

Saturday December 13th

2003

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- John Cougar Mellencamp

Dear Family, Friends, and Valued Clients:

Once again it's time for us to bid adieu to another year. David has finally left the apartment so I can sit and write unbothered. I've moved Inga's bed to the area under my desk. She seems to sleep for longer periods if she's near one of us. She's sound asleep at my feet, keeping them warm. The cats have found radiators to squeeze half under. It's cold outside. David's showing homes today on the Eastside (hey it's December, mere days before the holidays and things are finally slow; he'll go anywhere when things are slow). I saw the listing flyers for the houses he's showing today as they came out of the printer and for neighborhood they said things like "Lake Hills" or "Robinswood." My life has changed quite a bit; I seldom drive more than 2.6 miles a day thus I have no idea where those "neighborhoods" are located. I thought I heard him say Duvall or Monroe the other day, but maybe he was just joking. I do know these are repeat, loyal clients who he likes a great deal and that over the years he's done multiple transactions with them or other member of their family. Thus the Eastside. And thus my solitude.

About twenty minutes ago I had no solitude as David was hovering over my desk pestering me about our dining room table. I'm about to move it outside to the roof top deck permanently. He's fussing about how it was never meant to be an outdoor table and that the elements might destroy it. *Yeah, in about ten years.* He's fussing about how we don't need another table as we have a picnic table. *I say fine, I'll use it as a potting table for my container garden.* He's saying there's no room on the deck for it. *I say fine, I'll put it off the deck over on the part of the roof where the dog poops.* He's fussing about how - here's the best part - wasteful this is. Ah, the trump card: He's about to do something very wasteful and I make a bargain: *I'll never again ridicule the wasteful thing he's about to do providing he never again bring up what I now call my table.* (I equate some extravagances with waste whereas he does not - especially when they are his extravagances). I'm going to enjoy watching that table deteriorate on the roof over the next ten to twenty years, especially after how emotionally scarred I was by the process of getting it up there. And, since I'm a man of my word, I won't be telling we you what he's about to do that I think is extreme extravagance. Ask him, not me.

It's cold outside. I'm dreaming of Christmas in Palm Springs where it is warm outside. And if not really warm (it only gets up to about 75° each day this time of the year), at least it is very sunny and bright and dry in the daytime and merely crisp at night. One week from today you'll find me in my new car, alone but with Inga, and with a few possessions that we wouldn't be able to get on a plane during our usual trips down. I'm really looking forward to the drive, barring bad snow and ice trouble in the passes. I get to be alone for the 19 drive time hours and I get to check out diners and small towns and cheap-assed motel chains when I stop each day. Inga gets to be with me for 3 solid days with many play stops. It's all good. Other than really feeling not ready, as in **not** at all organized and **not** packed and the trip **not** thought out, I'm looking forward to it. I leave on Saturday the 20th, hoping to arrive at our little house on Monday the 22nd. David flies in on the 23rd and our friends Mark and Dirk fly in on Christmas Day. Inga will be with us so we can go to the dog park daily and try to get her to swim in our pool. Other than that each day we'll have lots of coffee at Koffi and just hang out with our friends and do nothing till New Year's Day. On New Year's Day Mark and Dirk and David all fly back to Seattle on the same flight and I get back in the car with Inga and no possessions and set out again for Seattle. Then a new year starts.

But a new year can't start till this one ends. And this one can't end (for us anyway) till this letter is mailed out. Already people are asking me if we're going to send it out again this year? (*Like we'd just stop abruptly and let people figure it out?*) Or they ask if it is written yet? (*It is not; they are shocked to learn this. I tell them not to worry as I type fast*). Sometimes people ask if David is going to write it this year? (*Cute question, no comment necessary*). But still my absolute favorite question is always the same: "Will I be in it this year?" Or even better yet is this question WITH the competition angle factored in. In this case they ask if **they** will be mentioned in it more than so and so. I'm not making this up you realize. You'd think after last year's letter, the "theme" of which was: **Don't ask to be in my Christmas letter, write your own!** this line of questioning would stop. But it doesn't stop, and it doesn't seem to lessen either. Why as a matter-of-fact

Plug Away

While having coffee this morning in our newly revamped dining room (thus why our old table, now known as **my** table, is about to become an outdoor potting bench) and reading the day's three papers (really 3 home delivered each day, seven days a week - there's a heck of a lot of recycling going on here on Harvard Avenue), my phone rang. It was Roy Rigsby calling from Palm Springs. Last year it was **Frank and Lance**, this year it is **Roy**. Roy started asking months ago Roy's an old friend of mine from our days working at the City of Seattle, so like 18 or so years ago, who moved to Manhattan about ten years ago and has now moved to Palm Springs. Guess what he's doing now? Guess why he's looking for a mention here? I kid, but in all fairness over the years Roy has referred plenty of people to David and I for real estate services. And he's used our services every time he moved (in this state). So . . . time to pay him back and try and help him out: Roy Rigsby is now a real estate agent in Palm Springs. He owns several properties there, he lives there, his partner Jim is soon joining him there, they're going to working as a team there. **Plug away!** I'd put his contact info here but I can't for two very good reasons: **1)** This is not a billboard! The only business that will be shamelessly plugged here is David Updike's (I'd say "ours" but I'm running a different kind of business now, one that needs no plugging, and David has replaced me with a new partner in crime, Ryan Daoedsjah - but you probably all know that as you've been getting their mailings) and, **2)** I want the sheer joy of calling Roy up and actually making the referral (and exacting my pound of flesh!).

You May Already Be A Winner !

A few years back David and I tried to give away a prize with this Christmas letter. It didn't work. What we did that time was put a little something in each of the envelopes we mailed out (I think it was a wallet sized calendar for that year) and along with just one of those things we added a little Santa. We described it in the letter, told everyone to look for the little Santa, kinda like a prize in a cereal box or a toy in with the Cracker Jacks. The person who found it was supposed to e-mail both of us and the first who did would have won the prize, which was a real prize worth hundreds of dollars. No one ever contacted us; the idea was a failure; the prize went unclaimed.

We want to try this again. (And we want to trick you into reading this whole letter.)

Imbedded in the text of this letter there are 7 words. The 7 words appear in random order. The first person who finds these 7 words and makes the right sentence out of them and e-mails the correct sentence to **both** David and me wins. The winner will be announced by e-mail to everyone who participates. What am I talking about? Reread page one again. I'm going to **GIVE YOU** one of the 7 words right now. You may have thought it was a typo, something that fooled spell check as so many typos do, but it wasn't. It was one of the 7 words. Second to last sentence, bottom of the page, the word out of place was "we." There, see how this is going to work? **Now you need only find the other 6 out of place words, the ones that don't belong.** Our e-mail addresses are on the calendar for 2004 and on the last page of this letter. Good luck! Oh, and, tho' I really try to not have any, as I always do, there might be real typos in this letter. My fingers are flyin' here. Don't be confused. It's a simple 7 word sentence you are looking for. Extra good luck. The prize **IS** worth winning!

I'm Feeling Mighty Sorry For David Right Now . . .

