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 1999

Dear Family, Friends, and Valued Clients:

### Wednesday November 17th

Bette Midler was on the *Today Show* today. Matt was doing the interview. (Since we wake up together five days a week, I'm on a first name basis with Matt, Katie, Al and Ann; they are my TV friends!) I had just gotten in from walking the dog to Starbucks, so I had a hot double cappuccino, two butterhorn, and ten minutes to myself as Inga eats her breakfast right after our morning walk. I barely had the dog food dish on the floor when by happenstance the Matt and Bette interview came on. So I'm thinking life is good: an occupied puppy, a hot cappuccino, two sweets and the perfectly timed end of a commercial break segueing into some time with Bette Midler – does it get much better than that? I don't think so.

Bette is currently touring the country with what she claims is her last BIG production show. She's calling it the *Divine Ms Millennium Tour*. I have tickets to see it with Cherese and Gary Tucker on Tuesday, December 7th, Pearl Harbor Day, so I am very keen on this interview. David and Rebecca were in a mood and weren't thinking clearly when Cherese and I opted to see Bette again, so we asked Gary and now they're sitting home that night. Anyway . . . after some idle welcome and how are you chit-chat, Matt started asking Bette *probing* questions about the end of the millennium, how she has fared this millennium, how she thinks the human race has fared, how the planet has fared, and how she thinks people are feeling right about now. (Her responses: she did great, the human race did OK, and the planet is suffering big time.)

As the interview continued Matt and Bette agreed that people *are* introspective and *want* to look within and that the end of the millennium has captured and magnified that mood. Why civilization itself it currently being analyzed as people examine their lives and relationships and decide on a course for the next hundred years. They went on to make some Y2K jokes and show performance clips from her tour, but by then I was lost in thought. All of a sudden it dawned on me . . . the year 2000 is less than 50 days away and I have not yet searched my soul. And I don't think David has searched his either. Then I began humming the *Ally McBeal* theme song and realized we could both search our souls and write the annual Christmas letter at the same time! How perfect! But this is not the time. It is too early – still November for Inga's sake – but we will return after this brief introduction. For now we're off to begin searching our souls.

### Monday November 22nd

Today on *Today* it was Celine Dion. Who cares? David and I will buy almost any CD, we buy CD's we haven't yet heard by groups and performers we don't even know just to see if we like 'em and to try and stay current (this is how you stay current if you only listen to talk radio stations) and even we don't have any of this woman's music. And to the best of my knowledge we don't know anyone who does. Were it not for that song from the four hour sinking ship movie (David made me see it), and the skits about her on *Saturday Night Live*, I wouldn't even know who she is. But here she is again saying she is going to retire, or take two years off. I've heard all this before. Two years off from what? Go away. Retire. Whatever.

We are still searching. Not ready to do the letter yet. Today is Tim Allen's birthday. Happy Birthday Tim!

### Sunday November 28th

Well this has got to stop or it will turn into a diary of the holiday season. And that's been done before. So it begins . . . not the letter but the over scheduled, hectic month of December. We just made it through Thanksgiving Weekend. And that was lovely. Parts of it were anyway. As always we had dinner over at

Greg and Larry's house. Our Thanksgiving Day tradition, the four of us plus various guests, started in 1986. In the 14 years since we have only missed one year. And every year for 14 years I have made my famous cranberry puree with almost equal parts alcohol, sugar and cranberries. There were several guests this year; the one we knew was the ever entertaining John Dickson. Dinner, the whole day, was wonderful.

The not so lovely parts were the last three days. David and I spent the past three days, the three days after Thanksgiving when David is convinced that the rest of the world is relaxing and watching movies, working. Working on lists: this mailing list, the Christmas card list, Christmas shopping lists, things to do lists, things to finish around the house lists. Very trying, especially for David when he knows the rest of the world is just watching a movie. And we were trying to focus on making plans: web site plans (will that ever happen?), advertising plans, career plans, what projects to do around the house plans, and, my favorite, the over scheduled, hectic holiday plans. It thus comes to my attention that starting tomorrow, the 29th, we have plans - some commitment - every night of the week for the next 23 nights. Yes my friends, booked nightly through December 21st. Our first free night is the 22nd. This makes me a bit nutty. I try to not think about it and take it one or two days at a time. We have a little bit of everything on the calendar now: birthday dinners out, holiday family dinners here at our house, the Bette Midler concert, five different December parties thrown by friends and clients, two office related parties, a night on a yacht with the Christmas ships, and a planning dinner with our Guemes Island partners. Then we get a break for two nights and then it is Christmas Eve. David has made reservations for two, just us alone on Christmas Eve, at Morton's, a new steak house that is about to open in Seattle. That will be calming. Christmas Day we are cooking dinner here at our house for a few friends without plans who are not leaving Seattle. In between all that we are supposed to write this letter, get a Christmas tree, and do some shopping. Oh and work. We must always be working. We always need to be finding clients, keeping our current clients happy, returning phone calls, answering e-mails, and selling houses. Ho, ho ho.

