

Good lord! This falderal.again? I'm busy!

Nelson + Updike's Annual Newsletter

Oh god . . . . do I have to read this?

Aren't you glad you haven't been axed from this list?

Saturday December 9th

2006

Dear Family, Friends, and Valued Clients:

2006 and still no blog on the internet. And this letter is still not available to you in any format other than this. Time and technology march on and I am clearly barely able to keep up. It's December 9th, surely the birthday of hundreds of people on this planet but I only know two of them: **Surrey Tribble** and **Clemie Cyburt**. Those are great names. **Surrey's** middle name is **Elton**. Now *that's* a name, and it always has been in my book! They both live in other states, different ones, but only distance separates us on their birthdays. It's just after two in the afternoon now. Writing is my day from this point on. Heck this is my weekend from this point on.

So let me set the stage for this: It's a Saturday. It's on the cold side outside and it was raining earlier today so it's wet outside. Currently the skies are grey (anyone surprised by that?). I'm at my desk in my office in the bowels of our home (a.k.a., the basement). **Inga**, the world's sweetest and most beautiful and well behaved dog, is sleeping 11 feet from me in front of the fireplace (it may be a basement office, but it has its perks).

On the stereo I'm taking a break from Christmas music, which I love, because **David** is home. I want to play Christmas music for 25 straight days each December. But he does go on about it. On and on and on - **David** makes such a fuss it's almost not enjoyable to have the music on. I can't figure it out. It's not as if I have bad or overly religious Christmas music. I've carefully imported only the best. This year I only bought 5 Christmas CDs: Bette Midler, Vanessa Williams, the Statler Brother, Il Divo and James Taylor. And even tho' those are all good artists, each of those CDs had one or two weak songs on it. Those songs I don't import. Only the best (IMO). James Taylor, for instance, could not leave well enough alone with **Jingle Bells**. His punishment? (Besides being dumped by Carly Simon?) His new CD is NOT 100% imported into my iTunes Christmas playlist. That will teach him. I import the CDs into iTunes and then the CD goes in a box (labeled "IMPORTED") in our laundry room never to be touched again. As of this moment we have **5,537** songs in iTunes. Of those **5,537** songs only **512** of them are holiday music. I just walked over there and checked, those are spot on numbers. I knew you were curious. Check back with me next year and see how far along I get. These days I only put a CD into the CD player one time. After that it's in a box in the laundry room.

But I digress. As I was saying, I'm taking a break from Christmas and am currently listening to Sarah Brightman. An acquired taste no doubt, but easily acquired one in my case. Even tho' she

starred on Broadway for years in *Phantom of the Opera*, I really never knew her voice. Then one night many years ago, while having dinner at **Mark and Dirk's**, I heard several of her CDs. I've been a fan ever since. Even tho' I can't sing at all, I appreciate an amazing voice. She's soothing on a quiet day, generally covers songs I like, and doesn't prevent me from typing. And **David** doesn't complain when she's on.

### Tonight

Our next scheduled event is to attend the annual Christmas party at our contractor's wood shop in Wallingford tonight. They clean up the sawdust and turn off the band saws before putting the champagne out. This year we are going to the party with **Ben and Carolyn**, friends of ours who did a whole house remodel with JAS this year. Many of you remember that **David** and I worked with **Benjamin** before we moved to Windermere 9 years ago (it's been nine years!). Anyway all of the JAS clients get invited. And since our house is still not done, we're still clients!

So this year we're killing two birds with one stone . . . . attending the party with **Ben and Carolyn** and then the four of us are going to skip out for our own private holiday dinner. It's a bit after 2:00 PM now. The party's at 7:00 PM. There's about 4 hours in between there somewhere for writing. (I take frequent breaks, there's lunch at some point, I have to clean up for dinner, and I have a dog.) I have only this weekend to accomplish this letter. Next week is a big week for me on several fronts. And the week after that **David** and I fly away for the holidays.

### He Lives In A Van Down By The River

The days around Thanksgiving we had a cold snap here in the Northwest and it snowed. The hills were alive with the sound of ice. It was pretty bad for a few days there, very touch and go. There was that horribly sad story that made the national news about the man who died trying to find help for his family stuck in the snow in Oregon. Truly tragic. On the 29th my office was supposed to attend a day long seminar at the Museum of History and Industry. There were commuting concerns. The conference was held but it was decided we should "power through it," which evidently meant no official breaks, a shorter lunch, and a quick and fast covering of the material. The motivational speaker (there is no other term or description for a speaker like this) running the show spent the first 45 minutes saying things like, "We're gonna power through this today," and then minutes later, "We're really going to go over this quickly today," and then moments later, "Forgive me if I rush through this today," and so on. He spent the first 45 minutes of the day telling us he was gonna tell us this stuff really fast. He was gonna get us out of there early because more snow was due late that afternoon. He told us that for 45 minutes. It was already snowing when it came time to take the test and fill out his evaluation forms.