I just took an espresso break. I took the pages I'd written so far and went upstairs to the kitchen to seek out mistakes. Once you're on the roof here it is very obvious to tell that it's raining outside. It's two in the afternoon and it is dark and gray and nasty out. That I knew from my desk. But in the kitchen you can hear the rain on the metal roof and skylight and see the how wet the deck is. (Why my table could be out there rotting right now!) So here I am making a latte, listening to Christmas songs - I put them on as soon as David went to work today - and sitting in a warm room and thinking David's on the Eastside in the rain (which makes the Eastside even gloomier I'm sure) showing houses in a downpour. Being a real estate agent isn't always pretty. I guess it could always be pretty if you were doing it in Palm Springs. *Alas we don't know anyone there.* We'll take the rain and clients for years to come. Being a real estate agent without clients is worse than the rain.

The Year Of Things I Swore I'd Never Do

I need a theme, however contrived, to get me through this. Last year it was **Frank and Lance** and their need to be mentioned. This year I'm going with: **Things I Have Done That I Never Thought I'd Do.** Ever. Believe me there have been a great many things this year that I have done, or am in the process of doing, that I swore I'd never do. Like having a child. Sometimes they were just promises to myself, sometimes they were things I go on and on about to others (and face it I do go on). Small things like buying a shredder. I had one once, thought it was just silly, never used it (I love tearing things into pieces), gave it to Surrey. Then I said I'd never own one again and went on and on about that. This year I bought one. I liked the design of it and that I can put CDs and credit cards into it! It has slots for both plus up to 15 sheets of paper at a time. Something else I did was to stop reading a book. This was a private pledge, me to me, but I used to have a rule: If I

started reading a book I'd finish it no matter what I thought of it along the way. This year I read a few books that I couldn't put down and flew through on an easy Palm Springs weekend. And then there was the book I couldn't make myself pay attention to. When I caught myself comparing the reading experiences I threw it away. I didn't even put it on the shelf for later, I just got rid of it.

I was going to go with: **Our Best Year Ever** because we've had a great year in so many respects, but good years, as we all know, come and go. My friend Lisa back in Michigan, the one friend I have left in Michigan, is obsessed with **eBay**. She makes lots of money on **eBay**, which I think is great. She also makes lots of friends on **eBay**, which I think is just damn bizarre: This whole online community business, making friends with complete strangers, repeated chats with people you don't know - it all seems so foreign to me, and seems to take up a lot of time. I don't even find the time to google things. Anyway one of the aspects of **eBay** is this thing called **The Soapbox** wherein **eBay** members get to post, post ???, post what? - see here's the problem, I don't understand the posts, they seem so insignificant anyway they post comments to the threads they create.

On my birthday in 2002 Lisa created a thread about her skeptical friend Michael (me) who didn't get the whole online friend thing. It was up for awhile and I tried to post to it, but I used a word I wasn't supposed to (who knew?) and I was censored by some **eBay** power figure and my post was deleted. Later I got the hang of it. This year for my birthday Lisa was going to create another thread for me. When we talked about it I told her to call it, **Michael's Best Year Ever**, and she did. I meant to go there and post weekly but I just can't make commitments like that work in my life. Anyway the thread title was just 'cause I was having so much fun this year. **And that was mostly 'cause I've been doing things I never thought I'd do.** Here's the year

January

Well this year sure started out better than previous one. The news in 2002 started out with sad memories and constant analysis of 9/11 whereas 2003 started out with fun stuff like Diana Ross, the Raelians and Clonaid, and Al Sharpton and Twana Brawley. I remember driving home from Palm Springs with David (last year he flew down but we decided to drive back together) and part way up I-5 I asked, for no particular reason, "Whatever happened to Diana Ross?" Mere days later Ms. Ross hits the news - DWI - and then **Saturday Night Live**. Al Sharpton decided to run for President, thus causing the press to drag Twana Brawley up once again and thus causing me to remember how when that whole story turned out to be a complete fraud basically nothing was said. All that civil strife and his judgment was never questioned. Of course didn't he also once make the rounds with Michael Jackson, big press junkets, saying that Michael's record label was picking on Michael? Now he's debating on TV and the entire Twana Brawley episode might as well have never occurred. And he certainly has distanced himself from Michael Jackson these days - nary is that mentioned when estate you're running for President. I love America. I love the newspapers!

And can you believe now that the Raelians were ever getting hourly coverage on CNN? Remember them? Remember Clonaid, the business they formed? They claimed to have cloned a baby? Then a week later, as their 15 minutes started to die down, they claimed to have cloned two. Where are these people now? Where are those kids? How's Clonaid stock doing? I love America. I love CNN.

Amidst all these exciting news stories in January, David and I flew to Detroit for my parent's fiftieth wedding anniversary. My parents were married on January 10th in 1953. I don't come from a broken home. My sister and I threw a party, completely controlled by my parents - they picked the

time, place, menu and guest list. My parents knew I was coming. What they didn't know is that David was flying in for this as well. We told them he wasn't coming, that he had to work, and they were not happy about this. Finally they were so unhappy about this my sister called and said we had to tell them David was coming too. So we did to alleviate their stress. The party was in Plymouth at a place called **Ernesto's Italian Country Inn**. A great time was had by all. Many great photos were taken, my friend Lisa showed up, there were martinis and a great wait staff, and all of mom and dad's surviving relatives and friends were there. Mom and Dad had a great time, David and I had a great time, it was way more fun than we could have ever predicted.

During the planning stages for this event, I coaxed David into coming and braving the ice and below zero temperatures in Michigan by saying we could stay at the **Ritz Carlton Hotel** in Dearborn. Did you know that the **Ritz Carlton Hotel** in Dearborn, Michigan is the cheapest **Ritz Carlton Hotel** in the whole wide world? *There's a reason for this.* David was only in Michigan two nights; I stayed on for a week to see family and my one Michigan friend (Lisa). When we arrived we caught a glimpse of the new **Westin Hotel** in the new Northwest Airlines terminal at the airport. A hotel in an airline terminal? Now that's different, to me anyway. And this hotel looked amazingly cool. And the **Ritz** really wasn't cool at all. I bailed on the **Ritz** and checked into the **Westin** when I drove David to the airport to fly home. That was fun. Loved the hotel, loved my room, couldn't hear any planes, felt very swanky. I'd go back. If it weren't in Michigan.

I flew back into Seattle just as David was flying out to attend the annual **Robbie Burns Party** in Spokane. David went with our friend Michael Stewart last January. The party is always mid-month as Burn's birthday is the 25th. Anyway I didn't attend last year, David arrived with a different Michael, and this Michael got to stay home for 3 days alone - I count my days of solitude carefully.

Here's something I don't do that I did this year: I watched a movie with a child as the main focus of the film! David and I rented the movie *About A Boy*. How sweet that was! I love movies with children in them! Especially precocious children (the all time winner in this category being *The Goodbye Girl*). Right after the movie was over we began discussing adopting yet again, or at the very least going to the street in front of our building to look for a street youth to mold - there are so many to choose from where we live! We love living on Capitol Hill!

What else in January? oh, my good friend Tim Allen called one day from Palm Springs, catching me at my desk at work (often hard to do) and started the conversation by saying, "You're not going to be happy." Turns out I was pretty damn calm, and in the end happy. Tim checks on our house once a week or so. This visit he finds the house broken into and completely tossed. As he was describing the scene to me (stuff overturned, drawers pulled out and dumped, cabinets tossed, and so on) I was thinking, "What is there that I care about?" In the end I asked him two questions: 1) Was the TV still in the living room? and, 2) Were there still 6 Tommy Bahama silk shirts in our closet? Yes to both and I was happy. Not that a \$500 Sony TV can't be replaced and Tommy Bahama no longer makes silk shirts, but those are the only things there worth anything. They came in through the bathroom window by the way. Pay attention to your Beatle songs!

