

NELSON + UPDIKE



1995

You really didn't expect another calendar this year like last year's did you?

That would have taken a whole lotta time and money, two things we were treating very differently in the past twelve months. For now we are back to restful scenes from the Washington landscape. But there is this minimalist-yet-exciting new logo and stationery to marvel over.

H O L I D A Y G R E E T I N G S
FROM MICHAEL AND DAVID

It is time again for our tongue-in-cheek annual holiday letter. Actually, it isn't really so tongue-in-cheek anymore. It used to be, or it tried to be, but after Michael gets involved eventually everything becomes a serious endeavor. For those of you who hate year-end letters, and we know there are a few of you out there 'cause we read Ann Landers and Dear Abby too, please just throw it away now. No need to call us or write to us and tell us how you feel. No need to write to Ann or Abby either as they too have heard it all before. Save yourself the energy, time and bad karma and just recycle it now. Recycling is a good thing.

Monday, December 18th, 1995, 2:07 p.m.

We are writing this later than usual this year. To say the least the past month has not been the happiest of times and getting in the mood to write a year-end letter hasn't been easy. Our minds knew it was coming and that we needed to just do it, but our spirits were less than willing. Finally, after some discussion, we decided that just because it is Christmas things can't always be merry; we decided that a year end letter can occur on a downbeat. In fact, to be honest and have even a modicum of integrity, sometimes, some years, they have to.

Mere days ago we were reflecting over coffee and the morning paper about the past year. Our business slows down in December and we are always given to frequent fits of reflection during the slow periods. Horrible questions such as "What if no one ever bought or sold a house with us again?" lead to realizations about the true meaning of total self-employment for both of us, the schedules we keep, the insurances we carry and analyses of the year past and plans for the year to come. During all of that we tried to come up with a few topics, the things that really stood out or that have changed the way we live, from 1995 worthy of mention in this letter. We came up with six key items: our new computer, Quicken, and e-mail (that all counts as one big thing in our lives), travel, patios, our friends, leashless play areas for dogs in parks and the end (as we know it) of the *Ms Saigon* road tour. That at least gave us some direction. And so here we go, our year, our 1995:

Michael Nelson + David Updike | 3101 East Madison Street | Seattle, Washington 98112-4232

Phone (Michael) 206.328.2145 | Phone (David) 206.329.0484 | Fax 206.720.0329 | e-mail YRENTBY @ aol.com

JANUARY

We rang in the new year quietly in our little neighborhood on foot. First we walked to our dear friends Greg and Larry's for a wonderful lobster dinner that started with live lobsters. Greg offered David the treat of killing the lobsters by poking a knife into their brains before he dropped them into a huge pot of boiling water. David, for some odd reason, jumped at the chance. (Larry and Michael cowered on the second floor with a bottle of wine waiting to be called to the table.) After dinner we walked over to David and Tim's new house where we were supposed to watch a movie. We never did. We ended up talking, ringing in the New Year quietly with good friends. At midnight we all huddled in their second floor bathroom with a view of the charming Space Needle (does that make it a view home?) and fireworks launched off the roof of same. Later we walked home.

Michael started the new year at 220 lbs. David and Michael started the new year very much in debt. Michael went to his (his ???) gym for the first time in about two years. His membership was still active thanks to years of paying, much to David's objection, for something he never used. David and Michael each opened their very first actual savings account - qualified retirement plans that are approved by the I.R.S. and impossible to get the money back out of (we must die, become disabled, "quit" our "jobs" - *what does that mean if you're a real estate agent???* - or actually reach some age and retire). The idea of not being able to get the money back out was novel; to hedge our bets we only put \$200 each in the plans. Our retirement villa condo on the beach in Florida is now assured!

So it was the start of 1995 and we were thinking in all of these grown-up ways. The next thing you know we started becoming obsessed with other "adult" themes (keep in mind Michael was still just *pushing 40* in January): budgeting, our careers, marketing, our relationship to this fixer house and money, how we spend our time, our general direction for the year to come, getting organized, living with people, pet care, and so on. Michael learned how to create a spreadsheet on this computer and a whole new world of "cells" opened up to him. David got out the *P-Touch Brother* label making machine and began to label everything in sight.

FEBRUARY

Ignoring all of the adult discussions held in January, we threw caution to the wind and bought a laser printer. On Sunday February 12th we celebrated our tenth anniversary. David increased his involvement in the group dedicated to having play areas in parks for people and their leashless dogs by attending City Council meetings.