I fear I'm becoming him. So let's get to some content. Quickly.

### Pick A Word Or Two, Sum It Up

If you asked either one of us to pick one word that summed up all of 2006 this, for me, would be extremely easy. If you asked the same thing of **David**, hmmm . . . I don't know how easy that would be. From **David** you might hear the word "travel" or "master bath remodel" or "**UpdikeGaspari.com**" or "folly." **David** might come up with "travel" if asked and then go on to talk about the many small trips we took this year. Or **David** might come up with "**UpdikeGaspari.com**" and discuss his focus on

their shared web site and the marketing materials that he and Kevin have been developing for the better part of the year. My fear, however, is that David would offer that last choice, "FOLLY" and use it to describe the one word, and there really is only one for me, that I would choose:

### LANDSCAPING.

2006 will go down in history as the largest landscaping year I will ever have. I can't conceive I'll ever do the things I've done this year again, and, well just where would I be doing all this again anyway? I honestly think this is our last yard. Certainly it's our last non-level yard. My next yard is in Palm Springs (a.k.a., the desert) where the yards are all very flat and very level and flat, flat, flat and square. Plus large portions of those yards are taken up by swimming pools. I'll never undertake landscaping projects on this scale again 'cause I'll never have a reason to after this place. It's not that I wouldn't do it all again if I could. It's been a thrilling year for me and it's all been about our 9,000 plus square foot lot in Seattle. I took a lot of photos. When I find those photos (I take photos and then misplace them) I'll open up iPhoto and make a great landscaping slideshow.

### January and February

Here's what I remember of January and February: **It rained.** It rained and rained and rained. Perhaps many of you have forgotten this by now, but think back . . . remember how Seattle was headed for some rain record? Something like 35 straight days of rain or some number like that? Remember that every day the local papers would harken back to the last time it rained this much? (It was 1964 when the 39 day record for number continuous days in a row was set.) Remember we were getting mentioned on national news programs for continuous rain? Basements were taking on water (and buyers were calling their real estate agents thinking we could - or should - do something about that). Our basement took on water. Roofs all over Seattle were leaking. Gutters were failing. (More phone calls from buyers - sometimes they like to "escalate" and talk to the manager - I get to take those calls! - that's part of my job.)

**SIDEBAR:** When our basement took on water, in two locations mind you, we did not call our real estate agents. (That was a joke! I was our real estate agent for this house - hahahaha, I crack me up!) Neither did we call the sellers or their agents. Neither did we call the man we hired to inspect this house when we bought it a few months before. Nope. We just called Rite Way Waterproofing (that would be who I'd recommend obviously) and had it fixed. It was a simple fix (for us), cost us about \$1,300 and we haven't had a drop of water in our basement since in either of our two trouble spots. David and I were in New York recently, October, when it evidently rained and rained here in Seattle. We kept calling home and everyone said how bad it was. I was eager to get home and see if our basement was leaking, if the fix fixed it. The first thing I did when we walked in the door was go to the bedroom where previously the carpet got soaked in bad rains and got on my knees and checked it all out. Not a drop of water. Since I was on my knees already I thanked the Lord because leaking basements are no fun. And they are my main source of customer complaint calls.

I remember all of this rain and I remember the picture window in our kitchen. We have a very large window on the west wall of our kitchen over the sink and entire counter area on either side of the sink. It's really the only work surface in our as yet un-remodeled kitchen. (David often points out that we could have had a new and finished kitchen had the money, time and energy I put into our yard this year been "better" directed.) Naturally I'm at this counter most of the time when I'm in our kitchen. I stood there and stared out this window for 55 days with only one thought in mind:

## I CAN MAKE THIS BETTER !

**SIDEBAR:** When we bought this house I had every tree in our yard removed, every one. They were simply too large (well too large and too ugly and the wrong kind of trees). They blocked 95% of the light (western light mind you) from getting to our house and plants. This yard was an unplanned mess. Mess doesn't bother me too much, but I hate things that feel unplanned. And before you go all tree hugger environmentalist on me (no hate mail please), please understand that not all trees are good trees and not all trees are in the right spot. We removed, I'm trying to remember, let's say 8 trees total. I have since personally planted 31 trees on this lot and I'm still not finished planting trees. I'm still on trees - just wait till I get to plants and flowers.