### Sunday December 12th

It seems as though I have to write this letter today. We don't have our tree up yet, but we have successfully made it through over half of the holiday schedule from hell. And my spirits are up. I haven't seen David yet today (it's 11:14 AM now, he is still at the gym) so I don't know how he's holding up. I think yesterday was hard on him. He cooked a huge holiday meal by himself for his family. Many people around, much stress, and I slipped away with Chereise to Restoration Hardware to buy cabinet pulls. Seriously. I left and he did it all. His dinner was great - another traditional turkey dinner, with all that stuff, coming on the heels of Thanksgiving. The kitchen is a bit of a fright still, but I need to focus here, not there. I have coffee beside me and I am ready to write the final *Nelson + Updike Christmas Letter* of this millennium. We've searched our end of the millennium souls and are ready to get it out and move on. We hope the preamble wasn't too tedious.

Oh, and - just in case there are any millennium purists reading this letter - if you think we are mentioning the millennium too much and you're dying to let us know it isn't really the end of a millennium, save yourself the effort 'cause we don't care! We can count. We know how this works. Why just the other day, on December 10th, I called our dear dear friend Surrey, a.k.a. Saint Surrey, to tell him he had just entered his 51st year. His 50th year ended the night before, on the 9th, when he "turned 50," but, as we all know, the next morning he was well into his 51st year. That's what friends are for . . . to advance your age as quickly as possible. That and to take you and your little yappy pug dogs to a shop-till-you-drop surprise 50th birthday party, complete with a cake for the dogs, at Bow Wow Meow. Which is exactly what Tucker and David and I did. We keep telling Surrey he'll remember this party and his paid for pug paraphernalia fest, which was followed by a lovely dinner complete with human gifts, for however many years he has left.

But I digress. What was my point? Oh, yeah . . . we can count. January 1st 2001 is the start of the next millennium. We got that. But remember Prince, back when there was a Prince, wrote "Tonight we're gonna party like it's 1999." I think that says it all. Not that we are "partying." (I love the way that became a noun.) There is no party here. For us December 31st 1999 will be more quiet than you can possibly know. David and I failed to catch millennium fever and thus ended up with no big plan for the 31st. We also pooh-poohed all the Y2K hype and ended up with no water and canned goods in our basement. Not one of our computers, and none of our software, has been checked either. However we also pooh-poohed the potential WTO problems and look how wrong we were! Anyway, here's what our year was like . . . . .

## Social Blanks

The year started out quietly. Generally for us nothing much happens in the winter (though I think that will be different next year as David is planning something big for February of 2000). We tend to just hunker down and work. Work is always pretty darn intense the first part of the year, and this year was no exception. January, February, March and the first half of April were very quiet. Work all day, dinner, movies, and TV all night. See some friends, read some books. Looking back at our kitchen calendar (the "social" calendar that guides our lives) most nights, unlike December, and most days, were blank. I do remember that somewhere in here we went back to vinyl. David and I went to the basement where all of our combined vinyl record albums (remember these) had been sitting in cardboard boxes since we moved here in 1993. Our basement used to flood. Talk about moldy oldies. Literally some were covered with mold. In most cases we could wipe it off, but often not. In many cases the vinyl was OK but the liner and cover were rotted away. We dug out our record player and hooked it up. We threw away the records that we couldn't save. We spent days on this project. But now our basement has less stuff in it and we can listen to my Jay and the Americans albums and David's Dan Hicks and His Hot Licks albums.

## Another Year's Progress On The House

Mid-April all that inactivity changed. It started with our house, as it always does. On April 12th a crew of three diggers who listened to Nine Inch Nails, and other similar music surely written to please Idaho hate groups, at an intolerable volume arrived in our back yard. I came home from work and could hear this music from the end of the alley with my car windows rolled up. I was absolutely appalled. When the foreman saw me he tried to talk to me about the project with the boom box booming. I could tell the guys in the hole would just as soon kill me as dig a hole, and the hole was way bigger than a grave anyway, so I tried to ignore this and talk. I was successful for about 30 seconds. Then I lost it and decided to risk my life by making them turn it off. Later, when talking to the foreman, I commented upon this noise, my neighbors and what it surely must be doing to their brains as they work. He reminded me that I needed to hire someone willing to dig a hole six feet by twelve feet by five feet deep with shovels and carry the dirt off site with repeated wheelbarrow trips. The hole was finished and they were gone in three days I had been dreaming of this major landscaping project for over ten years. Finally this was the start of my Koi pond.

The rest of my summer was about the pond. Building a box to hold the dirt back. Fiberglass. Building a filter system for the bottom of the pond. Washing - three times each batch - pea gravel. Water tests. Waiting. My first fish. Burying my first fish in the garden. More tests. My second fish. Another garden service. A much cheaper fish on my third try. Success. Building an above ground bio-filter. More fish. Plants. Landscaping. Big rocks, rocks I could load in my little truck and place alone. Then bigger rocks, rocks brought to our alley on fork lifts and placed, by David and me, with a pallet jack and a pry bar. Then more landscaping. We now have seven good sized happy healthy Koi who don't get to eat again till April. If you ever want to build a pond just call me. I've done all the research and nothing would make me happier than to consult on a project like this.

A great deal happened in April. While my sheer will was making the pond a reality outside, our favorite contractors, JAS Design Build, were installing phase two of our kitchen inside. Phase one of the kitchen happened in October of 1998, that was the lowers basically. Phase two was the uppers and the fancy refrigerator. Our kitchen is finally complete. What's more is that David and I finally live in a house with a fully finished kitchen. We didn't last in either of our first two houses long enough to finish the kitchens. We've been together since 1985 and have never lived in a space with a finished kitchen till this year. David would point out, if he were here, that our kitchen is NOT finished 'cause the trim around the sliding doors, and the door casing and trim into the powder bath, is not up yet. This is true, but these are hardly major things. In my world the kitchen is finished. In my world the glass is half full. My world is a happy place.