MARCH

Michael began to buy legal notebooks in preparation for what he calls "THE TRIAL." A client of ours who is an artist, Fred Birchman, buys a condo; we turn around and buy one of his drawings for the house. Our friends, Chere and Rebecca, who are traveling the country, city to god-forsaken-city, with the BIG Broadway musical *Miss Saigon* take the last week of the month off and visit us here in Seattle. They arrive the day of the Academy Awards. We have another couple, CeCe and Anne, over to watch them with us and we make pizzas from scratch after making a special trip to the new Larry's on Queen Anne for toppings. It is a good time.

APRIL

On April 4th we celebrate the two year anniversary of the first day we stumbled across this huge fixer house by making a list of all of the things still crying out for repair. This is sobering. To counteract that Michael then

selects one of his cocktail shakers and heads to the freezer where he keeps the gin and and martini glasses. Oooooops, he is out of olives! Then we remember why we did this! QFC is only one minute and thirty seconds away, door-to-door on foot. We feel better. April 15th comes and it is a dark day. But a week later everything is cheery again (we are masters of denial!) as we pile into a fancy-schmancy Jaguar that our friends Don and George bought and we all four drive off to Vancouver, B.C. for a road trip in style. Our first 1995 travel trip!

MAY

QUICKEN! On April 28th Michael loaded Quicken onto our computer for the first time. He got the instruction manual and a yellow highlighter. Nothing has been the same since. We won't go into the obsessive details here and now. Suffice it to say that he spends at least thirty minutes a day fussing with this. We no longer have check registers or paper records. Most of May was lost to this. He says he was just waiting for THE TRIAL to start. Rebecca, who was just here in early April, returns for two more weeks. She and Cherese went back out on the road to some city and she decided life was nicer here than there. I think it was LA. back then. Michael and Rebecca dig up the front yard and plant a small rose garden complete with a fussy bird bath. Too much of Michael's time is spent in the yards, front and back, planning, weeding and dreaming. Work suffers.

JUNE

Big travel! Our second 1995 travel trip! We want to visit Cherese and Rebecca in LA. We have never been to LA., but we have heard of it because of THE TRIAL. Michael has always wanted to drive down the West Coast and see the coastline and all the small cities along the way. He has had this desire since sometime in the 1970's when he saw Goldie Hawn drive down the coast in the opening sequence of the movie *Foul Play* (complete with Barry Manilow singing something like "ready to take a chance again" as the opening credits rolled by!) But we wanted to visit our friend and accountant Rob Thesman in San Francisco also. But the airlines hate it when you try to fly into one place and out of another (at least they charge as if they hate it) and car rentals are a hassle. So we decided to buy a compact disc player for David's truck and drive down rather than fly. We figured the money not spent on car rentals and plane fares would more than pay for the entire compact disc player and the gas. And we were correct. So we went. Great fun. Two weeks on the road, several B & B's tried out, some fine dining and some fast food, and the coastal roads all the way to LA. We avoided the major routes and stopped often. In San Francisco we stayed at Rob's; in LA. we stayed at Cherese and Rebecca's. In each city we saw the sights and tried to have at least one great (expensive) fine dining experience. The finest and best of these was at the Ritz-Carleton in San Francisco. We're still talking about that meal. We drove a great deal in both places thus really taking in the feel of different neighborhoods. We stopped at 79 different Starbucks outlets, including one (much to David's chagrin) mentioned in THE TRIAL. We did not go see *Miss Saigon* again this trip. It was our fifth or sixth visit to a tour city where the show was playing, thus it would have been our fifth or sixth time seeing it. This would not have been a good thing.

JULY

In May of 1994 Michael got a ticket in the park for playing ball with our dogs. It was 8:00 a.m. on a rainy Wednesday morning. The ticket was for \$138.00!! You could drive 85 miles an hour on a side street next to an elementary school where small children are playing during recess and the ticket would be for less than that. Michael began fighting the ticket and David got very mad at the system. Now David has somehow ended up on the steering committee for a group called C.O.L.A. (Citizens for Off Leash Areas) Plenty of meetings to attend, several City Council meetings each year, presentations at community centers, mailings, gathering

signatures and so much more. In July this was all heating up. (Oh, and all of you C.O.L.A. members out there, welcome to our annual letter.) Also in July we see the Carol Channing in the revival of *Hello Dolly* bound for Broadway. A moving experience; we both agree that musical comedy really doesn't get any better than this.