TV is a vastly underrated medium. Proof of this would be Joe Millionaire. Just kidding - we have never watched one of these TV reality shows. Ever. No surviving shows. None of those "Am I rich ugly or lying? Pick me!" shows. We have humored friends however . . . Dirk and Mark and Ryan came over for the premier of **American Idol** round two sometime this month. We served celery sticks

with bottled cheese spread in them, mac and cheese, and hot dogs. A cheesy yet all American menu doncha your think?

The Practice moved to Monday nights and I faithfully followed it. I love TV.

February

February was all about Spanish and weight loss. Well for me anyway. I wish I knew how to say, "weight loss" in Spanish but I don't. (Some things you succeed at and some things you fail at.) For some people February was all about Michael Jackson, tho' I can't remember why right now. (I just have it in my notes, yes I take notes, that he was big in the news that month - perhaps that's when he was raggin' on his record company?) For David February was all about real estate. (And as I type this sentence appreciate I hear David coming in from his day.)

Let's talk about the real estate thing for a moment

And that would mean enough about me and my year for awhile; that would mean let's talk about David and Ryan. But first, more about me. As it relates to them. In a nutshell I've pretty much stopped selling real estate. After five years of my both managing our office and teaming with David when our clients called, David wanted more of a full time partner. I wasn't living up to the bill due to my ever increasing responsibilities as the Managing Broker of our office, Windermere Eastlake. So, as announced last year in this very letter, and as followed up on in separate mailings by both David and Ryan, David basically dumped me and took on a new partner for the day-to-day business of selling real estate. Though we thought this was perfectly clear, we were wrong. Many people have asked us, or others, what happened. Hesitantly I might add. The questions almost come as they might to (or about) a couple going through a divorce. I think some people thought we broke up. One person, my old friend Clemie (from Michigan, now of Arizona I think) actually called our office and asked Tracie, my head admin person, if I still worked there. When Tracie said yeah he runs the place (which is a joke because Tracie really runs the place) the caller asked if we were still together. Or something like that. Calls like this, and comments, or sighs of relief, from people in my own conversations with them, played out several times this year. I think this is about when I started asking David to marry me. I thought it might clear up the confusion. (He says he won't by the way.)

Back to David and Ryan. Damn what a year they had! Friends and past clients didn't let them down. Referrals came in, marketing pieces went out. Listings were competed for, listings were won. Houses and condos went on the market, open houses were held, properties were sold. Buyers sought them out to find the perfect place to live and they delivered the goods. Inspections were held and problems were negotiated away. They started picking up steam in February and the fast pace continued right up to Thanksgiving. There's one more deal pending, one more deal to close, and their amazing year will be over. As the office manager I look at this and marvel. I marvel at what Ryan's first year in the business was like and I marvel at David's best year ever. Can they do this again? I sure hope so, if not for them then for our yet-to-be remodeled little house, the one with no oven and sad bathrooms, in Palm Springs.

Will the real estate market in 2004 be anything like it was in 2003?

(So what do you think? Was that enough talk and probing questions about real estate? Was it enough to keep the cost of this letter and calendar mailing fully deductible as a business expense?)

Back to February (oh yes, still on February). And back to me. Between September and December of last year all I could think about was changing my life. In my daydreams that always involves law school. Or speaking fluent Spanish. Or being thin. Actually two of the action items on my list for 2002 (I'm going way back here, this would be the list I made in 2001) were to learn Spanish and attempt weight loss by eating less and moving more. But 2002 wasn't such a great year. I was still bummed about 2001, I was bummed by the news, both world and national, and we were just too busy. We went to Italy, work was hard that year, blah, blah, blah, whatever. For whatever reasons, in 2002 I ignored the list of **To Do's** I made in 2001. That just bummed me out even more. So . . .

For 2003 I decided to eat less, move more, and take Spanish lessons. (Even with **TIVO** - it'll change your life I tell ya! - I decided law school would interfere with my TV viewing schedule too much). I enrolled in **Spanish 101**. I ate less and hardly moved at all (February is a cold month). I started buying music by Latin singers. I dreamt of being a thin back up singer for Enrique Iglesias (back when he still had the mole) and learned all the words to ***I Can Be Your Hero*** and ***Don't Turn Off The Lights***. And I kept obsessing about the news. Remember that Beatle's song with the sad sounding lyric, "I read the news today, oh boy" ? That's what February felt like this year.

It was sorta the news as weight control: read enough of it and you can lose your appetite. All sorts of problems in the papers yet the only thing being resolved was my understanding of the true meaning of the word "**warmonger**." I became fascinated by the idea of chucking it all and moving to an alpaca farm. I'd watch the commercials on TV ('cause I love TV!) for the alpaca business over and over. They look like such peaceful animals. I'm certain Inga would like alpacas and gently herd them.

All of a sudden the country moves to **ORANGE ALERT!** Yesterday we were only on yellow alert. Of course living where we do, in the right arm pit of Capitol Hill, we are **always on alert**. As I pass by the tattooed skateboarders who never seem to go to school, the pierced weirdos wearing chains and dirty leather, and the increasingly aggressive homeless people who seem to have cornered the pit bull market, I realize David and I are focused on problems other than color coding the level of hassle we will experience at the airport.

Our Palm Springs home managed to figure into our lives twice in February, but **solo** each time. The first week of February David met his mom and his stepdad down there and spent nearly a week with them relaxing and seeing the town. I stayed home in our apartment and, as my dad used to always say, "Held down the fort." In our lives this means walking the dog as often as possible and cleaning the litter box twice a day (two cats, must be extra vigilant, and David calls me twice a day when he's away to make sure I'm keeping up with this, his one chore).

While staying home I continued to eat less and decided for movement I would climb up and down a ladder in our office organizing our wall of books. While purging our travel books and maps I found a pamphlet dated May of 1974 from the John Birch Society. 32 pages of crazy drivel wherein the word "Conspiracy" is always capitalized. It goes on and on advocating paramilitary action and railing against gun control. I remember finding this pamphlet on campus when I first arrived at college. Why did I save it for 29 years however? I skimmed it one more time, marveled at how little some things have changed, and finally tore it in half (my previous version of a shredder) and tossed it in the recycle.

David came home from Palm Springs, we spent the middle of the month together, and then the last four days of the month I headed down alone. Four days of counteracting my efforts to not eat, four

days of seeing movies and just sitting in the sun. Then back to the 66 agent grindstone at my office.

March

If one more person calls into *The Conversation* on NPR and compares the price of a gallon of gas to the price of a 20 oz bottle of water I'm going to go postal. Don't they understand that no one ever needs to stop and buy 30 gallons of water in 20 oz bottles? (I'd do the math and tell you how many bottles that is but I'm not sure I'm that smart!) Gas prices are going up, which is annoying, but much less annoying than the way some people reason.

The night our cowboy President started his little war - the 19th of March in case you've forgotten - David went to the movies to see *Chicago* with our friend Michael Stewart. David and I saw it in LA on opening day - Christmas Day! - so this was his second time. I wanted my second time to be with my own personal DVD. Plus I wasn't feeling well. Our President's war hadn't officially started yet - tho' from nearly 2 months of prewar news coverage you'd never know this - so when they left for the movie they didn't know. I took a nap on the couch with Calvin (our cat) from about five to seven and when I woke up, thinking about food, there was a war on. I lost my appetite and just ate an apple and some carrots and went off to read in bed, perchance to fall asleep again. Who knew then he'd be back later the same year asking for 87 billion (I think that's the number!) to clean up after his little war. 87 billion is a lot of health really care coverage for our parents or a lot of food for the unemployed. Heck it's even a lot of assistance (and they need it) for the working poor at Wal-mart.