I hear David coming in. He must be done showing houses for the day. This means we are going to go get our Christmas tree. Let me first wrap up the house stuff. Two more things happened here this year. One is extremely obvious the moment you turn the corner onto 17th. We finally had a front porch put back on the house. When the house was built in 1910 it had a porch across the entire front. In 1956 the entire porch was ripped off and replaced by a block of very ugly concrete. In 1999 we put the porch back on. Over the ugly block of concrete. JAS designed it. We fussed it. They built it. And it is beautiful. It looks like it came

with the house. It was finished too late in the year to be painted (this project started in September) so that will be done next spring. The porch is big, wonderful, graceful, and though it is still winter, already I'm drawn to sitting on it with Inga or a portable telephone or a cup of coffee. The cats are in heaven.

And the coil of electrical wire that hung in our living room for the last seven years? That was the forth and last thing taken care of this year. We had the contractors, once again the ever wonderful JAS Design Build (just call if you need their number), extend a wall between our living room and our entry hall. The wall was 15 inches long, now it is about 80 inches long. And this changes everything. We now have a clearly defined entry hall, and the living room makes sense. Now both rooms are, well . . . cozy! The new wall has a beautiful cabinet in it with glass doors, interior lights above and below, and thicker than you'd expect glass shelves. Everything has been repainted - all new colors - and now that it is done it looks as if the wall, complete with the old banged up molding we reused, has been there forever. When I find the time (will it happen this month at all?) I'm filling the cabinet with my cocktail shaker collection.

So 1999: 1) the Koi pond is in finally and the yard is fully landscaped, 2) the kitchen is finally finished, complete with our dream refrigerator, 3) a turn-of-the-century porch is finally put back on our house, and 4) the main floor of our home gets its second cosmetic overhaul in the seven years we've lived here and the electrical wire hanging from the ceiling is finally put to use. Four more pieces of our vision fall into place. And frankly I am exhausted. David wants to push on and tackle the second floor in the year 2000. That involves massive amounts of lath and plaster removal, electrical work, moving several doors, moving closets some reframing of walls, and making two bathrooms, our bath being a full gut job and the guest bath being created from scratch. Last year David got his way (witness his new car). Next year I think I am getting my way - no work on the house till the SPRING of 2001 at the very soonest. I now see sixteen months of rest on the horizon and I gotta say, at my advance age, it looks good.

### The Tree Is Up

We took a long break. I'm back. And now there is a tree, undecorated but up, in our living room. Buying a Christmas tree always makes me think of the scene in *Love Story* where Ali and Ryan play in the snow and buy their tree. I'm not sure if they had hot chocolate first, but we did. We went to - don't make me say it again, but we do own a few shares of stock in the company, go ahead, guess - and got hot chocolate first. Then we went to the tree lot. Inga came too. Inga also helped put the tree in the stand and water it. We have no angel on our tree; Inga is our angel.

### Our New Puppy

Inga is a joy. She is the wind beneath my wings. She lights up my life. But she didn't come without some pain, confusion and hurt first. When we started the year we had one dog, Samson. He was a Kerry Blue Terrier. Libby, my Dalmatian, had passed of old age the year before. That was hard, but Libby was clearly old and it was clearly time. It's really true how that makes a difference in how hard it is on you. Watching Libby fade and then losing her was hard enough. We were completely unprepared for this year's loss. Samson was only eleven and we thought we had years left with him. One day in May we noticed he looked a great deal thinner. Actually we didn't notice, friends who visited did. We thought he was just getting more exercise what with all the trips to Guemes and all the running on the beach. But once people started commenting on his weight we began to see it. And once we knew to look for it the new loss was rather rapid. We went to the vet, were sent to a special critical care vet, tests were done and before the results could even be understood, Samson began bleeding from his gums. And it wouldn't stop. Then he stopped eating. Then he began vomiting blood. Then he really lost weight. No one could do anything and no one could or would really explain what we could do. Finally on June 5th, a Saturday, we had to have him put to sleep. It was a rough two weeks and that day, the day we made the decision, we were a mess. The vets all tell you you're doing the right thing, but you wonder, "Can this be turned around?" Particularly when the cause is such a mystery and it all happens so quickly. I sat with Samson all day that Saturday waiting for some word from someone. That was difficult. This is difficult. Let's move on to Inga.

Frauline Inga. Inga to her friends. She is a Weimaraner. Yes, those are the dogs that photographer guy dresses up and takes pictures of. Yes, those are the dogs in the new Toyota mini-van commercial. And yes, those are the most beautiful dogs on the planet. She was born in Ephrata, Washington on June 25th.

She'll be exactly six months old on Christmas Day. Our vet says she has (and I quote) "good confirmation" and that this breeder did an excellent job. We had pick of the litter (in Ephrata!). My parents were in town for two weeks so David and I planned a car trip (3 hours each way) for their second day here to drive through the mountains, play with the puppies, pick only one, have lunch, and return home. Since they were all so very small the day we selected, and they all seemed so much alike at that point, it is really amazing we ended up with the best Weimaraner ever bred. Sometimes things just work out.