So anyway I'm looking out the window for 55 days at a two tiered blank slate of bad rockery and bad root filled dirt. I wouldn't even call it soil. In the rains of January and February it was just mud. Mud that I wanted desperately to make better. To reshape. To reform. To transform. Would a waterfall help? Where would the water come from? Where would it go? Do I need ponds? And what about that back corner of the lot? Shouldn't *something* be there?

### February 24th to March 17th 2006 = Big Equipment, Phase One

It's not easy to find landscapers to work with. Real landscapers, not those guys who mow and blow your yard. I could go on and on and on about the travails of this, but I won't. The few of you who care have already heard my trial and error stories with landscapers. The few of you into gardening already know that a fancy high end hoity-toity landscape designer (who David insisted we hire because he lacks faith in me and my design abilities) was a pill (a gay pill, really the worst kind of pill) to work with. He shouted at me in an e-mail (a.k.a., all caps in a very snotty 5 word sentence in response to several reasonable questions I asked him in the e-mail before that - his *entire* response was 5 words). I paid too much money for his design to be yelled at in an e-mail. Plus I'm the client. I never in 20 years yelled at one of my clients. I vowed to never again contact him after that e-mail. I never responded to it and he never followed up with me. It was our last communication. I'd like my \$3,500 dollars back please!

Then there was the guy who I hired in 2000 to design and install the four flower beds in front of the apartment building we lived in on Capitol Hill. Not a huge job, but also not a cheap job. I hired him, worked well with him, paid him with no question. I think he was just starting out back then. It was all good. So I call him. He's not just starting out now. He refused to even come out here and see the yard. I begged on the phone, I pleaded in e-mails. He didn't like the sound of the job I guess. Or his feelings were hurt that I previously called the hoity-toity guy from the preceding paragraph. (But I fired him! And I admitted it was a mistake.) I was begging. No luck. He would not take the meeting and he turned the job down in an e-mail.

So I am calling and seeking and calling landscapers. I call everyone in the **GSBA Guide**. I get all of those little community newspapers and call and call. I scour **Seattle Magazine** and **Sunset** for the glossy ads with lovely pictures of gardens. I check **The Weekly** and **The Stranger** ads. And after 47 phone calls and plenty of discussions (a.k.a., rejections) I finally get it. Here's the problem: There are **NO** landscapers. There are only designers. They put the word "Landscape" in front of the word "Design" to fool you into calling. However when you do call you will learn that they do not actually touch the soil, they do not plant trees, and they most certainly do not move rocks.

In a nutshell, if you could get dirty or sweaty doing it, they don't do it. They draw. I didn't need a drawing. I paid dearly for one of those already and got yelled at when I asked reasonable questions about it. Plus, after 55 days of staring at the yard, I had ideas of my own. They hate that. Don't ever tell a landscape designer that you have an idea.

Finally in one of those many phone calls some nice landscape designer took pity on me. He actually gave the name of a guy who owns Big Equipment. I was finally on my way! I called the Big Equipment man, told him I wanted two ponds and a large waterfall, and that I was ready to write checks. He was on our front porch two days later. It was Superbowl Sunday, whatever day that is, sometime in February I think, and he came to meet with me. I remember thinking it was nice that he would come out so quickly, not only a weekend, but on that Sunday when so many people watch the game (clearly not me or him however - an auspicious beginning!) I had our checkbook in one hand, so he'd know I was serious, and a can of upside-down orange marker spray paint in the other, so he'd know I was deadly serious and yet simple and easy to deal with.

I'm thinking the Big Equipment guy will view the situation like this:

**A can of upside-down orange marker spray paint = simple and easy to deal with, gonna be fun!**

As opposed to:

**A hoity-toity gay pill fancy pants designer with a roll of paper = gonna be trouble ahead.**

And I was right. Big Equipment Man and I got along perfectly immediately. I drew what I wanted on the ground with the orange spray paint. I pointed here. I pointed there. Can you cut this concrete away? Can I have a large stone standing here? I had quick simple questions and he had quick yes and no answers, all helped along with the visual of orange lines in the mud. I also had a checkbook with me, I think that helped too. The BIG EQUIPMENT arrived on February 24th. Two men with huge machines often seen downtown digging holes for new condo projects. I watched as they squeezed this stuff into our backyard with literally two inches to spare between the house and the fence. Every day I would race home at the lunch hour to witness, point some more and use up more orange spray paint. And every day after work I would race home to see how much was accomplished that day. This went on for 22 days. As they backed the Big Equipment out of our newly transformed backyard on March 17th I saw the beginning of my garden of earthly delights.