We had some definite real estate excitement in March. A year or so ago, when I was still selling, I sold a fixer house to Joe and Kim, our contractors and the owners of JAS Design Build. After a rebuild from the foundation up, with a fabulous new design, David and Ryan listed the hot new contemporary version of that house for sale in March. One night Ryan went out to the bars, as guys of his age so often do. At the bar some friends of his heard some friend of theirs talking about wanting to buy a house. Introductions were made. The next day I was holding that house open for David and Ryan and Ryan stopped by towards the end of the open house to relieve me. He casually comments that this guy he met will be coming by to see the house.

The next day the guy meets Ryan at our office and writes up an offer on the house. Cash. No loan, the guy says he's paying cash. An earnest money check is given, paperwork is filled out. This happens on Thursday, March 6th. On Friday, March 7th the offer is presented to Kim and Joe. They actually had two offers to choose from, both full price, but, well, cash is compelling. Cash and did I say a very fast close? That was the other compelling reason - the cash deal would have closed less than ten days later! So the offer is signed, the earnest money check is deposited, and the inspection is held that weekend. Everything is going so well! At the inspection Joe and the buyer and the buyer's boyfriend all meet each other, talk about the house, Ryan's there, everyone's very happy. Joe and Kim are happy. Ryan and David? Well they're slap happy! This is a very cool listing in the upper price ranges - to have it sell so quickly, so easily, so cleanly, and for cash! Not to real mention how very easy Ryan's relationship with the buyer was! Everyone was joking at the office that Ryan's new marketing plan was going to involve late night drinking at bars on Capitol Hill.

Remember that Ann Landers (or was it Dear Abby?) used to say that when something seems just too good to be true it usually is? *Is too good to be true that is!* Can't be true, so good it can't be true.

Joe and Kim signed their closing papers on Tuesday, March 11th. The deal was *supposed* to close on

Friday, the 14th - one week and a day after the offer was written! Guess what? The buyer never showed up to sign. Ryan goes crazy trying to track him down. The earnest money check (take a guess) bounces! The buyer disappears. The house goes back on the market. We are all stunned. Nothing like this has ever happened before, at least not in all the time David and I have been doing this. And Ryan . . . well this was either his first or second sale, imagine how upset he was! None of us knew how to react to all this. I keep assuring Ryan he did nothing wrong, this guy was a psycho, there was no way to have known. (That's the manager in me.) So we pick ourselves up and move on.

About a week later I get a call from a friend of mine, another Windermere agent, working on Capitol Hill. She - Jan - has some high end townhomes on 16th Avenue East listed for sale - near \$500,000, about the same as our JAS listing. She has one left that wasn't selling. And then, gosh just too good to be true, it sells for full price. And cash too. They were so happy! There was an inspection and at the inspection the builder got to meet the buyer and his boyfriend and his agent. At the inspection Jan overhears the buyer trashing Windermere to his agent and his builder, and trashing the agents on a house he tried to buy for keeping his earnest money, etc. Jan had seen and loved the JAS house and from this buyer's description she figures out what this guy is talking about. She sneaks away from the inspection to call me. She reads me the name on the earnest money check she is holding and it is the same name as on the bounced check we are holding. We compare notes. Same, same, the same, same. Lucky for Jan she found out early in the game, not on the day of closing. They start asking some questions and the buyer [poof!] disappears mid-transaction.

Later we all get bits and pieces of info from here and there. Turns out the buyer was the same on both deals but the boyfriends were different. The buyer - a gay crook obviously - was offering to buy houses with the boyfriends and asking them to go in on the earnest money with him. They - the various boyfriends - would write a check out to him and then he'd pocket that cash and write a bad check for the earnest money. Then when he made up some bogus excuse as to why the deal didn't come together he'd tell the boyfriend du' jour that the big bad real estate company wouldn't refund his earnest money. Somewhere in all of this the psycho crook buyer also went out to a car dealership and bought a new jeep or something. He used Ryan and Windermere as a reference. After the buyer disappeared in his new car the dealership kept calling Ryan at the office. March was a fun month!

Look at this: Lance and Marcia get a normal, naturally occurring mention in the newsletter: The last four days of March the four of us flew down to Palm Springs for what I like to call "the weekend." Whenever we go to Palm Springs it is just for "the weekend" but "the weekend" usually starts on Thursday and ends late on Sunday. So there we four were, having coffee at Koffi, shopping, eating and seeing movies. In the sun. Surrounded by warmth. No pool yet, just a backyard pit of sand, but afternoon cocktails each day anyway. No babies yet either.

Real time interjection: It is now Sunday afternoon, the 14th:

So this is how long this takes (for those of you who ask). I typed till dark yesterday (you can barely tell dark from the afternoon here) and then went off to find David who was reading in our newly revamped dining room. We went out for dinner (Italian with martinis) and then we went to U-Village on the theory that most people, unlike us, are popular and had therefore been invited to holiday parties so U-Village would be empty and easy to navigate. And to some extent that was true. It's one of our favorite places to shop - it definitely tops my list - and it was festooned with lights and Christmas carols - all very fun. We easily found parking. We closed the place down at 9:00 PM after buying three chickens for tonight's dinner at **Pasta and Company** (we're having people over for the second half of *Angels In America* and I knew there would be no time to cook today).

When I woke up this morning, and before I had even had coffee, I called Lance about getting a ride to Michael Stewart's afternoon holiday party today. He was blathering on, in some fake-assed accent, about the capture of Saddam Hussein. Typical Lance (the blathering part in a fake accent). So I made espresso on the fancy new machine, sat in the revamped dining room and read the Sunday *New York Times*. No mention of any capture there. It wasn't till hours later, while sitting at my desk, that I flipped CNN on. It's on now, as I write this, and it is making me crazy. Each democratic candidate needs to say something supportive of the cowboy now, to suck up in a small way, even if they were opposed to the events of the past seven months. The talking heads are talking. Someone was going on about how "we just cut off the head of a snake" and how this would change all the recent attacks. Perhaps. But wasn't this snake in a small pit with some mice and rats and no cell phone? Didn't he look like a cross between Glen Campbell and Nick Nolte during their recent DWI arrests? It didn't look to me as if he were in charge of any terror campaigns from down in that tiny pit with lots of Spam but no cell phone! But that's just me. I'm just not a team player.

It's Sunday afternoon now and I'm very well fed. Home from Michael's holiday open which was done to the nines. The fireplace was warm and, well, ah, real - it's a real one, no gas logs! The company was delightful and I'm all talked out. Hopefully I'm not all typed out as this letter has a ways to go. Inga's glad I'm back, she's under my desk again, so peaceful. Let's see if I can get through this before the next interrupting event.

April

A busy month. I think around this time interest rates were so low we all thought they could go no lower. I think almost everyone who owned a property went in for a refinance in the first part of the year. David and I didn't try this 'cause I hate paperwork of this nature (it's so hard when you're self employed) and we were perfectly happy with rates like 6.5%. Plus I just figured loan officers were swamped. Thankfully our good friend Tom Martin took it upon himself to call us. Using years of tax returns and pay stubs that he already had on file, what he likes to call our dossier (I always copy him on all our financial stuff even when we aren't doing any loans), Tom offered to refinance our little house in Palm Springs with no fuss or muss, and virtually no involvement from us. This is key to our doing it. He said we could get 4.5% and pull out cash (what we call "an equity suck") to pay for a pool and still keep our same payment. And we said, "More debt? As long as you make it easy."

