

**Wednesday, December 11th, 1996**

Dear Friends, Relatives and Clients:

What would you do without Michael and David's annual Christmas letter? Michael is sure you would be highly disappointed and feel neglected and, of course, he takes much pleasure in delineating every small detail of the previous year. David, on the other hand, isn't at all sure you would notice if you didn't receive it were it not for the enclosed calendar. Regardless of where your feelings lie, it simply wouldn't be Christmas for the Nelson + Updike team without the seasonal ritual of Christmas letter creation. Not to mention the joys of bulk mailing and wondering just how very stressed the postal employee who is "helping" you is on the day we arrive with these.

This process always starts mid-November when we swear to update our mailing list, have the letter finished by December 1st, and in the mail by the 10th. Has never happened. Procrastination and seasonal demands for our time always conspire to prevent us from accomplishing this goal. This is why we are just beginning the project on this late date. Are we repeating ourselves? I guess I should have read the last two years letters . . . actually I read 'em, but I didn't write 'em. Brand new and *possibly* improved this year, it is I, David, at the helm of the 1996 letter. Michael is still dealing with business and thinks that it was high time that I shoulder this responsibility after the countless years that he has gleefully churned them out. So I am attempting to adjust my mind set to his much more detailed way of recounting our recent past.

Michael writes:

He misunderstood. I didn't give up all control - it simply isn't in my nature - I just asked him to start it. I clearly said I'd add my two-cents-worth later. I did have to promise to not alter one word he wrote when making my additions. I am not to restructure his sentences. Fair enough. So watch the fonts as I just decided to use a different one for my running commentary. Heck this might turn out to be just like spending time with us. But hopefully not like spending time with us when we morph into the Bickersons. Back to David:

1996 was a great year for big business and real estate in Seattle. Looking back on the year, only the first two months were slow. Every other month has been good right up through today! Having this much business in December is a very pleasant surprise. Although certain months of the year are predictably busy it seems harder to predict when a slowdown is going to occur. This tends to keep us on our toes.

The big news event in our lives this year was having our friends Rebecca and Chereese come to live with us on our finished third floor. They finally left their "Miss Saigon" road

ended up selling them a home nearby. Next week, they'll no longer be our roommates, they'll be our neighbors.

My turn again:

(Sounds just like that Newsweek column!) Our very, very close neighbors! The house I found for them is barely a block away, a small block, a quick short walk. We're on 17th and they're on 16th Avenue East. Such good friends so close; now there is going to be a lot of dropping by in our lives. Living together was great fun. Shopping together, eating together, entertaining together - it was all great. Having someone here when we traveled (as if that happens often!) was a comfort. Each morning the four of us began our day with the New York Times, the local morning paper, a huge stack of old magazines, several latte's and five pets! All just hanging out in the dining room for up to two hours reading and talking and buggin' each other. In the evenings, particularly on Thursdays, it was tea and "Must See T.V." in the living room. Now that it has ended I only remember the good things about having housemates. It's true that I occasionally I have a nightmare wherein small decrepit nellie lap dogs are walking around on top of the table during an elegant dinner party for eight (Joan Rivers, who is one of the guests, sits next to Chereise in my dream and they both cool), but it passes shortly after I wake up shaking. Another dream, the one wherein I am constantly reorganizing the way the dishwasher was loaded, is frequent and causes me to wake screaming.

As for the year . . . David's quite right, it's been good. Very good, and not just in the business arena. Again, thinking back on it, I only remember the good things about 1996. Perhaps this is because life is so darn sweet of late. I don't even remember the slow times at the start of the year. By March our real estate transactions were going strong and coming one right after another. And things just haven't let up. Even now, even during the holidays when it is usually slow, we have plenty to do. We only expect it (it' being that elusive thing we call "the market" in real estate circles) to pick-up in January and stay strong throughout 1997. The future looks good and we are pleased.

And life is good at the moment as well. We have bought into the whole holiday thing in a big way this year: a wreath on the door, tree up and decorated, and major holiday tshotskes scattered around the few finished rooms in the house. Some gifts have appeared. Some cards have been sent (not many - this is YOUR card) and social invitations are arriving daily. A fun and busy time. We had an office function here at the house for The Landmark Group - the first everyone actually attended - and it went smoothly (tho' both David and I were surprised to see how depleted the bar was when it was over). Tons of events this month - I'm sure it is the same for all of you. Bette Midler is touring and a group of us went to see her show just a few days ago. Saw the Seattle Men's Chorus Christmas Concert this year (hadn't done that in several years). Seeing friends, on the go, making the rounds (as my parents always used to say . . . "Making the rounds"). So where was David? Where was this letter?

