

Number Eleven: End up working at Windermere.

1997

Saturday, December 13th

Dear Family, Friends, and Valued Clients:

Now where did we leave off last year. . . ? Hey! **We're back!** We're back with what promises to be an extremely exciting version of our annual year-end thought provoking holiday newsletter. Only one bad thing happened to us (well to me actually - this is Michael at the keyboard to start) in all of this year so all of what we have to tell you is exciting and upbeat and hap-hap-happy. (Except for the one bad thing which was very bad and very sad for me - it actually left me speechless for about 30 minutes. And it didn't help that David found it amusing. I must steel myself before I can even discuss it, so I'll get to it later.) David has carefully prepared an outline of the year and the things we know you'll want us to share with you. And there is the big career move to explain. Also, **NEW** this year, the annual holiday letter contains a big surprise that could put cash in your pocket! **Your odds are better than with lotto** - read carefully for the hints and details to follow. There is so much to say . . . let's just get started.

Let's start with the house. We'd like to report that something improved inside our house this year; we'd like to report that some room was completed or that some surface was finished. Alas we cannot. Not one thing was done inside our house in all of 1997. Not one thing. The basement project, either side of it, was not worked on. There is still an open trench in the floor that fills with water during heavy rains. The basement is exactly as we left it in mid 1996.

We moved to the third floor in January, after the last of the housemates left, with the intent of gutting the falling lath and plaster from the second floor in the spring. You know, spring cleaning, spring gutting. Didn't happen. Nothing was done to the second floor this year. We just pass through it and store things on it. For the last three months I've been threatening to remove everything from my office and give it a much needed make-over. **My make-over dreams started** in October when I bought a very cool Chinese apothecary cabinet with 33 itty-bitty drawers circa 1800 for my 42nd birthday. (I gave it to ME! - I love things with lotza small cubbyholes.) I decided this should be the, . . . ah . . . "centerpiece" for a newly transformed office. So I measured the room and had a special piece of bound sisal with a new pad made specifically for the space Martha Stewart and I agreed should be covered. Then I agonized over paint chips for seven weeks. Here's how it all stands: the room is 1/3 emptied out, the old carpet has been given to a friend, the new sisal and pad are in rolls on the floor of the guest room, the new paint is in a box in a corner of second floor hallway, and the apothecary cabinet is standing in the middle of the second floor landing piled high with junk. When I move the junk the cats get up on it and sleep. It has been standing there now for almost two months. Just as I was poised to begin the actual work I got a new job and all of my free time vanished. Perhaps in 1998 I will find some free time again. In the meantime it all adds up to another half-finished, started-but-not-yet-completed project. **These are David's favorite kind.**

Nothing was done on the main floor either. Granted most of this floor was done when we moved in five years ago, but the entire back end of the house still has no walls. Sure there is a big shiny Viking range in the kitchen, but how long can we expect to dazzle people with that? Sooner or later everyone is going to realize the **Emperor has no clothes** and our kitchen has no ceiling, walls, floor or cabinets. It is bound to happen. Guests are most likely to notice these missing walls in the winter when it is essentially impossible to heat the kitchen. No interior walls, no insulation, and exterior walls you can see daylight through all add up to a pretty cold kitchen. By the time we get the kitchen and back end of the house finished the rest of what we have previously done on the main floor will also be in need of a re-do.

We did gut the 3/4 bath that was in the kitchen. In June we were having some dry rot - **major dry rot** - work done under the house and the back wall turned out to be a mess and needed to be replaced. Since the wall had to go I convinced David it was the perfect time to get that shower enclosure out of what should have been a main floor powder bath anyway. **As you know, all demolition is done by us.** We don't have the skill to put things back together to our demanding standards, but we do know how to take walls down. I bought a saws-all. We had that entire wall gone and the shower out in less than half a day. Of course one of the walls the shower was on was adjacent to the kitchen so now, well . . . ah, when guests come over we suggest they use the second floor bath as it still *has* four walls. In the end all of this demolition was followed by several days of making dump runs - what would we do without that truck?