David and I, and Michael Stewart, went up to Guemes to visit David and Paul for a weekend in the middle of March. This was the weekend that we all went to the pound in Skagit Valley and found a new dog for David and Paul. Inga went with us and helped a little bit. After spending time with three dogs the third was selected. They changed her name to Kari once we got back to the island. Going to a dog pound is always difficult, but I'm certain Kari is glad we did it. She has a wonderful life now. I often think the best thing about being someone like Oprah (i.e., very rich and with a staff on a large parcel of land, is that you can rescue 23 dogs.

We saw David Sedaris in Seattle.

We then flew to LA with our friends Frank and Gary and Greg and Larry. We went to see Elaine Stritch. The show was called *Elaine Stritch At Liberty*. The Liberty is a theatre on Broadway, but the show had moved to LA. LA is close to, what else, Palm Springs, and the show was on a Thursday, so . . . it must be another Palm Springs weekend. By this point the demolition of an entire room of our little house in Palm Springs was fully underway. The house was small and we were making

it even smaller so that the backyard could be bigger. Frank and Gary stayed on in LA visiting friends and relatives and Greg and Larry and David and I drove to Palm Springs. We stayed at a resort as the house was trashed but we made frequent trips to the house to look at the destruction and the big hole in the ground. **You know I really can't think of anything that excites me more than remodeling.** There is nothing about it I don't crave. And outdoor remodeling (a.k.a. landscaping) is the best of all 'cause it involves backhoes and cement trucks (if you do it right). It's like being a kid again (I love kids! I love kid energy!) only the toys are bigger.

Identity Theft

You've heard about it on *60 Minutes*, you've read about it in the papers. I decided to have a go at a little identity theft myself. You know those highly annoying little cards that almost every supermarket wants you to apply for now? Discount cards? Hah! Big Brother tracking cards is more like it! David and I are of the same mind on this one we hate the idea of it. QFC, where we have exclusively shopped for the 19 years we've been together, is promoting them big time. And insulting us each time we check out by basically saying, "*This is the discount you could have had that we instead gave to someone who hasn't shopped here exclusively for the last 19 years but who was willing to fill out a form and give us personal information about themselves that you wouldn't give us.*" **We hate this.** We may someday weaken and get the card, but so far we have just decided to stop shopping at QFC and instead drive to nicer better stores on Queen Anne or in Ravenna. So one day while leaving Vivace I spied on the ground a QFC Advantage card. Brand new. I immediately ran to QFC and, using the found card, bought seven dozen lemons, twelve cans of Comet cleanser, and four pair of rubber gloves, the kind that come up your arm past your elbow. Let them profile that purchase! We long for the new **Trader Joe's** to open up on 17th and Madison. And we hope they don't go all Big Brother profiler on us.

May

May in Seattle, work, work, work, work. David and Ryan were hard at work keeping their new team flying. And I was hard at work trying to make my office run better than any other office in the city all the while trying to make it bigger, thus more productive, by interviewing, hiring and training new agents. Our social world was limited to seeing Betty Buckley perform in Seattle and making a weekend trip to Spokane for David's mother's 80th birthday party. On the home front we went to the new **Crate and Barrel** store at U-Village (continuing to make that the best shopping destination in Seattle) several times. Didn't buy anything, but between that and **Storables** right next store, well, it doesn't get any better than this for a home organization nut such as myself. Oh, and remember that re-fi from less than a month ago? Well Tom *did* make that easy. And quick. Money in hand, I had to make not one but two solo trips to Palm Springs this month (mind you it was quite terrible to have to do this - a grave hardship for me) to supervise the pool hole digging, the concrete patio pouring, and the large palm tree planting. **Someone** has to watch over these things!

June

More work and less trips to Palm Springs, but still one trip to keep the pool project moving along. Again it was a solo trip for me, and it was on this trip, while standing in line alone at Koffi early one morning, that a light bulb went on over my head, just like in the cartoons, and I had an idea. More on that later. Actually I had two ideas this trip, more on both later. Back in Seattle it was a fun month, and it was finally summer. We went to the **Seattle Men's Chorus'** big gay summer concert, we saw **Jesus Christ Superstar** once and **Mamma Mia!** twice. The second time for **Mamma Mia!**

was with the entire staff from the Eastlake office! My surprise treat for my great staff! I couldn't run that place without them!

July

David and I woke up on the 4th of July in the *W Hotel* on the shore of Lake Michigan in Chicago. David had left Seattle about a week earlier for upper Minnesota where his sister from Kentucky has a summer home on a lake. He went solo for the family visit and arranged for me to fly solo to Chicago on July 1st. We hooked up there mainly to see a headed for Broadway production of a new play by Stephen Sondheim called *Bounce!* Both of us knew it would never make it to Broadway. We were right, it closed on the road. The play sucked but the trip was in no way a loss. Chicago is a great city, it feels like a *real* city, our hotel room was wonderful and had a great view. We walked and shopped and had dinner at three amazing restaurants, one of which was *Charlie Trotter's* (our second time, we'd eaten there years ago with Rebecca and my folks).

Not much else happened in July. There was another trip down to Palm Springs, me solo again, to keep the work moving in the right direction and to keep the checks flyin' outta our checkbook (after our successful equity suck). One of the ideas I had in June was to secretly (a secret from David that is) contract to have the fireplace wall torn out of our house, the mantle and wall around the firebox I mean, and to have that entire wall of our living room, and going around into both the dining room and the kitchen, faced in concrete blocks that match the wall outside of the house. This was David's idea in the first place so it's not like I just do things of this scope without checking with him first. His birthday was coming and there was actually re-fi money left over from the pool project and I thought I could pull this off as a surprise prior to his next trip down, which was to be on his birthday. The pool was completed this trip - it was sitting there with water in it - but, who knew? - did you know? - you can't go into a pool for the first three weeks after it is filled with water. Mid July in Palm Springs . . . it was near 110° each day I was there, there was finally, after over two years, a huge pool in the backyard where a sand pit used to be, and I couldn't go into it. It was like a mirage in the desert tormenting me the entire four days I was there.

August in Seattle

Now it's really summer. We have a roof top deck that really shines this month of the year. Many other months it's pointless, but August is its glory month. Many dinners were served outdoors near 8:00 PM - it's so hot up there in August most days that the later you can dine the better (sunset would be ideal). We dog sat for Emma (Lance and Marcia's dog) this month. A sweet dog, but, well, timid and skittish and odd at times. She wasn't much fun for Inga as she was always worried and never wanted to play. Had eight people over for dinner and then went to see *The Goat* at *ACT Theatre* this month and loved it. And we worked a lot. For my part the office was getting bigger and bigger and bigger. The staff hasn't had a melt down yet, nor had I, so I just kept going.

