



**2017**

**Thanksgiving Day**

**Sidebar:** The newsletter you are about to read contains no fake news. It may however contain redundant, crass, tasteless, and boring news.

*Holiday Greetings !*

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

It's very quiet right now. I don't have the news on, which is rare, and David's at the gym, which is not at all rare, and that general stillness that overtakes Seattle on holidays has set in. I just got in from taking Opal for an extra special early morning holiday walk and there were no cars moving anywhere in all of Georgetown. As we walked I kept running lyrics to "It's Quiet Uptown" from *Hamilton* through my mind.

It is rare to experience Georgetown with almost no traffic as this neighborhood tends to be used as a crossover point between I-5, WA 99, and WA 509. Michigan street connects all three. There is a huge dead Arby's on Michigan exactly midpoint between the I-5 ramps and the First Avenue South bridge. It's one of those large parcels with a ton of parking spaces surrounding a pretty large, but vacant and almost falling down, Arby's. Before I knew anything about Georgetown, about 22 years ago, I showed a duplex here in the dead of winter to a client several hours after he got off work at the King County Health Department. I remember thinking, "Where am I?" having never been in these parts before.

The client wanted to make an offer on the duplex so we needed a table to write on. And light. And warmth. This was back in the day (oh good lord, don't get him started) when agents actually used paper forms to write purchase and sale agreements. Back then these forms were 8-1/2" by 14" and 5 copies thick, each copy a different color. The office would get the top copy, the client would get the green copy, escrow got a color called "goldenrod" ~ you get the picture, "press hard and sign here." People actually signed paper. I have agents today who have never used paper forms with clients and who certainly have never driven across town to meet a client to have something wet signed. It's all digital now. Signatures are done by scanning and emailing or by one of several online signature apps.

Georgetown was really dark and very foreign to me back then and the only place I could see with lights on was this huge Arby's. It wasn't dead back then so that's where we went. I remember we were the only people in there at nine at night. I remember ordering sodas so we felt like we were legitimate customers who had the right to sit at a table. I remember very harsh fluorescent light. I remember keeping my eye on the front door (much like the final scene in *The Sopranos*.) And I remember my client successfully purchased the duplex. Years later my client died. The duplex on Carleton is still there, Opal and I walk past it almost daily, tho' now it sits next to 8 row houses (aka, thinner townhomes, or what I like to call New York Brownstones for a new age.

David and I are not cooking this year. We are "mixing" instead. Our friend Michael Stewart is a member of *The Ruins*, a supper club on lower Queen Anne, and he's arranged for us to have a very nice table there this afternoon. David and I are taking a fresh bottle of gin and two pre-made cocktails to Michael's house where the seven of us are gathering prior to dinner. We have an Apple Jack based drink (David got the idea from Rachel Maddow), a gin based drink called *The Loveless* (we got the recipe seven years ago, when we lived on Broadway, from the bartender at *Poppy*, which is across the street from the actual *Loveless Building* on Capitol Hill), and straight gin if our two cocktail options flop. You're always safe with straight gin.

Tomorrow David and I are escaping to Palm Springs for 5 days. And we are taking Opal. She's an extra \$100 each way, and she's fine about the whole process. No drugs needed, no coaxing, nothing. She waits in line like a show dog, she gets in her huge crate when it's time, she never whimpers or whines or barks. Frankly we think it is easier on her than it is on us. **WE** get stressed out by it; **WE** should have the calming drugs.

Wait. I just realized I moved on to talk about cocktails, dinner, and Palm Springs without finishing the dead Arby's story. The punchline is this: Starbucks. Yup, Starbucks. I'm on the Georgetown Community Council (a neighborhood organization, these used to be a popular thing in Seattle) and at a recent meeting I learned that Starbucks is going in. I am assuming they can't remodel this Arby's. I am assuming it going to have a drive through component given the amount of traffic on Michigan street at that point. But what I am hoping for is a Starbucks as fancy and cool as the one they just built in the heart of White Center. That Starbucks, at the corner of 98th Street and 16th Avenue SW is super nice. It has two walls that go up like oversized garage doors. It's big. It has a ton of places to sit. You could feel really good about writing up a purchase and sale agreement late at night in a warm and inviting place like that. And you wouldn't be alone. White Center just might be the next Georgetown after people discover this Starbucks and all of the other food establishments that have popped up there. Mark my words. Currently affordable housing near a fancy Starbucks in White Center. It won't last.

Meanwhile, obsessed with construction as I am, I go out of my way now to drive by the dead Arby's daily. Equipment has started to arrive on the site and I want to know the day they break ground and which way they are headed: a mow down or remodel? I drive by all of the construction sites in Georgetown daily. Honestly, I do. Most are multi-family sites: row houses, townhomes, or single family houses on teeny-tiny lots. Most of Georgetown seems to be zoned for multi-family housing. It's getting denser down here

in our 'hood. And we didn't even get a light rail station. Both David and I really wish we had a light rail station here. And a grocery store. Those are the two things we don't have that we really wish we had: public transportation and food. We have to drive miles and miles (like four) to get food. Beacon Hill has it all. But we are not on Beacon Hill.

We are building a house. I think most everyone knows that by now. Our street, Flora Avenue South, will soon have six new construction houses on it. Our street is still zoned single family so these are standard houses on regular sized lots. If you consider 4,000 square feet regular sized that is. The first on our street was finished over a year ago. Then this year two more new houses, big ones, were built at the north end of Flora. They sold in a matter of days and are now lived in. And currently two new houses at the southern end of Flora are wrapping up. As is one that is one street over on Ellis.

I am simply obsessed with watching construction. For the past year I have driven by all of these houses under construction. Every day before I pulled in my driveway I'd listen to NPR a bit longer and drive by the front and back of each of these sites. Up and down my street, up and down alleys on either side of my street, slowly driving by to see what happened that day. Even if I had a lot to do I'd find five minutes at the end of my day to see these job sites. I really can't seem to help it.

And us? Well we are just getting started. If you consider Day 60 just getting started that is. We broke ground exactly 60 days ago. All we have so far is a foundation. BUT what a foundation it is. I have photos. It is 38" thick all around it. That's over 3 feet. And then another 4" was poured on top of the 38" for our new floors. Some mornings it's hard for me to leave here as guys are arriving in trucks with excavators and backhoes and there are cement trucks pumping cement and plans are rolled out and . . . . . how am I supposed to get anything done now? There have been non-raining mornings where I make myself a cappuccino, skip *The Today Show* and walk out and CLIMB up on our new floors and just wander around trying to place the rooms in my mind while having my morning coffee. I am so excited about this I can barely focus on other things.

But let's move on . . . . .

### **My Mother Has Alzheimers And That's Not Funny**

This story is so old I can't even remember how old it is. I remember it happened during a party at Surrey Tribble's Seattle house, but I don't remember if it was his first house or his second house. And Surrey moved to Palm Springs the year after David and I first bought there (he moved into our first house on Hermosa), so that was seventeen years ago. So this story is well older than that. Anyway there was a party at Surrey's house. A group of us, 6 or 7 of my very close friends, I won't name them here (and I'm too old to remember exactly who they all were, tho' I remember the key players in this drama), ended up standing together and chatting and somehow someone told an Alzheimers joke. That lead to another. And then another. We were in tears laughing so hard. (You already see where this is going, right?) All of a sudden a woman none of us knew in a different room from the room we were in stormed into our room and screamed at us, "My mother has Alzheimers and that's not funny!" and then she and her partner stormed out of the party slamming several doors as they left.