Though our living space didn't improve one whit in 1997, we did make equity improvements a plenty to the house this year, mostly during the summer. We poured thousands and thousands of dollars into the outside of the house. **The money went four places:** 60% to the painter, 20% to the landscapers, 10% to the dry rot contractors and 10% towards a new look for our front door. After five long years we are pleased to say our house is no longer the sorriest and shabbiest one on the block. At this point, just judging from the street mind you, we are probably in the top four or five on the block. Making many happy neighbors.

Skyrocketing change such as this doesn't come easy. Or cheap. Or happen quickly. It was the better part of June, and most of July, till the major parts were completed. The house was jacked up and new concrete footings were poured. Our contractors replaced rotted supports, beams, and joists, the bad wall and all of the bad siding. A new window was put in the new bathroom wall. And the outside of all of it was put back together and made to look nice. But as luck would have it none of this happened in a time line that worked with the painter's schedule. So guess what? We paid for a full house paint job and ended up without having the full house painted. One of the back corners is now raw wood. Granted it is new pretty raw wood, but raw it remains. I guess we under estimated the amount of dry rot work that needed to be done before we scheduled painters. The painters finished and the dry rot work was still going on. By the time the rot work was finished the painters were long gone and couldn't or wouldn't come back, even when we added the enticement of the additional work of painting our new section of fence. (Oh yeah - we had a huge section fence built during all of the above too - **at the same time!** I was thrilled with all the activity and didn't mind three sets of contractors tripping over each other - I can't say they felt the same however).

Siding work was also done on the front of our house and finished later than hoped for. David ended up painting this section of house by himself. Our neighbors were "**commenting**" on it being unfinished for weeks and weeks and finally David primed and painted it several coats himself. It looks great. And we have the coolest copper cap or shelf thing that the contractor fabricated special for one corner of the house.

After all this work was as done as it was going to get, we invested heavily in a new look for the front yard. Again we helped with the demolition. Our good friends and landscapers Karen and Margie rented big power equipment and removed most of the old yard and all of the walkway. David operated the jackhammer. I took photos! Since the entire yard was torn up anyway, David dug a trench from the house to the street for a new big fat copper water line. Our house just doesn't look the same now: new curving paver walkway, new trees, plants, paint job, and a new **BLACK** front door with a window. Do a drive by!

Did someone say cash prizes? It is time for a hint. The hint is this: don't throw away anything that might have been included in the envelope your letter and 1998 calendar came in! That's it for now - details later!

Where was I? Oh yeah, at the front door. We like to go on and on about the new front door. What it cost, how many steps were involved to get it, what a quality lock cost these days (you'd be amazed!), that it involved no less than four separate contractors to make, install, weatherstrip and paint it, that the paint came from Holland and is special somehow and always looks shiny/wet. Last year I sold a house to our dear friends Cherese and Rebecca and in the process the police had to ram the old door down. Our contractor was called in to put up a new door prior to closing. We envied the results. We found out who the four contractors were he used and we called and scheduled 'em all. *Now we have the results.*

David is supposed to be around writing some of this letter. I've been fussing this for hours now alone. He is, however, addressing and sending Christmas cards (the only, and I mean ONLY, thing we are doing for Christmas this year) and setting up a tour of homes for me to show on Monday in, are you ready?, Renton. Or the Renton area. Somewhere down there. David just went out for his afternoon cookie - that means it is between 4:30 and 5:30 - this cookie run is seven days a week and as regular as Old Faithful.

While we're waiting for David to return, how about I tell you about a fun thing - fun for us at least - that we're going to start doing in 1998? Swell, here it is: a newsletter. It's taking shape in our minds. We have a wonderful graphic designer already on staff - my old friend from my earliest days in Seattle - Michael Kuntz. Michael runs a business called Michael's Ink and has already been creating and producing ads for us for the past year or so. Now we are branching out to a regular publication. We have two intelligent columnists already lined up and are seeking more - this is going to be a useful and fun publication, not a lame attempt at blatant self promotion - 'cause you know we'd never do that!

Columnist one is the ever popular Merritt Green. Merritt, who runs *Flotsam & Jetsam*, will be doing a regular column titled: *Tschotke Chat*. (And that is the correct spelling of what you may know as "chachka." Get it? It's alliterative - "Chachka Chat" - but it doesn't look alliterative. Are we clever, or what?) Merritt bills this as (she's on the phone with me now as I type and I am typing her actual words, her description of this feature column): "A fun fact filled column chockful of tips and tidbits on the wacky world of collectibles - what's hot and what's very ten minutes ago - plus scoop on *Flotsam & Jetsam's* upcoming estate sales, you know, where and when and what you might find." So there you have it.