AUGUST

Lots of fun in August. Michael's long lost cousin (who in Michael's family isn't long lost?), Marsha arrives with her lover Lori in Seattle for twelve days. Of the twelve days they are here, it rains and is cold for ten of them. Oh well. We drive and walk the city playing host and tourist, we cook in, we dine out. David falls for both of them in a big way. We take a road trip to Vancouver, B.C. (our third 1995 travel trip!) and Marsha literally talks all the way there, fast and non-stop, telling mostly amusing family stories from back home. David now realizes that Michael doesn't talk as much as he previously thought. On the way back from Vancouver we stop on Lopez Island in the San Juans for two days at an amazing B & B called the *Hunter Bay House*, part of the *Inn at Lopez*. It doesn't rain these two days, the place is amazing, on the water and with a view, and there is a hot tub. We rent bikes, eat a lot and watch movies. We discover that when Marsha is sleeping she does not talk.

David turns 39. We sell a six unit apartment building on Capitol Hill to a friend (who shall remain nameless, client privilege, discretion and all of that) who is a savvy investor and it closes. It is a happy day. David took the lead and bought two tickets to see Carly Simon at the Gorge. Michael's constant talk about Carly Simon, his clipping of every magazine article on Carly Simon and his playing her albums for almost eleven years has worn him down! Thus our fourth 1995 travel trip: a day at the Gorge and a night in Ellensburg!!! And Carly!!!

SEPTEMBER

David continued to spend time promoting C.O.L.A. Michael continued to spend way too much time in the yard, or rather bouncing between the yard and the kitchen TV where THE TRIAL was on incessantly. David began a series of secret phone calls and undisclosed check writing in anticipation (we think of Carly whenever we use that word) of Michael's 40th birthday. We returned to LA. on our fifth travel trip in 1995! These trips, no matter how small, started coming on the heels of the one before it seems. This time we flew down and tried to see things we missed the first time around: The Gamble House, The LaBrea Tar Pits, and other exciting things. We were only there for five days this time.

OCTOBER

On October 3rd Michael submitted his application to the California Bar Association. We wait; so far no word. So here comes the fifth and almost final 1995 travel trip. David surprised Michael for his 40th birthday with both a party (most everyone who came ignored Michael and watched a big deal playoff basketball game or some such thing on T.V.) and a trip to Manhattan. Manhattan! Our favorite place to visit! With two of our favorite things to do, namely eat out and go to the theatre. We saw Company, Victor/Victoria, The Food Chain, and Sunset Boulevard. We dined. We walked the city. We visited stores, galleries and museums. We took cabs.

NOVEMBER and DECEMBER

They say it's all downhill after 40. From what we can tell so far, that doesn't seem to be true. *But it has been all down for this year since returning from New York.* A few nice things have happened in the past sixty days, but any good has by far been outweighed by the bad. Two of our friends went into different hospitals in early

November with AIDS related pneumonias; both have since passed away. This was too sudden and shocking; no one expected it in either case making the losses that much greater. Then we have to update the mailing list for our Christmas cards and this annual letter. While tabbing through the entries in our data base we realize that we know about 20 men who have died in the past twelve months. Too depressing. Then, while closing out and storing the 1995 real estate files, we see that we were involved in selling seven houses where we were working for a man's estate, dealing with attorneys and heirs. Again, depressing. Visiting hospitals and attending memorial services is a sobering experience. We're each about 40 and we've likely attended more memorial services than our parents have combined. This isn't how things should be. We hope to not have another month like this one. We hope to not lose anymore friends. But we know better. But we hope.

It's always hard to segue from discussing AIDS and its devastating toll to something else; after that everything else is trivial. In an e-mail to a friend earlier this month this problem came up and it caused us to stop and send one piece of e-mail and then start a new one on a different topic. With e-mail that is easy to do.

E-MAIL

Did we say e-mail? When we first got this new computer (Power Macintosh 6100/60 av) we were amazed by its speed, but honestly didn't spend much time with it. Then came Quicken and Michael's obsession began. Then came America On Line. Then the Internet and the World Wide Web. Now we each fight the other for time on the machine. David wants to surf through home pages and web sites and Michael is constantly in the process of sending or receiving e-mail. With Rebecca on the road the e-mail started. At first it was benign. But then Michael found out that his best friend back in Michigan, Lisa Walters, had a Compuserve address. Then the addiction went into full swing. Michael swears that this annual letter will never be e-mailed, but David worries for cyberspace anyway. We have an e-mail address book, but it needs more addresses to feel complete. Send us yours if you have it. You can e-mail it to us. Our e-mail address is on our letterhead now. Use it!