Dead silence. My first thought was, "OMG we've ruined Surrey's party." But not so. Surrey came over and said it was just fine, that in general those two could be overly politically correct pills, and it was okay that they left.

Let's move on. I'll return to this later. I think. I have a different story now.

### **I Don't Think We're Allowed To Joke About That Anymore**

I was in the office two days ago and it was a ghost town. It usually is immediately before a holiday. I was at my desk going through piles and piles of paper and throwing most of it away (and of course by that I mean recycling as I never throw paper away anymore), when I heard the voice of an agent who is rarely in the office. Even with what's left of my voice, her office is within shouting distance of mine so I called her name and said. "Hey Jane, come here I want to show you something." As she rounded the corner into my office I said, "You know after I called out for you I realized how it might have stuck fear in your heart if I were Charlie Rose." We both cracked up but then she said, "I don't think we're allowed to joke about that anymore." She was a lawyer prior to becoming a real estate agent so I agreed that she was probably right. Still we laughed.

There might have been a point to those two stories next to each other. I don't know.

### **I Really Did Have Something To Show Her**

In 1995 David and I produced our own calendar called *Happy Homeowners*. Very professionally produced with high level photography featuring twelve sets of our clients each as the photo for the month that they closed on their home. The calendar was printed in Hong Kong, I think we printed about 1,500 of them, I have only two around still. These calendars were at the bottom of a pile of marketing materials on my desk that I was purging. That's what I wanted to show Jane. She was about twelve when we made these calendars. I thought she'd be amused. The photos in that calendar capture me at around 225 pounds. Today I weigh 165 pounds. It is a keeper. Although I'm guessing the other 1,498 we mailed out that year were just tossed in January of 1996.

**Sidebar:** Two clients featured in that 1995 calendar are about to list the home they were photographed on the porch of back then with David soon. Same house, same agent, twenty two years later. We love loyalty. David and I are loyal and we cherish it in others since both our livelihoods, and thus our house of cards, are dependent on it.

### **Sunday November 26th**

Don't hate me but I'm sitting at our dining room table in Palm Springs with all of the doors and windows in the house open wide. It is simply lovely. It is near 85 degrees outside and the sun is shining. No clouds. Since it's not really an "insect" time of the year, I have the screen doors open as well so Opal can just wander in and out. I think she loves it here as well. I find her out on the patio just lying in the sun. I go over and touch her and her dark grey coat is really warm. I love coming here. I love being here. And I am ALWAYS sad to have to return to Seattle. And I have a pretty great life in Seattle so that's surprising. I have a career I love, a house and neighborhood I love, books and art and things in my house that I love . . . yet I'm always sad to have to

leave Palm Springs. This ought to tell you how much I love it down here. I could go on and on about the weather, the sun, the ease of getting around here, the restaurants, the mid-century modern stuff, blah blah blah blah. But let me just sum it up in two words: more hummingbirds.

We had an easy trip down even with Opal. The first two days we were here the TV news and local paper kept saying "record highs" for this time of the year; 91 degrees isn't common here in November. We haven't even needed to heat the pool this trip and we're using it daily. We don't heat the pool when it's cold outside (usually November through March) because it's just too costly. So we heat the spa instead. The spa has to stand in sometimes as our mid-day water break. But Opal really wants a pool break. Every afternoon we get in with orange chuck-it balls and she swims back and forth non-stop chasing those balls. While hummingbirds fly overhead.

### **I Read The News Today, Oh Boy**

One of my favorite lines from Sgt Pepper's Lonely Heat's Club Band! Today's news was a mixed bag however. First the New York Times has a sweet obituary about a woman named Mary Adelman who loved and repaired typewriters in Manhattan since 1968. She died the day before Thanksgiving at 89. The obit details her escape from the Nazis in Belgium, how she and her husband set up this shop on the Upper West Side, her love of typewriters, and all of the famous writers she knew. A sweet, lovely thing to read over coffee on a Sunday morning when the sun is shining and hummingbirds are flying.

It made me think back to 1975 when my prize possession was an IBM Selectric typewriter. (If you're too young to immediately know what that is, Google it.)

Then I pick up a different section of the NYT and all of a sudden I'm confronted with a full page article titled "In America's Heartland, the Nazi Sympathizer Next Door." This is a full page with 3 color photos mind you. The subtitle reads, "Seeking Acceptance In The Mainstream." He's 29 and lives in Huber Heights, Ohio. He wants you to know he's not just some "edgy Republican," no, he really believes this shit. The article tracks his progression from leftist rock musician to libertarian to white nationalism (aka, full fledged wacko. Here's a photo of the Nazi shopping for groceries. Here's a photo of 11 books he owns. (Each one disturbing but see, he reads!) His wife was worried someone would picket their recent wedding. They both feel the current political climate has made it okay for them to register at Target and be so open about who they are. He's 29. She's 25. They both can vote. And this is where we are today. I could just not read things like this, I know many people currently who claim to just skip all news, but I'm not built that way.

### **Wednesday November 29th**

Sorry. The article about the stupid person filled with hate wanting to become more mainstream put me in a funk again and I stopped writing. This happens often these days. I am either getting more and more despondent about the world as I hear more about the world or I'm just getting old and wanting to do nothing more than sit and stare. Tho' down here there's plenty to just sit and stare at: blue water, swaying palm trees, the sky with no clouds - sitting and watching all of this can become addictive.

We leave here for Seattle today. Opal is ready: no drugs, no whining, no barking - she's so good about airports and plane travel. Ordinarily I'd be getting sad about now due to having to leave here. **But . . . . .**

You know I have been writing a holiday letter for so many years now that I worry about repeating myself. I can't remember what memories have floated to the top year after year. But here's one that just did: when I was a teenager I read a **Peanuts** cartoon in the Sunday paper that has always stuck with me. Charlie Brown was sitting under a tree talking to Snoopy and he said, in four panels of course, basically this: Panel one: "I think I've figured out the secret to a happy life." Panel two: "The secret is to own both a convertible and a swimming pool." Panel three: "That way when the sun is shining you can drive around town in your convertible." Final panel: "But when it rains you can say, "Oh well at least it's filling up the pool.""

And there's the "**BUT . . . . .**" from above. I'd be more sad about leaving today if we didn't have something exciting to return to Seattle for. We are building a house. And today they poured the final layer of concrete on top of the foundation. Today they poured our floors. It will be dark when we get home but as soon as the sun rises tomorrow I'll be out there checking it out. I love construction. I am in heaven.

### **Friday December 1st**

Just got home from the office Christmas party. Everyone is always joking about office holiday parties, or doing skits on TV about them. Now I think there's even a series of movies based on bad behavior at holiday parties. (How can that hold up for 90 minutes?) (Not my kind of movie in any event.) Perhaps I've been lucky but I've never seen drunken rowdiness at any of our holiday parties. (Well, if you don't count the Eastlake office party back in the early oughts when the top stager in Seattle got drunk and peed on Kevin and Kent's floor.) David and I put on suits, something we never do when we are actually working, and called Uber in order to avoid needing to park near MoHAI and in order to not have to track how many drinks we had.

Tonight's party was great. I love nothing more than working a room with a cocktail in my hand. "Working a room" - what a phrase that is. I have always liked phrases about "a room" as in working the room, knowing the room, sizing up a room, etc. I listen to four podcasts. One is by a gay man named Justin Sayre. The name of his podcast is fabulous: **Sparkle and Circulate**. That's what I do!

**Sidebar:** If you're gay and looking for something fun, go to **YouTube** and search for Justin Sayre. Short wonderful clips of Justin's stand up routines. More fun than constantly watching the news. My BFF Rebecca turned me on to him so it must be okay if female approved.