Our second guest columnist is actually two, yes two, columnists in one. They are the ever amazing Karen Page and Margie Boyd. I sprung this whole idea on Karen and Margie about five minutes before I sat down to write this letter today so I didn't get to force a quote out of them. But they immediately took to the idea and are formulating plans by now I am sure. Their column will be on, what else?, landscaping! Landscaping, pond building, gardening, transforming desolate spaces with cyclone fences into green filled retreats of wonder. Yeah, that's it, something like that. Look for it in March. Our target date is March 15th. We just picked it out of thin air. Our minds wandered at some motivational seminar we recently attended and the next thing you know we were passing notes back and forth and planning a newsletter.

Hey - we need a name for this publication. *The Enquirer* has already been used, though perhaps we can base it on that and call it *The Home Enquirer*. Any other ideas? You can fax ideas to 206.720.0.FAX or you can e-mail them to either of us (here's another hint about that cash prize) at the enclosed e-mail addresses.

Time to talk about travel. Hey! We know a travel agent, Don Barr, a good friend of ours. People like to read about travel . . . I see another columnist being born. We could launch a few careers with this newsletter, you just never know. Back to our travel. Since all I really remember about the vacation we took this year was the food - amazing and wonderful food - I'm going to go find David and sit him down at this keyboard for a spell. But, as Arnold said in those wonderful movies, "I'll be back." Here's David:

My turn? Finally? I'm changing fonts then! So In mid-March we set off to Madrid to meet our friends Don Barr and George Hein, who had been exploring remote parts of France, Spain and Portugal. George is one of the most exuberant, positive, "can-do" people I know. So, when he started to tell us how great Spain really was and how much fun we could have exploring it together what else could we do but say, "When do we go???" And it helped that Don, amazing travel agent that he is, got us from Seattle to London to Madrid with barely a layover, only one plane change, and for an extremely reasonable price - or so it seemed to us who seldom travel.

In Spain the weather was sunny every day we were there, but not too warm; perfect for outdoor touring. While based in Madrid we saw many interesting sights and most of the museums in Madrid, Segovia and Toledo. After a few days in Madrid we took the high speed train to Seville where we stayed a few nights, eventually renting a car and traveling through Cordoba to the Costa del Sol.

We hopped from small town to small town on the coast staying one night in each. The last two nights were in Tarife, our base from where we went to Gibraltar for the evening to see what dinner at an English casino would be like. Now we know exactly what the "Rock of Gibraltar" refers to!

From Tarife we also took a day trip to Tangiers, Morocco on an aging ship crammed full of European tourists. This was the most classic tourist experience of my life. Upon arrival, our boat was divided up into four different buses, depending on language spoken and off we went on a perfectly orchestrated, completely counterfeit inspection of Moroccan life. We had five hours to do the following: visit a "souk" where a musical group that looked like they were lifted out of the "Star Wars" bar sequence entertained us while we sat on lumpy pillows sipping mint tea and munching almond cookies. Thirty five Moroccan men begged each and every one of us to buy their wares. Not one of us did. Next we were taken to a scenic outlook where we got to see a snake charmer charm a snake! More wares were thrust in our faces! We were told buy Mohammed, our guide, that we should really buy postcards from his relative who incidentally was blind and needed the money! Many more things happened on this busy day: a trip to a rug bazaar where they all but demanded that we buy a rug, a leather good or a brass item. A trip to a restaurant where the world's most jaded, least inspired belly dancer hoochie cootched around and fleeced all of the middle aged men who wanted their pictures taken with her. Later there was an opportunity to ride a camel which didn't look any too happy to see fifty tourists line up to climb on his back. About fifty more attempts by the worlds most insistent street vendors who followed us around all day long and by now had guessed our names and how much money we had in our pockets! We couldn't get back on the boat fast enough!!! Having said all that, it was unlike anything I have ever done before. It was truly uniquely awful!!

We returned to Seville where we parted ways. Don and George had to get back to Paris to catch a flight home whereas Michael and I did not. So we, now on our own, returned to Madrid on that amazing train for several more lovely days of spicy Spanish cooking: great pastries, strong cafe and all manner of tapas courses. It was a terrific choice and I'm glad we went when we did.