Inga was delivered to us on Sunday August 8th, just barely older than six weeks, with razor sharp tiny little teeth and that special breath that puppies have. We're not going to offend all of our friends with children by comparing raising a puppy to raising a child. We know better than that. Raising a child is much harder, much more serious, and has far greater consequences if you do it badly (witness Columbine). But it was (is?) hard. Maybe it's our advanced age. How old am we? Old enough to know this is our last puppy. At least as long as we have to work. (I actually love the puppy phase, which we are still in, but it would be so much easier if we didn't have to ever leave the house.) Okay, I am not going to go on and on about our dog. I could, but I won't. Well maybe just one or two things. She has not yet chewed up any piece of clothing or any shoes. Or any furniture. She did completely chew through one lamp cord, but at least she unplugged it first. I am the one who got up at night with this dog every two to three hours for the first two months. Every two to three hours. Think about it. I'm old. After two months of that I started not returning her to her crate and me to the marital bed after the first time she would wake me up each night. I started stopping off on the second floor and hitting the guest bed - with her. Wonder or wonders she can sleep the whole night through and not ever go to the bathroom in the house. The secret was putting her under the covers of the guest bed and letting her sleep with me. So the crate bit is fine, but my advice is to IGNORE all those so called puppy raising experts and just sleep with your puppy. Let the puppy *under* the covers. Your dog will love you forever (she is so much more bonded with me than David!) and you will get a good night's sleep. And the look on the dog's face? That dog is so very grateful and has such a happy, eager to please look just before bedtime. Imagine getting into bed each night with someone grateful, happy, and eager to please? It's like perpetually being in the few months of a new relationship.

So . . . now our sleep patterns, our work schedules, and our social lives revolve around Inga the puppy. Who is feeding Inga when? When was Inga last walked? Can we go away? Can we travel? Cell phones ring and it *isn't* important business on the line, it is one of us checking to see if the other can spell the puppy. This puppy has brought the most dramatic change to our lives this year. And I couldn't be happier.

### Our Y 2 K Insurance Policy

If ever the world does go to hell in a hand basket, we are covered. Us and simply the best partners anyone could ever co-own an island-get-away-house with, our wonderful chore-loving partners Paul Beudet and David Wertheimer. As the world slides closer to hell, we have a little slice of heaven on Guemes Island. Night and day the sound of the water is calming. The beach is endlessly interesting to walk on. It makes dogs happy. There is a large deep fireplace and plenty of wood. There is a bottle of single malt scotch. Large ships and small boats go by. Mostly it is sunny there, even when it is overcast in Seattle. And the storms, when they do happen, are real storms and quite fun. There are very few people around. It is a great place to be alone, yet it is the perfect place to entertain and really *visit* with someone. Guests seem to like it. We are not often up with David and Paul, but when we are it is great. The house is comfortable for eight people (if they are four couples as we have four beds) and several times we've gone up with a couple and David and Paul come up with a couple and there you are - eight for dinner.

Have there been any problems you wonder? No. Unless you consider spending many weekends away from your primary home a problem. At the start of the year, having only had access to the Guemes house for about fifteen days, we were stealing away every weekend we could. It was new and exciting and we were there so often things began to fall apart at home. Remember our primary place is still very much a fixer with several years and several major projects to go. It takes constant focus and drive to keep projects on track and to finish things once started. About mid-year we had to examine how many weekends we were away and the negative impact it was having on basic chores at home.

Other than that problem, which in a way is a *happy* problem - one we are grateful to be able to have, it has been great. As it turns out co-owning a recreational home was the perfect thing for us. We could

have never done it alone. In oh so many ways we couldn't have, and wouldn't have, done it alone. Sharing this house with another couple synchs perfectly with our Seattle lives, our home, and our careers.

### Oh! The Places You'll See

The first weekend of March we broke the Guemes routine by visiting Palm Springs for the second time. The first time, in 1998, we stayed at a little hotel. This time we stayed at the home of a friend, Mark Anton, who we know due to us all being real estate agents in Seattle. Mark has a place very near the commercial strip in Palm Springs. I had a nasty head cold when we took off in Seattle. I had never flown with a head cold before. I spent most of the flight hoping we would crash and take me out of my absolute misery. I was in abject pain most of the time there with a throbbing in my ears that wouldn't stop. It was hard to enjoy my time there, but I gave it my best try. David had a great time. The weather was, well . . . wonderful for the first weekend in March. We rented a car. We drove around. They had two Starbucks. We liked the names of things and places. A place we visited called Twenty Nine Palms was the center of an earthquake later in the year. Other than the cool name there wasn't much reason to remember the place. But when I read the article on the quake it all came back to me. David seems to like going there; he's making me go again next month. He just had us get our only charge card (I still remember the days when we had eleven credit cards - it is so nice to say "only" when referring to ours now) switched over to some card that earns air miles on Alaska Airlines. Alaska flies to Palm Springs. We are flying to Palm Springs again over the Martin Luther King Jr holiday coming up in January 2000.

David often wonders if buying a second home on Guemes Island was as smart as buying a second home in Palm Springs. Inga and I do not wonder. In July on Guemes, sitting essentially on the Pacific Ocean, I do not wonder about anything other than Martha's Vineyard, the Atlantic Ocean, and how they might compare. The secret to my tranquility is that I never second guess any of my decisions, whereas David second guesses almost everything (except, I must admit, his new car).