Now I'm rambling. I really like the people I work with so being in a large space with two bars, and tables of food, and places to roam to, and to get to just sit and visit, and to not have to talk about how many offers there were on the listing in Ravenna that your buyers just didn't get, well, it's refreshing. And a great way to end the year. I can feel everyone in my office just pulling back and taking a much needed holiday break. It's

been a very hard year to be a real estate agent in the metropolitan Seattle area. People not in the business all think the market's great and therefore life is a bowl of cherries. Those of us in the trenches daily, and average people trying to buy a home to raise a family in, or to downsize into, know that's just not the case.

### **Sunday December 3rd**

Sadly we missed the JAS Christmas party last night. We were lucky enough to be invited and we RSVP'd yes but events conspired against us. David met some clients (buyers) at two in the afternoon yesterday and was certain he'd be finished by five but that's not how it went. They ended up looking at houses flung far and wide across the city for six hours. By time David got home he was just beat and not feeling festive.

Meanwhile my new car has a huge navigation screen in it that becomes a huge idiot light when the car senses anything wrong. Well for the 2nd day in a row it sensed low air pressure on the same tire. A drawing of the car pops up on the idiot light and it shows the exact pressure on all four tires: 43 psi, 41 psi, 39 psi and 9 psi. Nine is bad. My car has no spare tire and it does not have what are known as "run flat" tires. Instead it has a foreign looking thing that looks like a cross between a can of Cool Whip and a grenade that will "inflate" the tire long enough to get to a safe place. Now that we are taking all idiot lights very seriously, I stopped running errands and headed directly for the BMW dealership on Airport Way (we live very close to it thankfully). I had to leave the car and they shuttled me home. It all conspired against going out for the evening.

The next day, when I picked my car up, I was very glad that at the signing table less than two weeks ago I allowed myself to be up-sold into some special tire program. It cost me \$200 to add to the price of the car but it covers all legitimate tire issues as well as a fixed number of "this was your fault" problems and flats. A screw was found in my tire. They asked if I knew how or where that might have happened. I said, "Gee, I don't" neglecting to mention that we live next to a construction site. My brand new tire would have cost me \$350 without the up-sell tire thing but only cost me \$50 flat. This allowed me to feel very wise about the up-sell tire insurance thing even though at the time David questioned adding this. But it's a used car (new to me, but *not* a new car) and I just didn't want to deal with anything once I drove off the lot. Especially after what happened to my last car.

### **Two Moments Of Inspiration**

Everyone knows I love yard work. Taking a blank slate and making it a lovely oasis to start or end my day in is at the top of the list of things I love. Gardening, weeding, pruning, outdoor designing and maintaining are all things I love. And most everyone knows how much effort I put into building a 6,000 gallon koi pond here on our lot. And all about the Georgetown Garden Walks we participated in. So most everyone is genuinely surprised to find all of that gone. The koi pond is gone, the patios are gone, all of the flower beds are gone, it's all gone. Everyone asks why, what happened?

Well, two things happened. Both are very clear in my mind and even though I forget many things (ask anyone in my inner circle), these two things, these two moments in time really, I'm not likely to ever forget.

One of these moments was a few years ago on a Sunday afternoon in Seattle in the dead of winter. I don't know exactly what day it was, and it's not important really. I just remember it was a Sunday afternoon, yet it was dark outside even though it was the middle of the day (you know how it gets here). It was freezing cold and rain was coming down in sheets being blown by a strong wind into my face so that the rain felt like sharp needles. And I was outside cleaning the pond filter. I was soaking wet. The water was so cold and the task was made all the more unpleasant by the weather.

And I thought to myself, "No one you know is doing something like this today. Your friends are seeing movies, inside reading, or going to some event or brunch and you are cleaning fish poop out of a filter in nasty weather conditions. I was doing my chores. Granted it was a chore I created but at that moment the chore eclipsed the joy of the koi pond on a good summer day. And then I thought, "And you're 59, how long do you think you can do shit like this?" That was moment one. Not a positive moment by any means, perhaps more like an epiphany, but an unhappy, negative epiphany.

Moment two happened at a JAS party that, unlike last night's, we were able to attend. I know exactly when this party was because we got an invite (a *real one*, it came in the mail) and I put it in my calendar (on laptop calendars events never go away). It was November 7th of 2015 and it was hosted by two women, Mary and Melinda, who we know only because of being friends with Joe and Kim, owners of JAS. Quickly, Mary and Melinda are sisters who each lived elsewhere. They bought a house directly across the street from JAS's headquarters on Wallingford Avenue. This is not a huge house. It's a very typical, 1,000 square foot on the main floor, bungalow that you see all over the Wallingford neighborhood. The twins bought it and, working with JAS, they gutted it and transformed it into a perfect jewel box of a home. Then they had a **Big Night** party based on the 1996 movie of the same name wherein the characters baked a timbale meant to be the focal point of a dinner that the twins then baked for this party.

I could have some of those baking details wrong. Hardly the main point however. The main point is that we, both David and I, loved this party. The house was small yet it lived large. We all fit in it comfortably. From the glassware to the food to the finish details to the cocktails to the guests, David and I were in design and entertaining heaven. We mainly spent the night saying to each other things like, "Look at that!" "Did you notice this?" "Did you see how this works?" And finally, "I want to live like this, less space but way better space."

We stayed at this party much later than we normally stay out. As David pulled away (he always drives, I never get to drive) I looked at him and said, "Fuck. Now I want to build a house." That was moment two. Much happier than moment one on my journey, but definitely a thought I'd never had before. I honestly thought we were done. Our Matthews Beach house was 4,300 square feet (plus the 400 sq ft garage). Our current house is 2,240 total (two floors at 1,120 each). THAT move was a huge downsize; factoring in garage storage, it was a 50% reduction in space. But we adjusted to it perfectly, there's nothing we want that we don't have here, and I had a flat 4,000 square foot vacant lot, with a sidewalk out front and an alley around back, to live out all of my yard and pond fantasies on. Until the moment we were in the car leaving that now infamous (to me) party, it never occurred to me that we would build a house on the vacant lot. Obviously we both knew we could, but seriously, we never even discussed it.



## **Mounds Of Paperwork**

The Monday after the life changing party I was on the phone to Bank of America applying for refinance mortgages. My wheels were turning. The two lots were always separate lots with separate tax parcel numbers, and with separate water meters, BUT there was one mortgage, with B of A, that covered both our house and the vacant lot next door. In other words B of A had a lien on the vacant lot. By March of 2016 I had successfully refinanced the house we live in *and* our house in Palm Springs. The rate and terms and fees were so screaming good at B of A that once I went through the 90 days of paperwork (November 9th to late January is how long this took) and the loan on our current house was approved, I asked, since they had every scrap of paper about our lives in their hands at that point, if we could also re-fi Palm Springs. They said "YES!" and a second loan was pulled together in less than ten days with no additional paperwork needed. Both loans are at 3.25%. We will never have to apply for a bank loan ever again. Certainly not a refinance. Both loans closed in late January and the first payment on both loans was due on March 1st.

Shortly after we made the first payments on both loans in March I went down to the King County Tax Assessor's office and asked if they could check ownership on the vacant lot. (I had the parcel ID since there is no address yet.) They checked and said it was me and David. I asked if there were any liens on it. They said no. I asked if I could pay the taxes on the lot for the whole year. They said why yes, yes you can. So I wrote them a check on the spot because the taxes are not part of any mortgage payment anymore. I left there knowing we owned the lot free and clear, that the taxes were paid until 2018, and that they had our proper post office box mailing address for next year's tax bill.