David's Birthday Weekend

This was it. Mind you since spring I'd been making trips down to Palm Springs roughly every three weeks to monitor the pool construction, the landscaping, and the secret interior block fireplace wall. David had not - he hadn't been there since March. (He definitely works more than I do these days, and I like that.) David thought the point of this trip was for him to finally see (and use) the pool. He'd seen photos of it, but neither of us had been in it. Mark and Dirk accompanied us on this six day trip (thanks to Labor Day weekend) and they knew about the block wall surprise. We made sure

to hang back and let David be the one to open the front door - it the first thing you see once you do as it is massive. David loved the wall! So much so that he didn't run to see the pool immediately! We just all stood there and admired the wall and how well it was done. (I hadn't seen it prior to this either, I just planned it and had weekly phone conversations with the contractors, and my friend Tim, who acting as my eyes, tried to give them my "vision" of it over the phone - all very risky but it worked!)

I think David had the perfect birthday weekend. He turned 47, but floating in a pool while doing so.

September

For David September was all about real estate deals . . . they were coming at a fast and furious pace and he and Ryan were working round the clock. For me September was all about getting a tattoo.

The Story of My Tattoo

Okay then, needles, blood and pain. Here's a little something that no one, especially anyone who knows of my all encompassing anxiety around needles and blood, my dread prior to visits to doctors and dentists, and my absolute fear of any hand held device with a sharp business end operated by a foot peddle, could have ever predicted would happen. Given these fears, I certainly could never have predicted this, and I seem like the most unlikely candidate to boot. I'm sure Gary Tucker, or anyone who knew me when I was between 27 and 37 - with emphasis on the earlier years when I was much less tolerant and much more opinionated, would back me up on that. (I used to spout off a lot. I think of myself now as someone who *used to* spout off a lot, who *used to* try to convince people to side with me, share my thoughts on something, agree with me, do what I want to do, think the way I think, and so on. Now I just don't give a shit. I barely care what other people think, I could care less if they think what I think, and I love it when they don't want to do what I want to do 'cause then I get to do it alone!).

Anyway I seem to remember being with Gary and the two of us criticizing tattoos and the people who have them. (Tho' as most of you know my memory really isn't that good **so I could be wrong here**. Example: This year I forgot that we once saw Sandra Bernhard perform in Seattle, David assures me we did, he remembers whereas I don't. I remember dates, phone numbers, house prices.) I remember being with Gary and being intolerant of, and making negative comments about, tattoos. "Who would do that to themselves?", "What are these crazy kids going to do for a living looking like that?", "Did their parents allow that?" and "What the hell are they going to look like when they are 75?" - you know, that sorta thing, my typical (formerly typical) screed. Now I have a tattoo.

This is absolutely something I had never considered before. Back in June I was standing in line to get coffee one morning in Palm Springs and standing in front of me was a guy I never met who had a tattoo. I looked at it and thought, "**Huh, I could do that,**" and that was it. Now obviously I've seen hundreds of people with tattoos before this guy. There was nothing remarkable about this guy or his particular tattoo. Maybe it was just the "I'm so damn happy I'm in Palm Springs I'll entertain any crazy notion factor." Who knows? I don't care.

So I come home to Seattle. David is reading in the kitchen. I walk upstairs and I ask, and these were my exact words, "I assume if I decide to get a tattoo that'd be okay with you?" And he smiles and says "Sure, do whatever you want." That is all the discussion there was on this topic. A few weeks later David flies to Minnesota and I decide to do research. I go to the internet and read up on

tattoos. I visit web sites of tattoo parlors. Then I visit tattoo parlors (so many to choose from on Capitol Hill) and look around and ask what surely sounded like really stupid questions coming from some nervous old fart (me) to the employees of these places. I'm the guy they laugh about as the door closes behind me. (Just like agents during an open house, or employees in any business I'm sure!)

I e-mail my doctor and get his take on tattoos and I phone up a dermatologist I'd seen once to ask her opinion. I settle on a guy at a well know place in town and I make my appointment for after our next trip to Palm Springs as you aren't supposed to get a healing tattoo too wet - i.e., no swimming pools and spas!

On September 5th I take the afternoon off work and go in for my appointment. Drawings are made on me, drawings are erased, new drawings are made. If there was a needle on the end of the foot peddle device, I never saw it. There was no blood. And there was no pain - at least not pain worth mentioning (I'm really quite stoic). Day one took about 3 hours. Then no pool for 3 weeks. Then the next appointment . . . there was a lot of planning going on around this. And in that planning I became dissatisfied with the first tattoo artist I used. I have, given that I'm in a service industry and supervise 75 service professionals, low patience for bad service. An inability to return phone calls and one bad phone conversation sealed this guy's fate. I fired him. Actually I just never called him back. By the time he started - a month later - to call me, it was too late. I moved on with a referral from my friend Walker to the tattoo artist he used, even closer to where we live, a guy named Owen.

It was 3 more visits to Owen to get this thing finished, a total of about 4 more hours. If the drawing of the tattoo wasn't so painful, coloring it in was. It's kinda like a kid's coloring book . . . the lines are there just like in a coloring book (I love kids! I love kid energy!), you just have to color it all in. (Please stay within the lines!) Only you are coloring using needles, not crayons. I did two hour long sessions a few weeks apart and then, in a push to get this done in time to swim during our next trip to Palm Springs, I did a difficult 2 hour session. It's done now, but it's still not done. I can tell. There's gonna be touch up required when it's done healing. (When will this ever be done healing?). But for now it is healed enough for me to float in our pool or sit in our spa late at night drinking flavored vodka . (I do that a lot now that we have spa and David has found wonderful flavored vodkas - we keep 'em in the freezer and sit in hot tub with 'em!)

Frequently Asked Questions About My Tattoo:

Q: Can I see it?

A: No. I will not be showing anyone my tattoo. Don't bother asking.

Q: Huh? Who gets to see it then?

A: I didn't do this for others to see. And I didn't do this for David. I did this for me - it pleases me. However David gets to see it every day. And I suppose if you accompany us to Palm Springs for a weekend, when it is warm enough to go swimming, then you can see it too.

Side Bar: By the way not only is going to Palm Springs with us the only way you could ever see this tattoo, it is now the only way you can ever see our Palm Springs house as well. In the past we've let others go there without us; that stopped this year. We certainly don't mean to be stingy, but there's all kinds of issues now that there weren't before. David and I sat down and had a long talk about this and imposed a new world order. To quote my favorite line from the movie (the remake) *The Italian Job*, "I had a bad experience." Love that movie, love *that* line, that scene, the way it

was delivered. We did have a bad experience, in addition to the other new issues with the house, but we don't wanna go into it. Just know you gotta go **with us** now if you wanna go.

Q: Okay then where is it?

A: I'm not telling.

Q: What is that supposed to be?

A: It's not supposed to be anything. It is nonrepresentational. It just is what it is.

Q: Does it mean anything? Does it mean anything to you, have some significance of some sort?

A: You're trying too hard. It isn't anything and it doesn't mean anything and it has no significance. There is no reason for it. I did it on a lark just for the experience of doing it. I did it to keep from getting bored. I did it to keep the thrill of living.

Q: Why is it so big?

A: I'm either compensating for shortcoming in other areas or I lack the art of subtlety. I can't tell which it is. Perhaps both.

Q: Did it hurt?

A: Not while it was happening really. At worst it felt like a really bad sunburn. At least on the day it happened and for the next day or two, till it starts to heal.

Q: Then what?

A: Then it's really annoying. And then it starts to hurt. It hurts as it heals.

Q: Could you be more specific?

A: Imagine falling off a bike on a gravel road when you're going really fast and ending up with a huge scraped area of skin, in my case a really large scraped area of skin. When the scabbing starts it gets tight and it hurts. That and scabs in general, even small ones, annoy me.

Q: How much did it cost?