As usual, we spent a lot of time "visualizing" our finished home. This is a recurrent theme in our existence. Visualization is very important when you live in a big old house with broken plaster and exposed lath and a basically torn up kitchen. We are now three-and-a-half years into this project and still have enough tasks to keep us busy for ten more. The big outdoor improvements this year were a new concrete floor for our concrete bunker of a garage, a new door for the garage (it's oversized) with a superduper opener, and a concrete pad with custom built steps to the dog door for the dogs. Inside we replaced the rotted sill plate around the entire perimeter of the house at the same time performing the necessary (we hope) earthquake retrofitting. We replaced the door into, and all of the windows in, the basement.

Michael has been obsessed with finishing our basement laundry area with sheet rock, carpeting and tastefully chosen paint colors. And a functional laundry tub. Cabinetry too. Add to this a wine colored wine cellar. He gutted the old room where I stored my wine and started from scratch. Of course it isn't done yet. But my wine had to all be moved out of it. Then we learn that you shouldn't paint wine cellars. (Of course he already had.) Or if you do paint them you shouldn't put wine in them for months afterwards. So the basement is somewhat finished. Why he did all this I'm not sure as it is currently **more** finished than most of the house spaces we actually live in.

Of course prior to any of his basement finishing we had to waterproof it. Our basement flooded out several times last winter and spring. This waterproofing, all done on the inside of the basement, was a messy and expensive process, but if I had to vacuum up 50 more gallons of incoming cold water each day this winter I was going to scream. Nevertheless, spending precious resources on something no one can see and we immediately covered over also drives one a little crazy!!!! One of our goals is to, one day, finish off the other half, the now unfinished part of our basement, into a rentable mother-in-law unit. Michael has long thought that he could find someone with the skills to finish this space in return for future rent or lodgings within. The first guy to agree to do this didn't even make it into the space before he was offered a good full time job and split. This year Michael found another guy who was able to finish the work the first guy started and help Michael with the laundry room side, but he didn't even make it into the M-I-L space before he announced he was moving to Utah with his girlfriend. Oh well, we may have to do the work ourselves after all. Meanwhile Michael just wanders around down there "visualizing" it being finished!

Michael chimes in:

What can I say? He thinks this basement project is nuts and I am crazy, tho' he was rather easy on me in the telling of it above. That isn't always the case. I have to constantly defend my basement vision and fight to see it through. I often feel like that hen who wants to make bread and none of the barnyard animals want to help. They all want to play. But when the bread is finished everyone wants some. I don't call it a basement laundry room, I call it the T.V. Lounge. You really ought to see it. It came out quite nicely considering I did it without professional help. It has furniture (well stuff from Ikea) and a T.V. (There is always a T.V.! - I can fold laundry and watch CNN - Works for me!) And I will be finishing that wine cellar soon. I have a vision for it too. The guy who was gonna live in the soon to be finished apartment in exchange for finishing it went to Utah to get away from his ex-girlfriend and Seattle. David wasn't paying attention - he was too busy laughing when I told him my plans for the M-I-L were, as I put it, "on hold." However he called me a day ago to say he was returning. He called me from Utah. His grandma broke her hip and he's coming home to care for her. It could still happen. I was pleased to see David use the phrase "one of our goals" as I thought I was the only one who wanted the M-I-L. Everyone needs a M-I-L tenant for when doing all that traveling! Rationalize!

It is true that nothing happened in the living quarters of our home this year. Absolutely nothing. All of the money we could scrape together and all our spare time and energy went into things you wouldn't see if you visited. Sill plates? How often does anyone admire those? Earthquake bolts behind shear walls? "My what nice bolts you have!" Trenches with pea gravel under the basement floor? "Say, is that a new trench?" A new interior water line? Who'd notice? To the naked eye we are making no progress what-so-ever. But I know better. We're building from the ground up, slowly. And it's a good thing. Foundations are important. Besides what would we do if it were finished? - No one ever stops to think about that!

Outside the dogs are quite happy with the aforementioned concrete pad and set of custom built steps to the dog door. While the garage floor was being poured I thought a patio for the pets would be just the ticket. I mean all the guys and equipment were here already - how hard could it be? Still, when finished, the pet patio was too far from the height of the previously installed dog door. This relates back to the house being buried and the rotten sill plate. Anyway a doggie deck was the solution. You ought to see this! I am certain no other dogs have one. It has a rail and sides and - well it looks just like a deck you'd make for people, just tiny. For dogs. Nothing quite like pampering your pets. Silly, but fun.