The only other place we went in 1999 was New York City! Well, first there were a few small side trips. First there was a trip to Vancouver, BC with my parents during their summer stay with us in July. Less than a month later we returned to Canada (my we are world travelers aren't we?) but this time to Victoria by boat with my cousin Marsha and her partner Lori. I had never been to Victoria before and I've lived here over twenty one years now. I'd go back. I'd skip high tea. And I would never consider getting on the Victoria Clipper again. It *was* hell's waiting room . . . without a doubt one of the worst travel experiences possible.

Fortunately this was followed in October by a great travel experience to the best travel destination possible: Manhattan! Chereese, who used to do Broadway shows, now travels the world managing productions for Intel. In October she was working a big computer tech trade show in Manhattan. It didn't take much for her to convince us to meet her there. Rebecca and the two of us joined her there at the end of her Intel stint. During the planning phase of this trip Chereese went on line and arranged for the four of us to rent a two bedroom condo in Soho for *way less* than a hotel would cost. Cash in advance please. So we arrive. The three of us take a cab from the airport to our Soho digs. Well almost Soho digs. The place was on the north side of the Ho so we were Noho, not Soho as David kept pointing out. And then there was the place itself. Let me just say there was a reason for cash in advance please. Meanwhile Chereese was set up in a fancy hotel on Central Park. Rebecca quickly moved into the Central Park digs, extended Chereese's stay by several days, and began calling room service. We stayed on in not-quite-Soho by ourselves. In a desperate attempt to improve our lot, I rearranged all of the condos furniture. Later Chereese and Rebecca joined us for the last few days of our trip. On our last morning there, a day we were just going to have a lovely brunch in Chelsea, walk Manhattan streets and soak up Manhattan atmosphere prior to taking a car to the airport, on *that* morning we were awakened by the police pounding on our door trying to serve papers to the condo's owner. Cash in advance please.

While in New York we saw some Broadway shows that aren't worthy of mention in retrospect, ate at some great restaurants, shopped and walked. On our first night there we met up for drinks and dinner with our dear friend Ann Wendell who was in New York for the same computer trade show Chereese was there for. Ann, who evidently doesn't know about our advanced age, wanted to go out - actually go out on the town with us - after dinner. It was 11:00 PM! We sent Ann to her hotel room (we think) and we headed back to not-quite-Soho. On October 7th I saw Bill Clinton at Madison and 53rd. It is amazing how fast things

happen there. We were walking along and we stopped to go into a shop. I notice a few police standing around before we went in. We came out less than fifteen minutes later and I noticed a great many police all standing around with blue barricades. David and Cherese and Rebecca went on to the next shop but I stayed on to see what was going to happen. Within minutes blue barricades were thrown up, the walkers and drivers were stopped in all directions, and we were told to wait with no explanation of why. Fifteen minutes later a huge number of motorcycles, police cars, and black sedans with tinted windows go by, then a break for a few minutes, and then more of the same. And then a blue sedan with Bill Clinton in it. No tinted windows this time. There's Bill smiling and waving. He was alone in the back of the blue car. I think. At least I could see anyone else (above the window line).

We were in Manhattan for over a week. The best day of the trip was October 6th. It was the perfect day, clear skies, warm, almost hot weather. David and I took the subway to Brooklyn, ate a great breakfast at a cool luncheonette David found in one of his many restaurant guides, walked to the Brooklyn Art Museum to see a show making a big stir in all the national papers (Sensations), and then we walked from the museum to the river, walked along the river to the Brooklyn Bridge, walked over the Brooklyn Bridge back to Manhattan, and continued walking through Manhattan back to Soho. Later we met the girls for dinner. The day after we returned to Seattle I saw a photo in the New York Times of a shooting at a bakery in Soho on a street we walked on daily. The suspects were arrested on Elizabeth Street, the very street we stayed on.

### It Is Later Than It Has Ever Been For This Letter

I'm so sorry. It is Monday December 20th already. Usually this letter is in the mail, with that oh so handy calendar, by the 16th or 17th at the latest. Time has gotten away from me this month. That and in years past I was willing to stay up and write after everything else in the day was done. I know Gary and Surrey won't believe it, but already I'm getting e-mails and phone calls and Christmas cards that ask what is up? Is it coming? Have you decided to stop? Where's mine? Oh, the pressure!

### Aging Gracefully

David turned 43 this year. I turned 44. But, as we all now know thanks to millennium math, that means David is in his 44th year and I am in my 45th. I never planned for this. David did. His 44th year looks fabulous! Of course he gets up six days a week at six in the morning and either runs for miles or goes to a gym. I have watched him do this six days a week, every week, for 15 years. (As much as it is possible to watch from under the covers that is.) How is my 45th year? Well, I can move large rocks and do extensive manual labor if it involves yard work and landscape design (but it has to be my yard and my design). And, though it doesn't come up very often, I'm still able to walk from Brooklyn to Soho when I need to.