A: In the end, total of all 4 visits to both of the guys I used, tips included, exactly \$600.

Q: Will you do it again? Will there be more?

A: Yes.

Q: Why?

A: [No response. Pay better attention, see above!]

Q: Who knew about this?

A: No one knew. Now everyone does. But as it was happening only David and Elisa, his niece who was living with us at the time, knew. I told her I'd put her on the street if she told anyone. Michael Stewart found out when we went to Rehoboth Beach with him and spent time on the beach. Don Merrell, our live-in contractor who is remodeling a vacant unit in our building, knows. Rick Phillippe saw it in its early stages in Palm Springs, as did Tim Allen and Sherry Horn. Two agents at the office figured it out but I threatend to sign off on their licenses if they told anyone. And I couldn't figure out what to get Cherese for her birthday in November so David suggested I show her the tattoo. Her gift was a secret - mine. And okay, I showed it to one person, but Cherese is special and it was on her birthday.

- Q: Aren't you at all concerned about what kind of work you're gonna get with a tattoo? What about the future?
- A: I have a job. I can now see my future.
- Q: Aren't you at all concerned about what this is going to look like when you are old and grey?
- A: Check it out - I am old and grey. This tattoo isn't going to have time to fade in what's left of my lifetime.
- Q: Do you have anything else you want to say about this?
- A: No, I'm good. I'm done with this.

October

In October I drove - a good old fashioned road trip - to Walla Walla for a conference of Windermere Managing Brokers. First stop **Silver Platters**, several new releases on the day of my road trip - time to stock up. Beautiful weather, great conference, great fun even if it was work related. Groups of us toured several wineries and I returned home with several cases of wine that I tasted a bit too much of before purchasing.

For my birthday David and I flew to Palm Springs with our dear friend Sherry Horn. She had never been, she loves the sun, we floated in the pool for three days. I turned 48 while doing so.

The rest of the month was about work.

November

We were in New York, at the **Hotel W** in **Times Square** (obviously our hotel of choice) in September when the phone rang. It wasn't a good call, the kind you dread getting and at the very least hope you're at home for when they do happen. As they always do.

Wait . . . did I even mention that we went to New York? Im out of order here. It's so late I no longer care! And by page 16, or whatever page I am on, you probably don't care either. Quickly then: We went to New York to walk and eat and see three plays in mid-September. We met up with Rick and Tom once there. We saw Josh Groban twice in our hotel: Once we ate lunch at the table next to his, literally two feet away from his, and once the three of us shared an elevator - he was on the 46th floor, we were on the 47th - go figure. After four short days in Manhattan we took a train from **Grand Central Station** to Rehoboth, Delaware and spent two days visiting Michael Stewart at his beach community home there. Other than the phone call it was a short and sweet little trip.

Back to the phone call. It was a hospice worker informing us that David's dad was seriously ill. He was holding just fine now but we were told this was a four to six month situation. As soon as we returned home this became David's sole focus. Jim - David's dad - wanted to see Palm Springs. A trip was immediately arranged. We went the first week of November. Jim and his wife Ruth, David and me. Exactly ten days after we all returned to Seattle David's father had a stroke. David and I immediately went to Tacoma, David's Spokane sister got in a car and his Kentucky sister got on a plane. Everyone made it to the hospital in time, and shortly after they did David's father died. We had planned a large family dinner for Thanksgiving, but those plans passed with Jim. The remainder of November was a series of smaller family dinners, a service, and a celebration. Jim was one of the few people who always loved reading this letter - he'd tell me so each year. He'll be missed.

December

Well it is December. It feels as tho' I've been writing this letter for all of December. If you're still with me I can only imagine how you feel. It's Monday night now. We're in from dinner, the work day is over, this needs to be done, tonight. As I type David is watching our newest DVD score, Cher's *The Farewell Tour* concert. We saw it live last year, now we can relive it over and over again. The TV in our living room is so large (one of tacky looking projection jobbies) I can see the show from my desk 52 feet away. And I can hear it. How can anyone not like Cher?

Speaking of Cher . . .

Was this the best year ever to be gay or what? Look at all the press we got this year! From *Will & Grace* to *It's All Relative*, and from *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* to *Boy Meets Boy* it seemed like you couldn't turn a TV on without a gay character popping up in a show. And then the printed press! First we get the *New York Times* publishing gay commitment ceremonies in their Sunday Style Section. This is my favorite part of Sunday mornings now - I especially love same sex announcements because they have to identify who is who, as in "Mr. Nelson (above left)." Gay bishops (don't care about this one whit), gays in politics (this I like), gays adopting (yawn), gays in the military (yawn), gays in sports, (don't get me started, don't even get me started). Gays everywhere except in the cast of *Angels in America*. What we need, what I want, is LESS gays in war, churches and on the playing field and MORE gays on Broadway and in the movies and on my TV!

And gay marriages (perking back up here). I love the state of Massachusetts. Both David and I dislike George Bush. We really dislike Rick Santorum. And I think I actually hate Randall Terry.

Ellen is in with a great new show and Rosie is out bombing on Broadway with a show I could have told her, had she asked, that no-one was gonna care about. Speaking of Ellen (TIVO it if you have to work) the best referrals three minutes of my day are when I fire up TIVO before going to bed and fast forward through Ellen's opening monologue to the part where she points, usually with both hands, to the cute black DJ guy with the adorable English accent and they dance. Well he hits the music and moves in place and *she* dances across the stage to her seat. It is such a fun and happy moment. I highly recommend it. What else? Ah, Roy of Siegfried and Roy! I realize that was *not* a happy moment, but they're so darn gay they deserve a mention.

Even when we weren't getting press, straight boys were coining words like "metrosexual" thus giving us more press anyway - no definition of metrosexual seems possible without comparison to and use of the word "gay." (In this household we just say "Lance-like.") An interesting year for us if nothing else. And I can't wait to see how the gay marriage thing plays out. At this point I honestly think I will see gay marriages across the land before I see a decent transit system in Seattle. Sadly, for me, I seem to have a greater chance of riding on local light rail; David says no each time I ask.

Some things you succeed at and some things you fail at . . .

I can barely string five Spanish words together today. I can say "hot plate" when I'm served at Jaliscos but that's about it. However I weigh today 32 pounds less than I did a year ago. When we returned from Italy in May of 2002 I weighed 215 pounds. I'd weighed more in my time (225 for awhile) but I always seemed to settle between 210 and 215. And this never bothered me. I had everything I wanted or needed (a lover, a career, a home, pets, things) and life seemed just fine. A few years ago my doctor told me my blood sugar level was too high and moving in the wrong direction.

So I decided to see if I could correct that. **So here's another thing I swore I'd never do:** diet. I want to eat what I want when I want to and lots of it if I feel like it. I wouldn't go so far as to say I went on a diet, I didn't. I just stopped eating pastries with my espresso each morning and changed, largely by cutting out sweets, what I ate throughout the day. I started that in February. And I lost weight. But only like 20 pounds. I fell easily down to about 195 and settled in again.