Then, and only then, did our full focus shift from the burdensome paperwork of banks and government agencies to paperwork created by our architect. Whereas the paperwork to separate our two lots was mostly miserable and pain inducing, the paperwork generated by our architect was fun and exciting and always something to look forward to. Once our lot was unencumbered and we were obsessed with picking our favorite floor plan, we thought there was no stopping us now.

Hah. We were so naive.

## **Tuesday December 11th**

Wow. A whole week has whizzed by and I haven't been back to this letter once. Let's Blame it on Christmas parties (ah, am I supposed to say "Seasonal Parties" or "Holiday Parties"?) and the rush of things that all of a sudden have a year end deadline that hit my desk this time of the year.

Today was our annual holiday lunch for managers at work. Between the managers of offices (my counterparts in 5 other offices in the city), the three owners of the six offices, and our general manager, we were ten for lunch. We had a great time and we barely talked about real estate or managing 60 agents each on a daily basis. That could be why we had such a great time, not talking about work much. Although I think the several bottles of red wine passed around helped as well. Italian lunch. Red wine.

Is it time to focus on 2017? Should we say goodbye? There's so much about this year I want to say goodbye to, but I'm not going to do it here as then we veer off into politics and really who wants more of that? And who wants to hear what I have to say? Damn few I would guess. Let me just say this: I am horrified and embarrassed that our country allowed Trump to become President. And by our country I mean the people who voted for him. I watch the news all of the time. I can't stop myself. And when I hear him use words I am just saddened. And while he's trying to use words I think about the content of what he's trying to articulate and I'm outraged most of the time. And the double standards with how complaints from women about inappropriate sexual behavior are dealt with (or ignored in his case) and . . . . OKAY. STOP. Years ago there was a bit on Saturday Night Live about a terrible stand-up female comedian who's main line was, "Don't get me started, don't even get me started." David and I quote that line often.

### You Realize You Have Seattle To Thank For That, Right ?

Off the top of my head, here's just a few things I remember that started in Seattle, things I think you should be thanking Seattle for daily: Nordstrom, Grunge Music, Windermere Real Estate, Starbucks, REI, Cinnabon, Eddie Bauer, Microsoft, Almond Roca (oops, I think that was Tacoma), Fran's Chocolates (*that* was definitely us), Boeing, Top Pot Donuts, Pictionary, Chuck-it sticks and, how could I forget (you can't forget if you live in Seattle), of course, Amazon. Seattle is the first in many things. Many awesome things.

In 2017 we get to add one more things to this list: having male politicians leave office in disgrace after their past misdeeds, generally of a sexual kind, are brought forward by those they were perpetrated upon. Oh yes, we started that fire. We started it in here in Seattle with male politicians but we quickly expanded it to, well, basically we expanded it to all males.

Before Charlie Rose, before Al Franken, before Matt Later, before Roy Moore (really not a good example as Mr Moore just decided to ignore his accusers, or lie about them), before Harvey Weinstein, before Louis C.K., before Kevin Spacey, before Mario Batali, before Garrison Keilor, before Jeffrey Tambor, we had Mayor Ed Murray here in Seattle. Our Mayor had to resign from office months before Weinstein started the avalanche I partially listed above. And I mean partially. I just quickly typed that list from memory while sitting here with no google searches or magazine articles sitting next to me. Once the accusers really started coming forward it got to the point where David and I threw in the towel on keeping up. One day we were talking about the ramifications of all of it and David summed it up best when he said, "There's a purge going on." From that point on we just used shorthand to refer to everything. Example: Hey honey I just heard John Hockenberry from NPR is now part of the purge." See? Quick and short and nothing more needed be said.

I am going to miss **Better Things**. It was a really quality TV show that Louis C.K. was a co-creator of. I am going to miss **Writer's Almanac**. I used to plan running my daily errands around trying to be in the car at 2:45 PM so that I might hear **Writer's Almanac**. And I am going to miss Kevin Spacey on **House of Cards**. I am not going to miss **Transparent** however. If that show dies I'm okay with it. I hated his children. (Also I'm a wee bit confused as to who Tambor was harassing and I want to make a few jokes about it but I'm thinking this has all become a sacred cow and I best not.

## Sacred Cows

On November 11th Cherese Campo turned sixty. We wanted to be with her that day and a good deal of talk went into trying to make that happen but she had to fly out to a job the next day and her birthday came on the heels of David's 19 day trip to India and a short run I made to Miami so we couldn't make it happen. That day, the 11th, Louis C.K. released a statement that was printed in full in the New York Times. I read it and I was dumbfounded by how dumb he could be. Such a smart man, such a great comic, but what a surprisingly stupid statement. But we all (me, David, Cherese and Rebecca) really like (liked ?) Louis C.K. so reading what he said made me immediately call Cherese in Austin (they live in Texas now) and say, "Hey it's your 60th birthday! Do you want me to . . . ." and we both burst out laughing. I knew she would have already read his statement and I knew she'd immediately get the reference. Great fun, but are we allowed to joke about the purge or will we too be purged if we do?

## January Was Mainly About Apple Juice

Last year at this point in the letter (What? You don't have yours on hand for quick reference? ~ I will have a solution for that problem later in *this* letter) I reported on my great success with finally being able to drink water like a normal person who has not had 38 radiation treatments on his throat. This year I have a different spin on the drinking thing. In late January of his year David and I went over to Vashon Island to spend a day visiting with Patrick Dailey and Mary Curiel, clients of David's, and Mary's brother Joe, an old client of mine from back in the day. Joe had built an astounding house on a great piece of property there; we toured the house and grounds. Then David and I went to see Patrick and Mary's place on the island. While there visiting with them at their kitchen table admiring the visuals outdoors, Mary offered us apple juice. I don't drink apple juice. I haven't had apple juice in as long as I can remember, easily 25 years. And I don't drink apple cider. I have plenty of "juice issues" - I won't drink juice from concentrate, I won't drink juice that's been filtered, and certainly not apple juice that looks like urine to me. And don't get me started on any of those Martinelli's products - those are the worst. (Don't even get me started.)

BUT I am a very gracious guest. If I'm at someone's home and they offer me something, I eat it, or I drink it. I don't ask what's in it, I don't use the word "paleo," in conversation after they offer it to me, I don't say "Eeeuwww." Nope I just say, "Why that would be great, thank you." I would never eat salmon at home, and I'd never order it off a menu, but if you're serving salmon for dinner, that's what I'm eating. Ditto scallops. And, just recently, ditto shrimp. (Both texture issues.) (And "that vein" on shrimp.)

So I take the apple juice. And you know what, it was delicious. I think they pressed apples and made it themselves. It had some thickness to it, almost pulp like, it was brown as opposed to urine like and I couldn't see through it. It was great. I had thirds if I recall. Now I am obsessed with apple juice. I only drink the brand that goes by the word **Simple** on their label. It happens to also be the only orange juice we buy. Plus I like their logo and bottle design (marketing matters). But mainly I like the product because it has pulp. The orange juice comes in HIGH pulp. High pulp is easier for me to drink. Smith Bros delivers both so I get a bottle of each weekly. I love apple juice now.