### The State Of Our Relationship

David and I have been together for almost fifteen years. How do we do it? By finding new and inventive ways to amuse ourselves while torturing each other. Two recent examples: When we did the major kitchen and powder bath remodel David wanted to be in control of all finish surfaces, the actual look and feel and color of the rooms. And, believe it or not, for the most part I let him have it. But I couldn't let him have all of it. So I gave him the kitchen, the bigger room with more decisions, and I took the powder bath, a much smaller room with fewer decisions. He got to pick everything, every knob, every color, every appliance in the kitchen. Meanwhile I got to pick a color for the bath (blood red), a toilet paper holder and towel bar. I love all of David's decisions; he is less wild about mine, and he wants me to know it. He doesn't like the toilet paper holder I selected. Why I can't imagine. It came from Restoration Hardware. It's fairly nice looking. It has no springy parts in a tube and it is easy to use. But to prove how much he dislikes it he won't refill it. So I can go into the powder bath after he's used it and find an empty cardboard tube on the roller thing and a fresh roll of toilet paper on the sink. He thinks I don't notice this little protest, ah but I do! I just smile, put the fresh roll of toilet paper (paper over the front of course) on the roller, and enjoy my blood red room. For my part I have discovered David hates to repeat things. Meals for one (ask the girls about David and dinner). Music for another. Me? I'll find a compact disc I'm in the mood for and put it on repeat and play the same disc for hours. Sometimes, if I want to learn (memorize) a new song, I will just one song on repeat for hours. Doesn't phase me a bit. Drives David just crazy. So now my new thing is to play a disc on *shuffle* AND *repeat* for hours and then time how long it takes David to figure out what I've done. This cracks me up. It will be fifteen years on February 12th (which means that according to millennium

math on February 13th we will be in our sixteenth year). Obviously at the end of the day, and the start of the day, we are the best of friends. The lunch hour can be tricky however, and not just 'cause it involves food.

### David's Year In Real Estate

David has absolutely forbid me to discuss in this letter two very bad things that happened to us this year. I'm not sure if it is because reliving these two events is just too depressing and too demoralizing for him or if it is because he just wants to take the high road. Whatever his reason, if I want him to sign the letter I must obey. So, and you know how much it is against my nature to do so, I will omit details. This is his paragraph after all. David had another great year. Once again he's shown himself to be an excellent hunter-gatherer (my former job title). He hunted and gathered so well this year that he finally, after years and years of talking about it, got to buy the car he has always wanted, the car of his dreams. (I can't bring myself to type the words so you'll have to call HIM or e-mail HIM if you want the details).

But he deserves it. He's completely on top of the market, he's checking hourly for new listings, his clients are always informed and up on what's happening, and he knows and understands these contracts in and out. And the best part: he seldom loses in a multiple offer situation. I honestly don't think he lost even once in a multiple offer mess this year. He knows what it takes to win, he can convince his clients *to do what it takes* to win, and when he gets there everyone likes him. The other agents like him. The sellers like him. And he works all price ranges. He managed to find a couple a perfectly reasonable house for \$165,000 in Seattle this year. Anyone can find and sell find a \$400,000 house.

David ended his year by once again setting a record for the most expensive house he's ever sold. Again it wasn't a million, but it was well over three quarters of the way there. But even more gratifying than the price of the house was who bought it and under what conditions. Some friends of ours, who I won't name 'cause really I am the soul of discretion, ended up on the show *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire* and walked away with piles and piles of cash. Or was it Microsoft and piles and piles of stock? I get the two confused, which isn't hard to do when living in this part of the country. Anyway I do remember that these guys have wanted to buy a house with a western, Puget Sound, killer sunset view from a certain street in a certain neighborhood for years. Several years. And they were quite specific. Not only did they know what streets would be acceptable, they knew which few blocks on each street would really make them happy. David hunted and they waited. For over three years they waited while David hunted. They closed on their house early this month. The next day I called JAS and ordered a custom stereo cabinet (I was waiting too).

### Meanwhile Back At The Office

I think I am what is known as middle management. I have a boss and my boss has a boss. And there are people who call me boss. So I am in the middle. And I manage an office. And I manage 38, at last count, real estate agents. And I thought I missed selling real estate *last* year! I've done a great deal less in the way of selling real estate, and a great deal more in the way of management this year. My days are made up of trying to keep many people happy and things running smoothly while dealing with large volumes of mail, memos, and e-mail. Add to that the title reps, loan officers and various vendors who always seem to be around. Mix in the occasional angry phone call from one of my agent's clients, or drag me into the drama of their current real estate transaction, add in a few legal problems, and it is a full day. Oh and I have to go to meetings. And talk to lawyers.

And find good staff, my Waterloo this year! I have three staff positions (we call 'em admin positions) at my office. My weekend person, Fran Trinder, is the most amazing woman for the job. She was the first person I hired just over two years ago when I took this position on. I was new and I got lucky with her. I can't imagine what qualities a person could want in an admin person that she doesn't possess. Likewise with my lead admin person, Tracie McGovern, during the week. Now *she* is the proverbial wind beneath my wings. She has been with our office for, well long before I got there, like seven or eight years. She knows everything. I can't imagine working at this office without her. That's only two of three. What about the third! I've had to fire two people this year. One just last Thursday during the holidays - bad for my karma. The one before that I didn't really even get to fire 'cause he just disappeared. Now I've hired someone who I'm really excited about. She holds a great deal of promise, and not just cause she is over thirty.



## Who Wants To Be A Real Estate Agent?

The next game show on Fox! Coming in the fall! After *Greed* at 9:00 PM Central.