THE FIXER HOUSE

Back in the late spring or early summer, back when our spirits were high, we completed one project at this big fixer we call home. We followed our landscape plan and had concrete patios and a basement stairwell poured. Nothing else major was done here this year. But that one project really made our backyard usable for the first time. Places to sit, less dust and boarder planting beds to amuse Michael. David can actually get to and from his parking spot now without walking through mud. The dogs have less dirt to roll in. Ah, the little things!!! Wait! We also took out the two huge trees out front, leveled the parking strip, put down sod, and planted four healthy trees. Maybe we meant that we did no interior projects this year. Yeah, that's what we meant. Only outdoor stuff. Stop by in the spring, the yards will look great. These days we just wait longingly for spring.

OTHER PEOPLE'S HOUSES

And condominiums. And vacant lots. And co-operative apartments. And buildings. And rentals. And so on. It was an odd year for real estate. For us it wasn't as good as 1994 was (thus no fancy calendar), but it was still very good. We're pretty darn good at this (if we do say so ourselves) so even an off year for us is a better year than 90 to 95% of the other agents out there are having. So when things get slow, as they have been the past month, we have to remind ourselves of this by looking at our track record and the big picture. All in all we helped quite a few people find the perfect place to live this year, be it in a house or a condo. We educated many people about the new disclosure laws, the underground oil tank laws, and the ins and outs of selling

property. And when the time came, we helped them sell theirs. We've matched homeowners with painters and plumbers and general contractors. We've advised on remodel projects. We've helped investors make wise decisions. We still love doing this and we honestly don't see ourselves ever doing anything else. The office in which we work is expanding (watch the corner of Lake Washington Boulevard and East Madison Street) and some new opportunities for us may grow out of that. In 1996 we are both returning to the classroom for several continuing education classes and David is going to accumulate clock hours for his Associate Broker's license. We're excited about the year to come and hoping interest rates keep to the low side as they have been. And whatever you do, tell your friends to call us. This is strictly a referral business for us. We don't cold call. (Please re-read the inside of last year's calendar before you - *oh please don't do it* - toss it out. It is all true.)

ONE OF US WILL BE MISS SAIGON

Well that's about it. Oh, our basement is flooded. It has been flooded for over a week now. We thought we had all of the water vacuumed up, but it rained again last night. Prior to starting this letter today we were down there mopping and shop-vac-ing and moving things to higher ground. Each year at least six different clients will call us up as tell us their basement has flooded (or has some small amount of water in it). Usually they want advice, but once in awhile they want to assign blame. We never have any advice and we aren't much into blame. (We usually go for a combination of the concepts "act of god" and "personal responsibility".) Anyway, we wish we had kept a list of the clients who've called us on this one as we'd like to call them up now to find out what we should do. Or which attorneys to call. Or just to get sympathy. Or maybe a client referral.

The show is over. At least for our friends Cherese and Rebecca. In mid October they made the decision to leave the show and return to Seattle. By November first notices were flying here and there. Boxes began arriving by UPS and sprucing up work began on the space they are to occupy. They arrive in late January and they will be staying on our third floor. We call this the grand experiment: two couples, all the very best and closest of friends, both couples self-employed (or soon to be), both couples with pets, everyone about 40 years old and with firm ideas of their own, all under one roof. (Wasn't there a TV show this season with title? I guess it didn't last, but it was filmed a block away from our house.) Add to this mix the fact that one couple sells real estate and the other will be starting a new business of their own. One couple has Broadway connections and had traveled extensively while the other couple has been firmly rooted in Seattle for years. Everybody sing: "Meet Patty whose been most everywhere from" You get the idea.

We figure if this doesn't work out, or if anyone's career starts to slip, we can always put this all down on paper and shop it around LA. Look at *Friends*!!! Look at *Seinfeld*!!! Look at *The Single Guy*!!! Is this really that much different? We think not. This could be a big TV hit. Our hair could be debated on the cover of TV Guide. This could be (dare I say it?) a good thing.

That's it. We are looking forward to 1996, and starting to think about 1999 and 2000 as well. Time is marching on, and we are trying to keep up, yet relax and enjoy what we have. Look for our home page in 1996. That will be a miracle if it happens as we know nothing about this Internet stuff really. We are well. We love our home and neighborhood. The pets are alive and well. Most nights we are watching TV or laser disks with the cats, so call. Stay in touch. Oh, and happy holidays, whatever they are for you. We have an antique wax Christmas tree that we picked up at one of Merritt's famous garage/yard/estate sales. It's eight inches tall.

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