## **Be Careful About Paying Too Much Rent In Advance**

My oldest friend in the world, Lisa Mills Walters, we met in the dorms at Oakland University in the spring of 1974 (?) (I'm sure Lisa knows the exact date and military time) - Wait - this is a messy sentence. Let me clarify. Lisa's not the oldest friend I have age wise, she's only 62. I have friends in Seattle well into their seventies and two friends in Palm Springs in their eighties. What I mean is I've had a relationship with Lisa longer than any other non-relative on the planet: 43 years. Lisa loved coming to visit me in Palm Springs. Perhaps she liked visiting our pool in Palm Springs more, but whether because of me or the pool, we started seeing a lot more of each other after David and I first purchased in Palm Springs in 2001. Lisa's made more trips to Palm Springs than I can remember or count since.

Fast forward to 2015. David and I sold our lovely finished house in Palm Springs and bought a large mess of a house instead. We made it livable (it's still not finished) and Lisa came out to see it in it's unfinished glory. And she saw the very sad pool. The sad and almost unusable pool. The certainly un-heatable pool. But Lisa didn't care and she continued visiting our house even with the crappy old pool. And she kept asking if she could rent the house every January. And she kept asking me what rent would be and so on. None of these things I had answers for.

Fast forward to May of 2016. David and I decided to scrape together every cent we had and have the sad pool removed and a stunning new pool put in its place. Lisa knew it was a financial struggle so she calls and offers \$4,500 towards the cost of the new pool in exchange for January rent for the next five years. I don't remember if it was me or her who came up with the five years, but she picked the \$4,500 number which I thought was odd as I would have gone with \$4,000 or \$5,000 for division purposes. Of course I wasn't forthcoming with a number at all because I was uncomfortable coming up with a number for my oldest friend in the world. This is likely why she picked the number. And beyond that, David and I made a pact to not rent our house anyway (unless you've know one of us for 43 years or more). None-the-less the art of Lisa's deal was solid. Lisa mailed a check and a deal was struck. Lisa and me, deal makers just like Trump!

So the pool was replaced over the course of the summer of 2016.

Meanwhile Lisa calls me now and then and asks things like, "I'm working on Eric to retire and move to Palm Springs but what should I tell him about the water supply in the desert?" I chuckle to myself thinking this is never going to happen and I talk to her about the water leap of faith.

The new pool and spa - and trust me they are stunning and worth stretching for - were finished in October of 2016.

Since Lisa's rent had been paid in full for all of January 2017 she took advantage of it. She drove to Palm Springs (from Michigan) for about a month or so. I flew down there for the week around Martin Luther King's birthday and we had a great time. It might have been around then that she asked for the contact info for our real estate agents Jim Webb and Roy Rigsby. Can you see where this story is going yet? Did you count that Lisa is using the first "rent covered January" on this trip yet she wants to talk to agents?

Let me make a long story that stretches out over the first few months of the year short: Lisa and Eric now live in a wonderful three bedroom, two bathroom condo exactly one half mile from where David and I live on Amarillo. They have basically retired (tho' both are "working" at their old jobs long distance) and have completely moved to Palm Springs. They are not keeping a residence in Michigan. When they go there they have children and friends and relatives to visit and stay with. Their only home is now walking distance from our house on Amarillo. To get to Amarillo you need to drive on Sonora; their condo fronts on Sonora. I have to say I did not see this coming. But I am thrilled about it. The last time David and I were down there Eric and Lisa had us over for drinks and dinner. Now we'll really have a chance to get to know each other. Oh, and technically Lisa's rented our house for the next four Januarys. Rent's been paid.

**Sidebar:** Lisa might want to correct or add (or subtract) parts of that story to make it more accurate but to that I say, "Write your own letter! This is how I remember it."

## **February**

I attend a manager's meeting with my bosses and the other five managers on the second Wednesday of each month. My phone is on vibrate during the meetings. On February 8th my phone lit up and started to vibrate. It was a number I didn't recognize - so easy to ignore - but was that a Michigan area code? A few minutes later it started up again but this time it was my sister Lynn calling. Mid-day on a Wednesday, is this "The Call"? This can't be good, right? So I step out of the meeting. My dad, 91 years old at the time, fell down landing on one of his arms and his face. No one could hear him yell for help where he was. He's lying on icy cold concrete in February in Michigan. Thankfully he had the family plan cell phone I gave him in his pocket and somehow he could get to it and call **911** with his free arm.

Countless phone calls between Lynn and I ensue over the next few days. I was thinking I should go there immediately but Lynn wanted me to wait until we knew a little bit more. The more we found out was that he was going to be staying in the hospital for a number of days and then he'd be moved to a rehab facility for a number of days, 20 days I think it was. It's all dictated by the Veteran's Administration. Lynn felt "she had this" as long as he was in the hospital or rehab. She could handle driving mom back and forth and she wanted me to come when Dad was released from rehab. That's when she wanted the help. So I wait.

## **March**

The waiting is over. Lynn calls and says, "Now" and I buy tickets. I fly on March 30th. Dad is released from the rehab facility and I become the driver. Mom and Dad live in Grand Blanc, Michigan (a suburb of Flint) (**Roger and Me** anyone?) and the VA, in Ann Arbor, is a good 70 minutes down US 23 if everything goes well. So I spend a week being the driver and breakfast, lunch, and dinner companion. Literally every person at the VA, and I'm serious, EVERY PERSON, from the janitor to the nurse to the doctor to the clerk behind the drug counter all say "Thank you for your service" both when they greet my Dad and when they are finished with him and saying goodbye. I hear these five words many many times during my stay.

Last month, on ***Curb Your Enthusiasm***, Larry David had an entire episode devoted to those words: Thank you for your service.

**Sidebar:** Today Mom and Dad are still living alone, and I don't mean "alone" in that sense, I mean ON THEIR OWN, in their first floor apartment. Mom is 87, Dad is 92. There are only three steps. One step outside from the ground to the porch. And two steps inside from the door/mailbox area to the hallway where their apartment door is. Handrails in both places. Dad has keys to his van and he drives mom to Bingo and Euchre, and the Senior Center. He also takes mom to get her hair done (this is a weekly thing, the "getting the hair done" which is how they refer to it). When I was there I took mom one week to get her hair done. I went into the shop and everyone who worked there knew my story, where I live, that we go to Palm Springs, etc.

### **Also In March**

We made our thirteenth mortgage payments on the last two mortgages we'll ever have. Both of our re-finances had their first payments a year ago. A year ago they were new loans. (I applied for both at the same time.) Now 13 payments down with only 167 more to go. I'm so happy with these mortgages I may have to count them down here each year. Sorry.

### **Wednesday December 12th**

As I type this David is making a souffle. For dinner. "Eggs for dinner" is how I refer to this. This is our second "souffle dinner" in that past two weeks. The first souffle dinner was about ten days ago. We were almost out of flour, we didn't have any cream of tartar, and he made a make-shift souffle dish out of a glass storage bowl. Yet it worked. Likely because he wouldn't allow any noise or vibrations near the oven lest it fall. His first attempt, even without the proper "stuff," was successful so David then went out and bought a proper souffle dish, some fresh cream of tartar, and a bag of fresh flour. Tonight it's spinach and cheese. I'll keep writing and wait for my cocktail.

### **April**

We went to Austin, Texas. Yup. Cherese and Rebecca have moved there. Rebecca seems to be retired and Cherese works wherever there's an international airport so now they are based in Austin. We stayed in their very nice house located in a very cool neighborhood. We got to see their friends Donna and Lorelei, now our friends too. Many meals out, those four girls know how to eat and where. David and I had a great time. Caveat: They do not provide their guests with robes. Perhaps now, in light of Charlie Rose, this policy will change.

### **May**

On Friday May 12th we met Elliot Easton. Elliot builds houses. The connection was made via our friend Dan Duffus who often uses Elliot to build his houses. (In our biz they are called spec houses, meaning houses being built for sale to unidentified buyers. Dan is a developer of housing, and one of the best people David and I know.)