Hello! - I'm back already. David went off to cook dinner and said I should finish. He's making Mexican food tonight, not Spanish. And there is a difference, a big one. The last four or five days that we were in Madrid were so wonderful. By then we knew our way around well, knew where the best cafes were, and managed to get the coolest room in the coolest hotel on the Plaza del Sol. We were on the top floor looking right down on the plaza, dead center in our building, dead center in the plaza. We ate at one nice, very nice, restaurant we found in a guide book and the owner's wife was from Boston. Since we arrived for dinner way too early at 9:30 PM - **which immediately tags you as a lame tourist** - she took pity on us and spent a great deal of time at our table. We loved her husband's food and talked of other places for us to eat. She then wrote down the places they eat at - not places we'd find in any guide book - places you'd go for good Spanish food if you were Spanish and just eating out with your family or friends. So we put away the books and the next three nights we went places and said she'd sent us. We love eating out and these dining experiences were simply amazing! The hardest part is waiting till 10:00 PM before you set out!

Pet Corner!!! Every letter like this has one! **Pet update coming atcha . . .** We are happy to say that Libby is still alive and with us as we write this letter. She is so old and her days are getting, we fear, much harder. She was born on October 15th 1983 so she's just shy of 15 years old now. Her back legs barely function. Stairs are almost out of the question. She falls down all the time and can't get up. She has odd growths on her face and body. She seems to be less interested (how can *this* be???) in food these days. And she often can't make it outside before the reason why she thought about going outside in the first place is, how shall I say this, . . . "evident". . .? She can barely hear and she spends most of her time sleeping. But, on the bright side, she still knows who we are, she still greets us in the morning and when we come home, she still loves it when we rent a movie and watch it - now limited to basement viewings due to limitations on where she can go - with her on the couch between us, and she still enjoys the occasional walk.

We met a woman who is an artist who paints portraits of pets. She paints pets only, but I believe she will paint people if they are with their pets. David hired her to paint a portrait of Samson and Libby and then he had our friend Larry put a wonderful frame around it. At first I was skeptical, but then I saw her work. Our painting is quite fun, very well done, and proudly hangs in our entry hall. If you visit soon you will have a chance to compare Libby to her likeness. Samson, being all black, is a harder dog to put on canvas. But he's there too! And he's still here with us. As are both Calvin and Claire, our soothing cats. We are pet people! **And so is President Clinton!** He got a puppy! We love that!

What else happened this year? We saw a touring production of *A Chorus Line* - that kinda takes you back! Ellen came out and we all watched and cheered. **Lola Falana found God.** We spent a week in Sandpoint, Idaho - don't ask - and Coeur d'Alene in June taking higher education real estate courses (not an oxymoron when we do it!) in order to get us our GRI designation - which stands for Graduate of the Realtor's Institute. We almost had this licked this year, but my new job forced us to cancel our final class in November so we remain one class short of the degree. Perhaps next year.

We had a very good month in August and David scraped together enough cash to put a down payment on a used, a very used - a 1995 with 91,000 miles on it the day we bought it used - Range Rover. Once again, at first I was skeptical, then I found the switch for the **butt warmer**. And I heard the stereo system. And then I drove it. Now I want one. Also in August there were sailing trips in the San Juans with our friend Tim Allen. First I went up for a week alone. Tim was already up there on his boat with Merritt hopping from island to island when I arrived on the float plane. I spent a week, the weather was lovely, and the resort life was quite agreeable. We floated, ate, and read books and magazines. After a week I flew back, Merritt had already flown back, and Tim stayed on. A week or so later David and I flew up together and repeated the experience, though the weather wasn't as great the second time around and part of the trip was work in that we helped Tim bring the boat back down to Seattle the last few days of the trip.

David visited some of his family in Cincinnati in late October during one of what turned out to be the most eventful weeks of our lives. **Neither of us knew this when he left** and couldn't have possibly guessed what would happen while he was away. We had carefully made one set of plans, but as we all know the best laid plans often go astray. While David was out of town I was offered a new job, a job I had been trying to get for about seven months. I accepted it immediately and in doing so dramatically changed the plans we had set in motion prior to his leaving.