I hire real estate agents. Brand new agents and experienced agents from other companies. Hiring real estate agents, such an odd concept . . . how do you hire someone you not only don't pay, but who in fact pays you to come to work for you? Better yet, wrap your mind around this, firing real estate agents. As dear ol' Merritt always says "Imagine being fired as a real estate agent! How lame do you have to be?" Well not always lame, but absolutely crazy will do it. I fired an agent this year, who only two months prior, in a moment of weakness, I hired. She was crazy. I knew it in my gut when I hired her, but I was in a kinder gentler caring place the day I decided to give her a chance. The stories I could tell. Our last conversation was the best. I had informed her as part of the firing that I was uncomfortable supervising her and being ultimately responsible for her activities. What came next was so amazing I grabbed a pen and wrote it down while biting my lip hard to not burst out laughing into the phone. I got it verbatim. She said: "I honestly don't know why you are uncomfortable with me. Perhaps it is because you are not used to being around a strong empowered woman or perhaps it is because I represent the woman you might have known had you chosen a different lifestyle." She went on to tell me about my lifestyle of pain, her lifestyle of joy, her hairdresser, and how her joy made his pain better. She could help me too.

But I digress. Where was I? Oh yes, training newer agents and helping them build their career (or, as we like to call it, their "book of business") and retaining experienced agents by supporting their existing careers and keeping them happy. What I really get a charge out of lately is explaining real estate careers to people who want to become, or think they want to become, real estate agents. So many people think this looks like a great life from the outside. My job is to temper with reality (the hard cash costs of starting in this business, the hard cash costs of running a real estate business each month, and an honest appraisal of the long learning curve and slow initial earnings potential.) Then I tell them about what it can be like, how great it can be, in their third or fifth year. If they get past all that, and the six to seven full weeks of full time classroom hours, my training begins. And I gotta say, I love it. It's now been just over two full years of management at Windermere and I could not be any happier. I never regret going to work.

And I'm still a licensed agent after all is said and done. I still show property to buyers now and then, I like to keep a hand in it all and keep current with the market, and I still do quite a bit of listing and marketing houses for sellers. Sadly I don't have as much opportunity to go out shopping with buyers now that I have a desk tied to me, but once in a while I can make it happen. The best time this year was with Lisa Chiaverotti, the younger sister of my friend Terri from college back in Michigan. I remember this woman as the kid sister of my friend. I have a photo of her with a cast on her arm taken on a camping trip when she was like, I don't know, nine and I was perhaps twenty. This is the image locked in my mind. Next thing I know she's all grown up, in Seattle, teaching school, getting married, and buying a house near Greenlake with her husband. Not only did I get to see her whole family again, and my friend Terri, when they arrived for the wedding, I got to show her and sell her the house and show it to the entire wedding party the day after the wedding. I don't get to do it as often anymore, but when I do it is usually special in some way.

## I Read The News Today. Oh Boy . . .

Now it is Tuesday the 21st. Lame! I didn't make it last night. I am simply older and less willing to pull all nighters these days. Not that it was an all nighter . . . I climbed into bed with a book and Inga at about eleven. I'm three quarters of the way through *A Man In Full*. I could have skipped reading and tried to stay up and finish this letter and get it to a 24 hour Kinkos, but what would the point be? It probably won't get to you by Christmas anyway. It just became your first official *Welcome to the year 2000* greeting.

So what's in the news? Well today on *Today* a woman who was in a tree for two years hugged the earth. Her middle name was "Butterfly." I'd like to see the birth certificate please. I'd like to see everyone's birth certificate. It is the 21st of December. I guess this gets mailed tomorrow. Last year, as we were loading it into the Rover for the trip to hell's other waiting room, the Bulk Mail Station, Tracie informed me we were bombing a country. Remember that? A year ago we were in a war! Last month Seattle was in a war. We made the national news nightly. WTO put us on the map. I had the pleasure of driving by armed militia types with big clubs each day on my way to the office.

This year as this goes to press thousands are swept away in floods, several terrorists are trying to get into Seattle with nitroglycerin, and dot com stocks are sucking money out of blue chip stocks and creating Wall Street havoc while Microsoft threatens to become an evil empire (according to Ms Reno) worthy of any James Bond film. The world is a troubled place, yet David and I seem to be untroubled. Is it an unrelenting shallowness on our part? Or a sagacious cosmic understanding of our place in the big picture? Speaking of James Bond films, Q died. You could tell Desmond Llewelyn was planning to retire when they introduced his protege, John Cleese, in *The World Is Not Enough*. So when I saw his large obit in the New York Times I wasn't too surprised. But as I read it I was. He was 85 but he didn't die of old age. He was in a car wreck in London. Who can predict these things?

Speaking of London, did you see the one about the 35 year old naked swordsman who attacked 10 with a sword in a church there? You missed that? How about the 17 year old girl who died on the operating table while having a massive hairball removed from her stomach? Her mother commented that it looked like a rat. Heidi Fleiss got a get out of jail free card for good behavior (in jail). In Seattle a fire-eating transsexual climbed to the top of an electrical tower near our office and took her shirt off and ate fire to protest laws requiring women to wear shirts in public but not men. I guess that was the one thing she really missed about being a guy, going shirtless. I don't make these things up you know, I just read three newspapers each day.

And often I wonder why I do as the news isn't always nice. On a serious note the news really didn't get much better in 1999. In Texas three men identified as white supremacists dragged another man to his death simply because he was black. At trial they had to prove it was a hate crime. A year after Matthew Shepard's murder we get, from our own military this time, a soldier in Kentucky beating another soldier to death, while he slept in his bunk, with a baseball bat simply because he was gay. In that case the murderer had previously tried to pick a fight with the gay man only to end up losing the fight. So I guess he thought he'd try a bat while sleeping. The army needed to investigate; they were not sure it was a hate crime at first. At least the man who murdered Scott Amedure, remember, the Jenny Jones secret crush show?, was finally found guilty this year, after two or three trials, for appearing at Scott's door with a shotgun and killing him for being gay. I read the papers and watch the news and often find it all just overwhelming. How many more years of news of this nature before I just pack it in and move to Guemes Island full time?