By time we met Elliot we had our building permit from the City of Seattle in hand for over three months. (Details available elsewhere.) But we couldn't find a builder we could afford to hire. We know builders, and via referrals we met several more builders, and we interviewed at least eight of them, but nothing was working out for us. Some builders wouldn't even look at our permitted plans without several thousand dollars up front. That made us nervous. And we were nervous by the issued building permit only being good for eighteen months. Tick-toc, tick-toc, tick-toc. A clock was ticking. And we really wanted to avoid being exactly where we are now - framing a house in December and January in the midst of heavy winter rains. But anyone in the construction business who seemed to be any good was slammed with work. Tho' this house is a big deal to us, I think to most builders it was just a minor potential thing in their very busy pipeline. We were being quoted numbers that would have made this impossible for us to pull off.

And then we met Elliot. He came here on a Friday night with a bottle of red wine and we three talked. When he left we both said, "HIM" as in he's the guy we want to do this with. Happy happy talk emails and texts flew around the next day and we three seemed to be in 100% agreement that we were going to do this together.

**Sidebar:** About six month prior to this David and I had lunch with Dan and toured a few properties of his and then we came here and walked this site. After Dan saw the site and the plans (which at that point were not yet fully permitted, I remember Dan saying to me very clearly, "You shouldn't pay anyone more than \_\_\_\_\_ to build this house." It was such a specific comment that it stuck with me. Elliot is a project manager, or a construction site manager, I'm not sure how to describe it. But I do know he's paid a monthly fee for managing this whole project. The fee seemed reasonable to us. I asked, "How many months will this take?" I asked partially because our eighteen month permit only had fifteen months left on it at that point. But also I wanted to do the obvious math. Elliot's answer was ten or eleven months. Elliot's cost then, even if it took the full eleven months, was 15% less than the number in Dan's blank above. That made me feel good.

So we had a fully issued and paid for permit and now we'd found a builder who we could afford and we we both really liked. We thought there was no stopping us now.

Hah. We were so naive.

### **The Last Lesbo Weekend**

Over Memorial Day we once again went to Palm Springs with Cherese and Rebecca. This was a thing. We had been going to Palm Springs with the girls for as long as I can remember, first at our first house and now at our new house. And we had added in Donna and Lorelei the last two years running. So it was me and David and four lesbians. So I dubbed it, "Lesbo Weekend." We had a great time again this year. The six of us really love food and we really love cocktails even more than the food. But (get this) after Lesbo Weekend was over this year and we were all back to our homes, we were told not to "hold" Memorial Day weekend for this anymore. Evidently it's too hot there then. Or it's not hot but it's the wrong time of the year because why come to Palm Springs if it's hot in Austin? Or some logic like that. We are shocked. I can't believe we are not getting together next May. They say these weekends aren't over but I know how things go. First you move to Texas.

## June and July and August and September

Years from now when people talk about the year 2017, and they will, I think it will all come down to two words. And for David and I this will be true as well. However our words will be different. I think the rest of America will focus on one of these combination of words:

Sexual misconduct

Sexual harassment

Inappropriate behavior

Workplace harassment

All good choices. But not for me and David. For us there are two words for 2017 that immediately jump to mind. Two words that basically controlled our summer and ruined any joyous times we might have had. Two words that I'm still dealing with to a much lessor degree BUT that still strike fear in my heart:

## **Construction Loan**

First we needed to own the lot free and clear. Then we needed to clear the taxes on the lot. Then we needed to hire an architect. Then we needed plans we could get approved by the City of Seattle so we could get our building permit. Then we needed a builder we could afford to hire. Check. Check. Check. Check. Check. Let's go!

Oh, wait. We need the money to buy the stuff to build the house with.

I have said this to anyone who will listen to me: Without any doubt the hardest thing I have ever done in my life is apply for and get a construction loan approved.

Harder than any thing I ever did in college, exams, papers, whatever. Harder than any aspect of any job I've ever held. Harder than anything about any real estate contract I've ever worked on. Harder than getting the Federal government to issue my mom, who has no birth certificate because she was left on the doorstep of an orphanage 87 years ago, a passport so I could take my parents on a cruise to Alaska (thankfully we took this cruise in 2000 - if it had been after 9/11 my mom would have never been given that passport). Harder than applying for two re-finance mortgages with Bank of America at the same time, two concurrent applications.

We had to get the bank to like us and think we are credit worthy, not a risk. That part went okay. We had to get the bank to like our plans. We are not building a large house. Our part of it is only 1,813 square feet. But there is an ADU - accessory dwelling unit - which is a 469 square foot one bedroom apartment above our 530 square foot garage. Neither our loan office nor the appraiser liked this. When our banker said that to me I was slack jawed and said, "Whaaaaaat?" He said, and I quote exactly, "If ADUs were such a good idea why don't more people build them?" The banks saw it as a negative if they had to repossess the house from us.



And the appraiser didn't know what to do. He complained there were no comparable new houses out there. Literally a week after our appraisal was completed two new construction houses, very contemporary ones similar to what we are building, came on the market on our street, a mere two blocks away, for just shy of a million dollars. In Georgetown? A million dollars? They both sold in a matter of days and both had multiple offers and both went over their asking price (but not over a million dollars, one was like 970k and the other was 985k). These sales would have bumped our appraisal higher which in turn would have gotten us more money. But we think we will be fine with the budget we have.

Then we had to get the bank to like our builder. Our builder has been building houses for fourteen years but under his father's general contractor's license. His father was a Seattle real estate agent my exact age who started in real estate the same year as I did but who is now retired to Florida. Clearly his father made better choices than I did, like becoming a developer. Anyway he retired and closed up shop. Elliot opened up shop. He got his own GC license but the bank has a requirement that they be three years old, not three months old. This is where great wealth might have come in handy. Instead of wealth all I had was a letter writing campaign to mucky-mucks at the bank and tenacity

Meanwhile Elliot who is not used to dealing with the bank we chose, and not used to the amount of paperwork the bank was requiring, started to question getting involved in this project. So then I had to get Elliot to like the bank again and shield him from the paperwork. So I'd spend my nights after work "being Elliot" and responding to all of the bank requests on his behalf.

Then we had to create a budget based on a formula the bank uses which was unlike the way Elliot is used to working. It was like juggling six balls in the air when you don't know how to juggle.

**Sidebar:** Our construction loan is not with B of A, they don't do construction loans that I know of. We used a different local lender who I'm not naming as I don't for a second think it would have been any different had we picked the other local bank that does construction loans. The only way it would have been different would have been if we were wealthy. I think wealth would have smoothed out some of the exceptions that were needed.

Somehow (tenacity really) our construction loan was approved. On September 7th David and I returned from Labor Day weekend in Palm Springs and the very first thing we did was go to the bank and sign loan papers. There's a three day right of rescission on construction loans (just like on refinances). Up until this point we had been fronting all the cash to get this project rolling. At closing we were going to get our first "draw" against the total amount of the construction loan. This first draw was to reimburse us for some of our upfront "soft costs" like architect, soils testing, and structural engineering costs. Oh, and don't forget those City permits fees.

Our construction loan finally closed on Monday September 11th and part of the loan proceeds were deposited into our bank account that day. Only then did I breathe a huge sigh of relief.

## Okay That Was Hard

Time for something completely relaxing and fun. How about a trip to Harlem? Over a year ago when we had no idea how difficult this year was going to be, David and I said, "YES!" when Greg and Larry asked us if we wanted to go on a gay cruise to some place I don't remember at the moment. We put a deposit down on the cruise and David arranged for business class tickets using our Alaska air miles to and from wherever this cruise was supposed to be starting and stopping.

