prior to going I had to decide WHAT should go. In the last 5 years we have gone from a 4,700 square foot house that was chock-a-block full of stuff to a tiny apartment and a huge storage locker to filling this house, and garage, up with stuff. Beds, bedding, shelves, all the stuff people put on shelves, lamps, small side tables, etc. **This year I literally touched all of that stuff.**

And by touched I mean I took it out of boxes, I unwrapped it, I held it, I really thought about it. Was it a gift? Did it mean something special to me? If so, why have I not missed it in the last 5 years? Most of this stuff was boxed up in October and November of 2010 when we left Matthews Beach. We’ve lived full and normal lives since then essentially without this stuff. Because it’s been stored. So every thing, no matter how small, was debated. I showed it to David, we’d talk about it and then we’d decided it’s fate: Palm Springs or do we work it in here? Purge? Charity? Give it away to family or friends, wrap it up in big black contractor bags and leave it for the garbage men? Think about YOUR basement. Think about YOUR attic. Do you have a storage locker anywhere? What about that extra room in your house? When is the last time YOU actually took the time to touch every thing you have and really decide if you still need it and why and where? David and I acquired a lot of stuff in our 30s and 40s and I was determined to not have it around in my 60s.

I had my tables set up on the deck. (Frank loves my tables as they never seem to go away, but now two of them have, they have been moved to Palm Springs!) There was the Palm Springs table, the Georgetown table, and the get rid of it anyway you can table. I started this in May. I worked at this at least an hour every day. I really worked at this. I knew the U-Haul was coming and I needed to be ready. Several trips to *The Container Store* (for containers of course) and to (for more shelving for the Amarillo House of course). The day Jim called Tim and I were starting to load the truck.

The big truck was here for 4 days before I hit the road. Neighbors were concerned we were moving (so sweet of them). The truck was loaded over the first 2 days and then, after it was loaded, I couldn’t stop myself from slowing walking through the house and garage, opening drawers, looking at chairs, going into our laundry and furnace room, still looking to make sure everything was “touched.” After this move was over, in August when Opal and I were back home, it was (and it still is) a great feeling knowing we have less crap now. And the crap we do have is actually being used somewhere. We are not keeping things we don’t absolutely have to anymore. In that light I just gave 6 boxes of all of our Christmas stuff to Elisa and Gregg. Christmas ornaments, great mugs, mantel stocking holders, lights, an iron tree stand, all of it. They have 2 small boys and will be able to really use this stuff for years. Children get trees and decorations this time of the year; David and I get plane tickets. We will visit our Christmas stuff at Elisa’s for the big family dinner on Christmas Day. And then the very next day we will fly to the Amarillo House to visit some of our other stuff for about 9 days.

### **And Now A Closing Story In Three Parts**

This is my favorite story of the year. Every time I think about it, and I do often, I smile. Every word of this story is true and exactly how it happened. And since it happened very recently my memory on this is very sharp.

#### **Part One:**

I was at some street fair and there was a sign up booth for Smith Brothers home delivery service. We foam a lot of milk here in preparation for our retirement jobs. I signed up. We have that cute little metal milk box on our front porch, it has only been stolen once and they seemed used to this and replaced it the next week. At first this was tricky as you go online and set up and standard order and if you don't adjust that order by 6:00 PM on Monday they bring you all of it on Tuesday. At first I'd forget and then buy milk and then end up with more milk the next day. But finally I got smart, I set up a reminder in my not *At A Glance* calendar and now, each Sunday, I get reminders on my laptop and my iPhone to adjust our Smith Brothers order. So there's a long list of what you can get on their website. We get milk, butter, eggs, yogurt, mostly dairy products, each week. But I look at all of the other options and occasionally try them. It's so easy, why not have them bring a chocolate bar? Or pasta sauce?

One day in early November David opens the refrigerator and sees a bottle of *Cucina Fresca Tomato Vodka Sauce*. He says, "What's this?" in a very critical voice. I say, "It's pasta sauce, I thought we'd try it." What follows is a crazy stupid insane argument. Really you ask? Oh yes, really. One half of The Bickersons has come back to life and is saying insane things like, "We never agreed to get more than milk from them" and "We don't buy food this way" and on and on and on and on. I of course am not having any of it and I just shine it on which makes him more annoyed. He just kept going on about how Smith Brothers was "for dairy only."

#### **Part Two:**

David has a friend named Jennifer. They get together two or three days a week, I don't track this well, and they run. This has been going on for about 20 years, perhaps longer. They met at David's gym decades ago. This running is like a 6:00 AM event so the alarm here goes off at 5:30 sometimes. Jennifer can do no wrong. As a matter of fact, in her whole life, I am pretty sure Jennifer has never done anything wrong. She was a witness at our wedding. She has a job only a saint can do. She is flawless. David thinks she walks on water. One day, in early November, David and Jennifer go running.

#### **Part Three:**

I am usually home about the time David comes back from the gym or running. The morning that makes this story worthwhile I have Quicken open and I'm balancing our checking account with Opal soundly sleeping on my feet. David comes in. He is happy and smiling and just giddy with the joy of life, and he says to me, quite excitedly . . . .

“Jennifer says we can order our turkey for Thanksgiving from Smith Brothers! Did you know that? Jennifer says they are good turkeys and come in all sizes. Have you looked? How do I log on their website? I hope we’re not too late. Jennifer’s already ordered hers.”

I swear to god this is happening two days after the *Cucina Fresca Tomato Vodka Sauce* argument. I am not kidding. No time had passed. It wasn’t a week later. It was 48 hours later. And that is how Greg and Larry and Michael and Edward and Frank and Gary and David and I came to enjoy our wonderful Smith Brothers turkey and all of the wonderful side dishes here in Georgetown on Thanksgiving Day.

**Thank God I’m Stopping Here**

A slight bummer for me because I had a few more 2015 stories, one about a great *The Big Night* party we attended, but I gotta stop. 30 pages is just ridiculous. This is the longest holiday letter I have ever written and I promise this will never happen again!

**Happy Holidays !**

**Relax some.** (I’m going to start after a few more keystones !!!)

**And let’s all create some great stories in 2016 !!!!!**

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