Speaking of dogs (here's a heavy handed segue and a shameless plug) some clients, friends who are clients, opened up a shop that caters to dogs and cats in Wallingford this year. It's open now - go visit. It is called Bow-WOW-Meow and it's on 45th Street. I sold them the house - well it was a house, just a basic little bungalow prior to their remodel, done I might add by our contractor and friend Wally Novak - that the shop is in. Now it's a cool store slash deli slash place to hang out. It has a deck designed for people. And a killer patio. Dogs are welcome - check it out. Plus it was one of my more interesting real estate deals this year. Want to open a business? Need a space? Give me a call! David:

We left our home, pets and housemates three times over the course of the year trading turns of pet sitting their cat and dog with our two cats and two dogs. In March we went to Hawaii for a week to commemorate the passing of our good friend Jim who died a year ago this month. He very graciously prepaid for our entire journey along with five other close friends. The change in climate was the perfect tonic for our cold gray February and Hawaii, one of Jim's favorite places, was the perfect place to remember him.

In July, Michael's parents visited us from Detroit. We had a great visit with them and Michael decided to make the most of the opportunity to entertain all of us. So, we went to Las Vegas for a mini-vacation. Why would anyone go to Las Vegas in the summer? I guess perhaps because we underestimated just what 112 degree heat is really like! Well, we had a great time in spite of the heat. I enjoyed the novelty of it all and thought it cool to stay in a hotel shaped like a pyramid. We never really tried to learn how to gamble other than shoving quarters into slot machines.

Since we've never been to a national convention before and since we heard earlier in the year that this year the National Realtors Convention would be held in San Francisco just before Thanksgiving, we knew that we owed ourselves the experience. What we saw was a huge convention hall filled with vendors, many of them very tacky, armed to the teeth with products they promised would transform novices into superduper salespersons! The ratio was about eight-to-one vendors to attendees. We saw our peers from across the country, even some from Europe, Australia and South Africa. Many of our peers wore ribbons pertaining to their expertise and training. Unfortunately for us, we had none. Many of our peers looked like a cross between Tammy Faye Baker and Mary Kay. Fortunately for us, we did not. We attended the key-note address. It turned out to just be the Republican spin on the November elections as given by John McLaughlin who tried and tried to tie it all into the real estate market. We attended a couple of seminars and spent a lot of time at the trade show on the convention floor. We absorbed the latest in computer programs designed to put us in touch with our clients, and got to see the latest in digital camera technology.

#### Mike's back:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Back to the here and now, we just got home from seeing the new Star Trek movie. I of course haven't ever seen any of these new characters 'cause they aren't on CNN. But I did pick-up two new phrases I liked quite a bit. "Make it so." I rather liked that. I'm in a "make it so" kinda mood these days. Should that be my new motto? You could call me about real estate and I could make it so! Whaddya think? How about "resistance is futile?" I really liked that. I could call you about real estate and end each call with "resistance is futile." Or I could just end each discussion with David regarding the wisdom of my basement projects with "resistance is futile." This is gonna come in handy, I can feel it.

Hey guess what? This letter is going to be later than usual this year. But I'm OK with that. I am perfectly calm and having a great month. Nothing is gonna stress me out, I can tell. It is now Sunday night, December 15th, and this isn't ready to send. Not even close. And tomorrow I have to manage the office and the staff meeting. (Did I tell you? I have a title after ten years in the business. . . . I'm the "Managing Broker" at The Landmark Group . . . . I recruit, I hire, I train, I write policy, I manage, I try to keep agents and staff from whining. I have yet to fire, not my style. I need to learn what the phrase "micro-manage" means . . . . I see that in *Dilbert* all the time but haven't a clue.) And tomorrow night I think we are going to see *Mars Attacks*. David keeps saying I should only be doing this till it is done and in the mail (quite a switch from years past - I think now that he's more involved he's more concerned). But I'm in a different place this month this year . . . it's a calm peaceful place with no pressure. I'm saving myself for the stress of 1997, the I.R.S, the new listings we already have lined up, and so on. There will be time to get all tightly wound up soon enough. We'll be back with more of this letter later. Now I'm going to sleep.

We've had another fun-filled, entertaining year. This is because we get to have fun at both work and play. Michael loves to advise, educate and generally control our clients lives. Given the opportunity he'll make time to impact your life. Just make sure that you're ready for everything that implies! Each year in this business seems more fulfilling to me, perhaps because we are working with more and more repeat clients and referrals. Take care - and we hope to hear from you in 1997.

David

That's it ??? He's signed off already? The letter is over? It can't be, not so soon. Shouldn't we include a few real estate "war stories" to edify and amuse our readers? We've some great tales to tell from those trenches this year.