Then this year started out and it was rough. David had already committed to going to India in October with his sister, brother-in-law, and niece. He was worried about business at the time (it was slow) and he was worried about the cost of two out of the country trips in one year. And I was in construction loan hell. And Opal, our dog, needed a \$3,000 knee and weeks of constant attention. We bailed on the gay cruise with Greg and Larry (they went without us and had a great time). We got the cruise deposit back quickly and easily but the airline tickets don't un-do as easily. But we could swap them out for other tickets. Manhattan. When in doubt go to New York.

So to really shed the horrid summer we had with the many unknowns about our house project, we flew to Manhattan for six days. But this time we did something completely different. David went to VRBO or one of those sites and found a furnished apartment on the ground floor of a brownstone in Harlem. In all of the times we've been to Manhattan we had never been to Harlem. It was delightful. It was quiet at night, something we've never had there. We were 3 blocks from a subway line so we could get to Times Square in about 15 minutes. Donna and Lorelei and Cherese and Rebecca all came to New York at the same time. (Maybe Lesbo Weekend has found a new home?) We saw Bette Midler in *Hello Dolly!*, we saw *Come From Away*, and we saw *Spamilton*. But the best thing we did, the most "New York-y" thing we did was go to Joe's Pub to watch a semi-stand-up, semi drag show (?), by a guy named Justin Sayre (see page 6 if that rings a bell). And, again, the six of us know how to eat out. The meals we had!

## October And Into November

I dodged a bullet. David has been talking about going to India for years. I have been talking about my complete lack of interest in going to India for as long. He knows I never felt the need to go there; I believe he really wanted to go there. As he got closer to sixty the talk about going there increased. And then, and I am so grateful for this, his sister Mary said she and her husband would like to go. I jumped on this immediately and did everything I could to encourage this to happen. It seemed like they were on the phone planning this for at least a year. Finally in mid-October I drove David to the airport and he was off for nineteen days. David and I have now been together for 32 years (it will be 33 years in February) and in all that time we have never been apart for more than six or seven days. Nineteen days was charting new territory. My constant companion for every one of those days was Opal. I took her everywhere with me. She doesn't mind sleeping in the car waiting for me, she likes it better than sleeping at home alone waiting for me. I've asked. I also spent a great deal of time just being alone. I really didn't try to see a lot of people or call a lot of people. I actually wanted to see what it would be like to be alone for that long. Because I'm never alone. I'm good with most of being alone but I can't say I like sleeping alone. Thankfully I had Opal.

On November 2nd my cousin Marsha turned sixty. It seems like everyone is turning sixty these days. I asked Brienne (owner of Opal's sister, Coco) to take Opal for two nights since David was in India and I got on a plane and I flew to Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Seattle to the Miami is a long flight so I splurged and flew in first class. I rationalized this could be "my India trip" this year. Plus Marsha mentioned long ago she'd be there for her birthday so I bought my tickets way back then, over six months prior, and the further out you buy them, the cheaper they are.

Marsha lives in Michigan. If you are in Michigan you treat Miami the same way the west coast treats Palm Springs. It's where you go. It's also where you buy a get-a-way condo which Marsha did a few years ago in North Miami. I've heard a great deal about her condo and the Intracoastal Waterway it is on. Of course Marsha's condo has a dock and she has a pontoon boat. The highpoint of the trip was Marsha's Big Birthday Dinner at Joey's (or Billy's or Bob's or Joe's, some name like that) Stone Crab. Dinner was great but it was really about GETTING to dinner that thrilled Marsha. The two of us, plus two lesbian couples who are good friends of hers, got on the pontoon boat with bottles of wine and some snacks and set off. I seem to spend a lot of my vacation time in groups made up of lesbians. Marsha, who was with a woman from the age of 20 to 40-ish, is dating men now. But all of her friends are from those twenty years and tend to be gay.

Anyway, THIS was Marsha's dream gift, getting friends trapped on this boat that she was in control of and making us putter along the canals to the bay, then across the bay, to the restaurant (that also has a dock). There was a seating shortage on the pontoon boat so a large round black fabric chair was brought to the boat from the condo. It had an extra layer of pet hair on it so it was pretty comfy. I got to sit in it for this voyage. It looked pretty funny and the photos of me in the chair with the lights of Miami behind me are priceless. At one point the pontoon boat ran into trouble, or we were about to hit a yacht, or something, and all of the women jumped into action. I stayed in my cat hair covered chair and watched with a glass of wine in my hand. Marsha commented that I seemed so calm. I said, "I'm trapped on a boat with four and a half dykes, I'll just sit here and let you all handle it." After dinner it was dark and cold and raining so I got in a cab and offered one of the couples a ride. The cab dropped them at the condo and then took me to my high-rise hotel. Marsha and the other couple made it home, soaking wet, eventually! Happy Sixty Marsha!

And now, a different voice:

### **Namaste - David's India Trip In His Words**

My big adventure this year was my trip to India a trip which I had been dreaming about for the last 40 years or so. I had wasted the previous 20 years trying to interest Michael in going. Three years ago I came to the realization that **a)** Michael was never going to change his mind and **b)** I wasn't going to go there on my own. So, I started asking close friends and relatives if they would be interested. As luck would have it, I asked my sister Mary and brother-in-law David if they would like to go. (This was early in 2016 - the year I turned 60). They were indeed interested but had already committed to a trip to China at roughly the same time. They proposed we go the following year which I happily agreed to and the plan was set. Happily for us, Elizabeth, (their daughter/my niece) was able to commit to the plan as well!

The tour that we committed to was arranged by my good friend Jack North (tour arranger extraordinaire) of JW North Travel. Our schedule was a modified "Golden Triangle" plan. The basic Golden Triangle is New Delhi - Agra - Jaipur. Our expanded tour was New Delhi, Varanasi, Khajuraho, Orchha, Agra, Fatepur Sikri, Jaipur, Udaipur & Mumbai. This was a lot of travel: nine destinations in the space of 14 days. We accomplished this with 4 internal air flights, one motor coach ride, and one train ride. As a result we now have a sense of what the roads, rails and airports of India are like.

The India that I saw was a mix of first and third and "other" world(ly). Delhi & Mumbai are huge metropolises with modern high rises and state-of-the-art airports. They can look and feel much the same as their European and American counterparts. Not far from the high rise office complexes are the low rise slums. If you arrive in the middle of the night and are picked up and transported into the heart of the city by your guide you won't notice them. But on the return trip to the airport during daylight hours they are impossible to miss. The biggest negative of the trip was the smoke filled air we experienced in almost every place we went. Particularly bad was New Delhi and Varanasi. We visited a range of cities from 50,000 to over 20,000,000 in size.

Of the places we visited the most challenging was Varanasi - the ancient city on the Ganges. This was the least modernized city and the hardest to navigate. We mostly used pedi-cabs and then walked through its teeming streets of people. Pedestrians, cattle, dogs, goats, motorcyles, and every other means of transport compete for space. This was a nerve jangling experience!

Our boat ride on the Ganges and visit to the Taj Mahal at dawn and dusk were my two most memorable moments on the trip. Additional high points involved spotting owlettes nesting, large green parrots, flocks of vultures and gangs of monkeys in and around many of the Hindu temples and palaces we visited.