### However I Seem To Be News And Information Obsessed

David seems content to get all his new from only one source, The New York Times. Beyond that he listens to music and watches movies. I, however, am the reason they have these 24 hours a day news stations. I crave several sources at all hours. David is not always happy with this side of me. I often have several televisions on to different news and information stations when I am in the house alone. CNN, cable shows, whatever. He comes in and disapproves. My dream come true would be an office with a stack of several TVs in a square like they have in newsrooms. All on mute with a control in my hands. Woke up one day in September to find that our cable provider was forced to offer us more and more stations as part of our basic service. They added near 40 channels. We were both enthralled. David finally had Comedy Central and VH1, and all of a sudden I had Court TV, the Weather Station and the Traffic Station. Who cares about HBO and Showtime? Between re-runs of *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*, over ten news stations, and our new favorite channel, E!, we are happy. If it's not getting a dose of style from Elsa Klensch it is biographies all the time. We know so much more about Diane Carroll now. And haven't you wondered what ever became of Stephen Bishop? *Behind the Music* tells all. Did you know that Judge Wapner now does a *People's Court* type show on a station called Animal Planet where all the cases must have pets or animals involved? Only people going to court with pet disputes are allowed. I love this. I wondered where he went when Judge Judy came on the scene. Now I know.

We got a DSL line this year. (As my dear friend Lisa pointed out that's "Digital Subscriber Line line," not unlike, she goes on to say, "Personal Identification Number number" or PIN number as we are all trained to say.) So our web site information comes faster now thanks to David who made that happen. Now we have blue and green and white and red cables, four of 'em, running here and there in our home office. David claims he still has no space of his own in "our office" and sadly he is correct. I gave him a drawer in a file cabinet, but he seems to want more. So in 2000 I plan on purging, filing, and making real space for him and his laptop. I see many books going to resale shops and a complete revamping of this space to

accommodate David. We don't need, or shouldn't need, as much of this paper anymore anyway.

### Our New Palm Pilots

Because we each have Palm Pilots now. And laptops. And they all can talk to each other. It is a miracle. Part of the miracle is that I spearheaded this technological advance in our lives. I bought our first Palm while on the streets of New York. All it took was one window display with Palm and Macintosh products side-by-side. I never investigated the Palm Pilot, even though every one in every meeting in 1999 seemed to be tapping on one, because I assumed they were for the rest of the world, not Apple users. Once I realized we could use them too, well, whole new vistas opened up. On the flight back from New York I did absolutely nothing but learn to use my Palm Pilot. For over six hours I read the manual and tapped away. David was amazed at my stick-to-it-ness with this thing. By time we landed in Seattle I had the start of my calendar, as many personal and business contacts as I could remember, ditto with your birthdays, and several to do memos in my Palm. It wasn't long till we decided David needed one too. We have dumped several different software applications we were using and now have put all our eggs in the 3Com basket. And - almost better than sex I tell you - the best part was something I tried just last Friday in a restaurant. We were having our annual Guemes Island dinner with David and Paul. Tom Skerritt was sitting two tables away with three others. After the Guemes business was concluded we moved on to many things, one of which was, duh!, talking about real estate. At one point I needed to give them a person's name and number. I first said I'd call them with that info next week. Then I realized I had my Palm in my pocket and wondered if that person had made it in the device yet. Glory be, they had. I didn't know for sure 'cause I didn't enter the info, the device just picked it up while talking to my laptop. Anyway I showed it to Paul so he could enter the info into his Palm Pilot. But then Paul suggested I beam the info to him. So he showed me how to do that and I pointed my Palm at his and tapped its G spot and schzaaam. I thought about beaming an autograph request to Tom Skerritt but there didn't seem to be a Palm Pilot at his table. We had two at ours. I'm gonna love the next 100 years.

### And Finally The Question You've All Been Waiting For

Will this letter ever end? Yes. Now. My intellectual property is all used up for this millennium. I don't quite know why, but it wasn't as easy this year as in year's past. David just comes in here, looks at me, and shakes his head. He's been a good sport about this however, bringing, at various times, food, tea, ice cream and Fran's chocolates to my side as I type. You gotta love that. I sure do. So goodbye 1999. We hope you and yours are all well, happy, and satisfied at this milestone. We hope you remember us and stay in touch. And we hope everyone sets some reasonable goals for the year 2000, things like quickly getting used to writing "2000" on checks instead of "19 . . . oooops" when you are in line in front of us at the grocery store. Our goals are simple, the main one being to continue on as we have. Add to that, for David, keeping his new car scratch and dent free, and for Michael, well I have two . . . I either want to be in a Gap Commercial (I have the song memorized: "We slip and slide as we fall in love and just can't seem to get enough," but I don't have the look down yet) or I want to be one of the people who get to say "I'm watching you CNN" during a commercial break. Preferably without my name on the screen as I say it.

e-mail us!

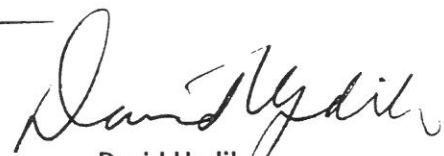
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