What about our mondo multi-family yard sale in May? Eleven households selling, well . . . selling junk, here in our front yard, or so we thought till the rain came and we moved everything indoors and had to move all our stuff out of the sale area. That was fun. In two days we all took in over \$4800 in cash, coins and one dollar bills mostly. David would have no part of any of it. I love a good yard sale - and it was! I made about \$1300 and for the life of me I can't remember what I sold. We certainly don't miss any of it.

What about the four part wine tasting class we took with David Brown in February? It was his birthday and so Tim and David and I treated him, and David and I attended with him. Great fun, great wine, and nice to be "in school" again. Perhaps that's where my motivation to gut the wine room and build a wine cellar came from?

What about the big family reunion David went to in Bend, Oregon in April? I didn't go, so I can't report on it. All I remember is having some "alone time" (a term coined by the four of us living in this house for the past year - we all sought it) that weekend.

Or the mini road trip to Cle Elum for dinner with Don & George in July. I think it was an off-shoot of the yard sale, but I don't remember how. Anyway we got to ride in their Jaguar and they treated us to dinner someplace famous there, but I forgot the name . . . "Mama Something Or Other's" I think it was.

In October I turned 41. We went to see a show called *Tap Dogs* (or was it *Dogs of Tap*? - we joked about it so much I can't keep it straight now). It was a simple birthday, dinner and a show, just the two of us. David, on the other hand, turned 40 on August 28th so it couldn't be such a simple affair. There was the surprise shopping trip to Portland, the surprise stay at the Heathman once there, the surprise night at the Pike Place Market back home, the surprise dinner at Flying Fish downtown Seattle, and then the surprise birthday cake social here at the house afterwards. "Surprise, surprise, surprise" as Gomer Pyle used to say! It all went on for three days, one surprise after another. Plus shopping.

The piano. The baby grand piano. Can't forget this! We had a delightful client named John in August who sold his house and bought a condo. This didn't just happen, it took a month or two over the course of the summer ending in August. When it started he spoke of selling his things - an estate type sale, major downsizing of things - and starting anew in the condo. I inquired about the piano - if it was for sale, we'd be interested. I gave him our dear friend Merritt's number (she runs estate - yard - garage - moving sales, antique mall spaces, etc) and went to work to sell the house. It wasn't the easiest sale of the year, but we managed to put it, and keep it, together. When the final piece of paper was signed he told us the piano was ours. Talk about thank you gifts! So we moved it, have had it worked on by a clown (seriously - our piano mover, tuner and expert repair man *is* a clown) and here it is. We see lessons in our future. For now we see furniture in our entry hall - and what GRAND furniture it is. Thanks John!

I see according to my margins that I have a decision to make. Do I stop now and end this at five pages, or do I go on and force an extra page to be introduced into it? Five pages will copy nicely on three pieces of paper, the first being our cool new letterhead . . . like the letterhead? We love it! Six pages will force us to use four pieces of paper. . . hmmm. . . Plus David just popped in the room to say he was "going in" as in going into the crawl space. He is obsessing about insulation these days and just bought bunches of pipe and wall insulation and a respirator and stuff and I think he wants me to come help, or at the very least act interested and be supportive. So I think we end here. Plus I want to go see *Mars Attacks* at the brand new 16-plex downtown this afternoon (it's Monday the 16th now, about 2 PM). So, goodbye. We'll skip news about C.O.L.A. and off-leash dog runs. Skipping news about David's stock club (going strong!) If you want to hear what a waste having a real structural engineer and or retrofitter come look your house is, you'll have to call. I'll tell you what I learned (nothing) and how much money we threw away (could have bought a small appliance or office machine instead). And my San Francisco restaurant reviews will have to wait - we ate at six great places (the real reason I was so excited about that convention). Call if you're going there and we'll pontificate.

David sold the greatest and biggest (in terms of price and size and coolness) house either of us ever sold this year. He's shy and doesn't like to go on about it, but I was so proud of him. (Oh and thank you again Norman and Mike!) I sold my first houseboat. Learned a lot doing it and overcame fear of that niche. On one of my sales the police busted the door to the house down and I later had to move the psycho tenant out - as in really help move, using our truck. We came to love The Highlander - our favorite condo building on Capitol Hill now. We had fun, and profit, in real estate again this year. As David said, each year we know more and this becomes more and more satisfying to us. Let's face it, we're people persons! To those of you who've sent us friends and family to work with - a heartfelt thank you from both of us. To those of you who've worked with us - without you there would be nothing. Thank you. Take care everyone. I'm off to help David in the crawl space. We both hope to see or hear from you in 1997. Till next year -