How was traveling with family? Amazingly good! As much as I love the idea of traveling, I am not in the same league as my niece, sister, and brother-in law. (This explains why they were willing to go to India in the first place!) No drama to report and no hysteria, not even from me! We live on opposite sides of the country so we don't see each other very often. Spending two weeks together in a completely foreign country turned out to be a singular bonding experience! I had never spent more than a couple of days at a time visiting my niece before. I really enjoyed getting to know her better and sharing so many great meals (largely Indian) with her.

All in all I would say this trip was one of the best experiences of my life. I am so glad that I went. I would highly recommend it and would consider returning. The only drawback to our tour was that we didn't have enough time to spend in Jaipur and in Mumbai.

### **Maybe That Construction Loan Isn't The Hardest Thing I'll Ever Do, Part 1**

Maybe, just maybe, I can retrain myself to space only once after a period. Lisa, master of the English language and grammar instructor and all around smarty pants when it comes to writing, has been telling me for years to stop it. And by it I mean what I just did: space twice after a period. See? See "it period space space And" right there?

My fingers did that. I can't seem to make them stop doing it. Even though I have made the decision to try in this letter, I can't make myself type that way. This might become the hardest thing I've ever had to do. This is the first thing in my life that I have ever written wherein I tried to NOT put two spaces after a period or other punctuation. And I failed at doing it. But I have gone back and manually deleted every second space after a punctuation mark to see what it looks like and how it feels.

Do people under 35 even know what the issue is here? Does anyone care? Now that schools have stopped teaching kids to write (and by that I mean cursive writing, basic penmanship), does anyone really care about anything?

### **Thursday December 14th**

Good Morning!!! I'm making coffee and listening to Gayle King on ***CBS This Morning***. Gayle just might be the last man standing. Once Matt Lauer went down I started channel flipping. Anyway THE PURGE continues. I have no idea who this Def Jam guy is, but I do know who Tavis Smiley is. Another one from NPR falls. (Just thinking of these shenanigans and NPR at the same time is shocking to me.)

### **Maybe That Construction Loan Isn't The Hardest Thing I'll Ever Do, Part 2**

I worked on this letter until quite late last night and then crawled into bed well past my usual bedtime. And while falling asleep I thought of all of the 2017 things I forgot to mention. Like how David and I managed to drive my old 2005 Ford Escape without oil for awhile. (We now really react to idiot lights in cars!) How I gave my car to NPR. (The tow truck driver did not assault me or engage in any sexual misconduct.) About my new car, forgot to mention that. It's a tiny 2015 BMW, used, bought with 8,000 miles on it. (It plugs into the wall like a vacuum cleaner would, just an average three prong plug.) I missed the whole buying Opal a \$3,000 knee and the recovery process (mostly for me and David, she was fine after a few days). Our new outdoor awning in Palm Springs (now we have some shade). The masterful re-arranging of our decks here at our current house and the addition of a very tall blue wall that now separates our backyard deck, aka "the courtyard," from the job site next door. (Thank you Ted and Geoff and Colton!)

So much was missed. But wait, there's more.

One more thing. And I can't believe I'm gonna tell you this as it's been something only I have known about for over a year now. Not even David knew I was doing this. I sit at the kitchen table on my laptop all night long and he never asks, "What are you working on?" Two people besides me knew about this. Our friend Lee Curry (a former tenant from when we owned and lived in the Dubois Apartments who now lives in London) was one. Lee helped me long ago from afar. (I have had the site registered since at least 2012. I came up with the site name during or shortly after the whole cancer thing.) The other person who knew is an amazing hired hand, Mike Brogan. Mike lives in the Crown Hill area. Crown Hill to London, that's how my blog rolls. Mike is an amazing guy who is a certified Apple Consultant. He has gotten me out of several jams. And he knows the inner workings of WordPress. So three people in the WWW knew about this.

A few months ago I told David. He didn't seem that interested, I think it barely registered with him. Perhaps he was too focused on India. Anyway, the thing is I have been teaching myself WordPress.

**Sidebar:** I was completely sold on WordPress when I realized and talked to Mike about the *Hello Dolly!* aspect to it. Every time I'm on my dashboard about to do something I first read and sing the lyric to whatever *Hello Dolly!* song is being displayed that visit.

So, in addition to everything else I have been doing in 2017, I have been toying around with a website. Or a blog. And it's hard for me. I have to teach myself the ins and outs of a new website (WordPress) and I have to force myself to go there and practice and explore. Now, before Gary Tucker goes on about this being a crazy vanity project, yet another "bloated puff piece" (his exact words once), let me say this. I have no illusions anyone save four or five of my friends will ever follow this blog. And even four or five is an iffy number. And I am not trying to cook my way through Julia Child to end up with a movie deal based on my blog. I'm not that crazy, stupid, or vain.

I started this as a way to document the construction of our new house. It's as simple as that. My family is not going to be coming here to see this house. My parents won't (can't, let's be honest) travel anymore. And I thought well if there were a website that had photos on it my sister could open up her laptop and show Mom and Dad the site. And yes, I'm not stupid, I realize this could have been done likely countless other ways (photo sharing, some photo websites, Facebook even) but you know what? I just wanted to do this. I wanted to have to learn something new, and I didn't want that to be Instagram or Linked-In. Plus I like to write. And I like taking photos. So I have a new hobby. Will it last? Don't know? Will anybody care? Don't know. Will I like it but get so busy I can't keep up with it? Don't know. Will I try to space only once after every punctuation mark on the site? Probably not.

So there some meaning to the old TV commercial phrase, "But wait, there's more!"

You can go there if you like. It's new so there's not much there yet. Some of it might be redundant to this letter as I've been working on both at the same time. Not all of the "tabs" have content yet as I'm still laying the site out. I have to make decisions like should I let people "follow" the site by getting email notifications? Should I let people comment on the site? How do I arrange things on the site? And so on. It is a work in progress. Comments welcome. I have already incorporated one of Lee's suggestions from London, so construction criticism is welcome and might be acted upon.

Type these words into your browser taking out all of the spaces and using a "." instead of the word "dot." Here you go:

**Now The Truth Can Be Told dot com**

**a.k.a.,**

<http://www.nowthetruthcanbetold.com>

The way I have it set up now is that each time you visit the site you should see a different example of my fine and witty and clever photography skills. I don't know if it changes by refreshing your browser or if you have to actually close completely out of the site and then go back in again. Don't try that too many times as I don't have an endless supply of photographs on the site yet. Do enjoy though. (If you even go there, again no illusions here.)

# Happy Holidays!



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[ If you use Twitter you can find Michael here: @SeattleMichaelN ]

## PS

### No Good Deed Goes Unpunished

Still liking the sound of those five words and still find reason to say them often.

The exact definition per Wikipedia:

*Beneficial actions often go unappreciated or are met with outright hostility. If they are appreciated, they often lead to additional requests.*

This year's example of those words in action:

A little over a year ago I volunteered to be the treasure of the Georgetown Community Council. I was trained little bit in 2016 by the outgoing treasurer, but largely I had to make sense of this myself. It's a non-profit community group. Nothing in any of the materials I was given said you have to file an income tax return with the IRS and since it doesn't really "make" money it just didn't occur to me.

A few weeks ago I got a notice from the IRS with a deadline for filing for the GCC. Threats were implied. I don't like getting notices from the IRS. Our house of cards can't withstand things like that. The notice referenced forms that I knew nothing about.

Thank god for Marci Flanery, our CPA. I scanned the notice from the IRS to her and merely asked if she knew what form I needed. Instead of sending me a form, I think she just handled it. I have asked by email a few times if I need to do anything but I'm guessing not. *If you ever need a CPA call me so I can make a referral.* I like the brownie points.