The plan was that we were going to move our careers to **Windermere Real Estate**, thus causing me to leave behind the management position I had at our previous firm, and focus on building our careers as agents at a larger, stronger firm. We had decided that we wanted to finish our careers in real estate at Windermere. We had been thinking about it for about seven months, investigating options, researching benefits and soul searching about was important to us, our clients, and our futures. At the same time I was interviewing for management positions at various Windermere offices as I became aware of the opportunities. After several months two positions had come and gone without me being the candidate selected. We continued to plan.

David and I finally decided that we needed to just make this move and get on with things, to "just do it" as it were. Over the course of the summer we were waiting to see how my interviews would come out. My previous management position was getting on my nerves and making me not look forward to my days. So on August 25th we decided to stop waiting, take the plunge and get our lives in order. We began meeting with the owners of our new firm, reading contracts, ordering cards, all very quietly, that sort of thing. David left to visit his sister the week we were planning on announcing our move to our old firm and all of our friends and colleagues. **Our move was announced on Thursday October 23rd** (quite some time had passed between our making the decision and making the move since we had to close out several deals at our old firm and get our affairs in order). Our new business cards arrived the next day. But before we could even use one of them I was called to a meeting. At that meeting I was informed that the manager we planned on working for at our new office needed to move to Boston. And I was offered his job. And things started to change and move very quickly. On November 15th I was made Branch Manager of the Eastlake office.

After our official announcement went out a few people called or e-mailed and expressed surprise at our decision. **Everyone is so literal.** A few comments here, a calendar there, and people read all sorts of things into them. I don't remember either of us saying we would *never* work for Windermere. As a matter of fact a careful reading of the paragraph or two under **the eleven item list** in the *95 Happy Homeowner's Calendar* indicates just the opposite: that we were keeping our options open. And so we did. So why the confusion?

Simple if you ask me. I'm a very passionate and loyal kinda guy. My passionate loyalty to whatever firm I was working for at the time was likely strong and perhaps that, coupled with our fierce and fiery youthful independence, made people think we'd never make a move like this. Well we did. And now that we have we can't quite figure out why it took as long as it did. **We are so happy here.** What were we thinking all of those years? **Why didn't we put this together sooner?** When we needed clothing we always went to Nordstrom. When we needed any kind of electronic gear we always went to Magnolia Hi-Fi. We were aware that we could probably get an item cheaper at an outlet store or some warehouse, but we never went that route. We wanted service and professional help and to know the store would still be there in a year or two and we were willing to pay for it. We always appreciated the higher standard.

Now more than ever I dare say. We're 90% settled in at our new office. We have astounding new tools and computer access and are really looking forward to the housing market in 1998. It is going to be hot. We can all feel it - it's in the air still - and we're dying to put our new resources to work. Last year in some **Seattle areas housing prices went up by 20%.** Everyone we talk to, meaning clients, buyers and sellers, lead us to believe this will continue. We have a few great listings coming on in January, things already lined up in West Seattle, Mount Baker and the Central Area and buyers waiting in the wings to enter.

David and I no longer sit near each other; that's a bit odd for us, but we adjust quickly to a new situation - you have to be able to adapt quickly to survive as well as we have for as long as we have in this business. I have this big fancy office now. It has walls, windows, a door **and a 12' long credenza** so I know I have arrived. It had a nice view of Lake Union, but a hotel is being built across the street and as each floor goes up I see the view slip away so I know things can change.

Hey this is it. Outta room. Gotta wrap it up. Would you rather hear about the big prize you could win or the bad news that caused me to stand still and speechless for 30 minutes? I'm going for the prize. You all have a white envelope stuffed in with your calendar. Each is different on the outside and each envelope contains the same two items. Study them carefully. The back side of one of the items in only one of the envelopes has been stamped with a Santa stamp and is signed by both me and David. If you have that mail it to us with your name and address and you will be sent a serious gift. We'd say what the gift is but since it will be different depending on the location (as in which state in the country, this mailing goes all over) of the recipient we can't. We leave for Miami of all places on Christmas Day. We return on the 3rd of January. No rush. **The winner will be announced in the March newsletter!** And what the prize was!

Take Care & Keep in

Touch Michael Nelson

Have a Happy New Year!

David Ardike