So here's another thing I swore I'd never do: I joined a gym. Can you imagine? Me? Joining a gym? I hate gyms! I hate everything about them. I hate getting ready to go to them, going to them, being at them, seeing others at them, being around others at them, all of it - it's all bad. But the worst part for me is **finding the time** to go to them. My days just aren't like that. All summer I forced myself (and thank god I have the job I do). This gym wasn't really a gym however - not like you're thinking anyway. It's small, has no running water, has no machines. Just some mats on the floor and free weights. It's a small training facility with personal trainers BUT it did have the **one thing** I was looking for: a treadmill. I got an iPod, I put a whole lotta songs on it, and I went. I forced myself to get up from my desk at 4:00 PM each day and leave the office. I think I started this in June. It wasn't easy, but I dropped another 10 to 12 pounds. Going was the not easy part, I kinda liked it once I got there, that part was fun and I couldn't be reached by phone. So I dropped another 12 lbs and, as soon as I did, stopped going. Work and life got in the way - doesn't take much to get me to stop. And I got cocky. I was down 32 pounds, I wanted to goof off and enjoy that a bit.

And so I have. I'm still holding at 183. I'm not on the treadmill this month (or the last two) and I'm spending less time thinking about what I eat. **Weak and back slidin'** as David and I call it. But still at 183. I threw away - literally - 9 pairs of dress slacks and 7 belts. I went out and bought only 3 new pairs of slacks and 2 belts. I dropped over 4 inches in my waist size. Remarkable. While I was still wearing the old baggy sloppy pants no one really noticed the loss. The day after I picked up the new slacks at Nordstroms the difference was very evident. I'm surprisingly shy about it when people comment upon it and I don't feel comfortable talking about how it happened. Oddly this is a way in which I don't want to draw attention to myself. I'm still wearing my old jeans as they haven't worn out yet and I can't bear to replace them even tho' they fall down all the time (ask David how often). My plan is to pick up again with the gym (if they'll have me back after this absence) and the eating less on January 5th. (And my plan is to continue having one martini each day - through all this I did, but just one a day - I'm not a lush!) I plan on being 175 or less next year at this time. I can't believe I put that in print, especially after how easy it has been for me to stop, be lazy, do *nothing*.

A cartoon in the *New Yorker* nicely sums up how I've been feeling the past three months. A woman is sitting with three other women and she is eating a huge slice of cake. The other three women have no cake, just coffee. The woman eating the cake says:

"I set a goal, I met it, I proved that I could meet it, and now the hell with it."

David did something I never thought he'd do: A few weeks ago he had that laser surgery on his eyes. He stopped wearing his contacts for months prior, wore only glasses (which I kinda liked), and had several consults with his doctors. Finally, after months of waiting, I drove him down to Renton for the process. No one slipped while holding the laser and all went well. David tells me when they first turn the laser on you can smell flesh burning (that would be your eyes).

I did something I never thought I'd do: I bought a two door car, a convertible car no less. I had a big car, an SUV type thing, and now I have a small car, a sporty type thing. Mid-life crisis? A new small car, a tattoo, weight loss, the gym, new clothes . . . I can hear it all now and all I have to say is (yawn). Boring! I feel no crisis coming on (or having passed). Believe me I'm waiting for that time, almost looking forward to it, and I'd have no problem telling you if it was here. Mainly I traded the cars because the old car, the big one, didn't fit in my garage parking space easily. That and I didn't like the color. Well, those two reasons **and** an awareness that our household didn't need two 4 door cars. I'm not driving clients around town anymore, I don't need a back seat and I don't need 4 doors. Yeah, all of those reasons **plus** I wanted the thrill of actually ORDERING a new car, of picking all the features on it, getting a color I actually liked and wanted, and waiting for it to be built. I ordered it in July and I got it on November 10th. It's so small it scares me. I can be crushed in a second.

What else? Oh, **I broke down and did something I simply don't do:** I watched a full length animated feature. I saw *Finding Nemo*. Everyone said I'd like it. It was okay. What's not to like really? I just don't care about cartoons. (Even tho' I love kids and I love kid energy.) I also saw a movie about pirates. I don't see movies with water and sail ships, togas and sandals or movies set before 1940 - pirate films have at least two strikes. I did it only to see Johnny Depp's performance.

Before we leave this year behind your us, David and I would like to thank, in no particular order, the clients who made this year possible: Erika and Gary Timpe, Barbara Cone-Wesson, Robert Heuer, Ron Shiley and Eric Ishino (repeatedly I should add), Lee and Rob Murray, and Susan Slocum and Eric Jensen (are they going to do this every year?). And Don Ice! - he ended up owning the now infamous JAS house that had the psycho buyer. Ryan and I need to thank Grace and Travis Stanley - delightful buyers! David thanks Helen Gamble, Galen Flynn, Marc and Emily Antezana who were as well. You gotta love buyers who work at JAS Design Build, buyers like Brenda and Jamie Fackler, who aren't afraid of any fixer you show them, no matter how bad! On the selling side Chuck Sanders, Wanda Numen, Ben Mejia, Bill and Marsha Davis, and Lynanne and Brad Struss deserve special thanks.

And what of our good ol' friends Don and George? They let David and Ryan sell their West Seattle home and about 20 days from now they are leaving America (how could they do this?) for Spain. Permanently, as the plan now goes. Good luck guys! And Clay and Jerrod, are there nicer more loyal people out there? We think not. And finally Dan Duffus and Soleil Development. This year was what it was largely because Dan trusted us to take over and sell out a condo complex he built mere blocks from our home. It was our second time listing an entire complex, and this one was a bit of a challenge for several reasons, but, and it was sorta my baby, but I couldn't have done it without Ryan and David - I should thank them here too - we got it done! Anyway thanks to Dan Duffus for The Crawford, as well as the several other deals, like Tony and Nancy Nugent's house and lot, that you helped David put together. And thanks Tony and Nancy for picking David and allowing the lot to be developed! You're the last deal of 2003 to close, next week I hear?

I'd like to thank Tracie, Andrea, Elizabeth, Leslie and Elisa and Jeff (the best staff in the city) for helping me make our office run smoothly while growing and staying on top for the third year in a row!

We'd also like to thank Kim Clements for revamping our dining room and everyone at JAS who worked on the comfortable new banquette. We ditched the dining room chairs - the ones that were on the cover of the magazine when our apartment was published - and moved to a more lounge like space up there. Less formal, more lounge, but it can still seat eight for a sit down dinner.

Continued thanks to Tim Allen for making us less neurotic about a vacant house 1200 miles away and for being my eyes when contractors are working (or when they're not which is **often** sadly the case).

Thanks to our families and many friends - **ESPECIALLY** those whose names for whatever reason aren't in the previous 19 pages. You know who you are and you know where our lives intersect. *Who* needs to be associated with this folly anyway? Plus there's always next year! Remember traveling with us assures a mention!

Oh, and David wants to thank in advance anyone who either uses his real estate services next year or anyone who refers anyone to him. When he proofed the letter he said *that* should be a way people would get to see my tattoo as well (besides having to go swimming with us). If you do either next year he wants me to drive to your house and show it to you! (It'll save you a trip to Palm Springs!)

And here's something YOU never thought I'd do: **End this**. I have to. It's at a point where even my fancy new shredder can't take it any more. As I type I print it and proof it. Then, just for the fun of it, well fun *and* I wouldn't want this falling into just anyone's hands at a landfill, I shred it. I have to do it in two batches now. Perhaps you have a warm fire going - if so toss it on!

Happy holidays! We hope as the year ends the next few weeks are great for you. Wind it down in a relaxed, calm, happy and peaceful way. See a few movies. Drink heavily.

Your 2004 calendar is enclosed. Make every effort to fill in the little squares with lunches and coffee dates with friends, a concert or two, a few plays and lots of movies dates. Plan some trips, throw a party, get some fun scheduled!

Keep in touch,



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