[That's how much I can type and repeatedly edit in an afternoon. It's not the typing, it's the editing, proofing and formatting that sucks up the time. That and dog breaks. Gotta go shower and get ready for a night out now. Later. Much more later.]

So Far Today

Well it's just about one in the afternoon and I'm home alone, a very quiet Sunday. Slept in late as we were out a bit later than usual for us (plus I'm 51 now and I live in the woods, just being out at all is unusual for us). But we had a great time last night. David is downtown at the sales center for 1521 - 2nd Avenue now (I think that's the address, I don't really track that stuff much anymore) showing a friend units there. And they're gonna have lunch. David sold one of these units a week or so ago and now he's telling Michael about them. And they're going to have lunch. Thus I have Christmas music on. I'm importing again. I'm importing as I write! People ask when I find the time to import.

So far today this is what I've done: drank espresso and read all of the local paper and the business section of the New York Times. I read all of the local paper that interests me (this is a very quick process but I do see each section - except the sports section obviously). There was a mediocre article about Zillow in today real estate section. I read every word of it. Everyone is all worked up about Zillow. Everyone but me. Call for details 'cause I can't even bother to write about Zillow. There was a great article, a long one, 3 pages, about a landlord and a tenant in Manhattan (I'm in the New York Times now) who are at each other's throats and have been for about 5 years. Lots of lawyers involved. A much more interesting article. That one I savored over my second cappuccino. The rest of the New York Times I'll savor during breaks and meals throughout today (and often into the next day as well).

Wanna know what the BEST part of this morning was? When I walk upstairs to make the espresso in the kitchen (yes, we're still sleeping in our basement bedroom, the one with the formerly wet floor), the very first thing I see when I look out the huge kitchen window is a waterfall. And not a small one. A good sized one. One that flows from a fairly large pond in the upper part of our yard to a smaller pond that is literally right outside our kitchen door, at patio level. If you backed a chair from the patio table up too far you'd be in a real pond. The flow of this fall is so great that even a few weeks ago in the snow and ice it was running . . . . there was lots of ice, but that waterfall never slowed enough to freeze up! **Calvin**, our cat, is out there daily on the 30 tons of granite that was brought in to make the pond and fall. He is certain I built this so he would have constantly running drinking water. He sits on a huge granite rock next to the waterfall and he drinks. Humming birds visit. The plants and trees I've carefully chosen and placed are filling in. It's all good. This is what each and every morning is like for me now. Something to look at, an espresso machine in front of the window, cats, a dog, and three newspapers (3 a day!). Sometimes **David** is there to bitch about the **Today Show** being on. (I can read AND listen - you can't have too much news in the morning.)

It really was 30 tons of rock. And that was just in the BACKYARD.

I finished with the 5 Christmas CDs I bought this year so I headed into the laundry room to find the box with the Christmas music I never got to last year. It's a whole file box of Christmas CDs, a lot of them. Most I edited and imported last year. There were 16 left that I hadn't got to. Now there are only 15. I put one, **Winter Celebration, A Celtic Season** into the trash compactor. I first popped into the iMac but when the first song came on, with no words mind you, I thought the traveling company of **River Dance** was in my house. I tried to think of who I could "give" this CD to. In the end I got to glimpse my pond and waterfall as I took it to the trash compactor.

I absolutely love trash compactors. They are the grown up equivalent of putting a lit M-80 in your enemy's mailbox. (I understand children. Could this be why I have no use for them?)

Celtic? Christmas music needs words. Well, most music needs words. This is the main, but not the only, problem with jazz. But don't get me started. Don't even get me started. I am not importing a Christmas CD made up, are you ready for this, of songs by these 4 people: Pat Boone, Vikki Carr, Debbie Reynolds, and Tony Orlando. How did those 4 people end up on the same CD? But this I'll listen too - pretty and with words. Plus, com'on, Vikki Carr? LOVE Vikki Carr. First of all her name has two "k" s in it AND she sang one of my all time favorite songs: **Let It Please Be Him**. Each and every time that song comes on Kixi (880 AM) **Tracie**, the real manager of my office, buzzes me on the intercom and either let's me hear it live OR she records it into my desk's voice mail for me to find later. She knows how to keep me happy.

Content. Need some content. I'm sounding like, or thinking like, David and Kevin's web site designer. He kept e-mailing me for content. His name is Lee Curry. He used to be our tenant on Capitol Hill in the apartment building (when we lived close in but had no waterfall). We moved to the woods and he moved to London. But, thanks to e-mail, he's still the web master for [UpdikeGaspari.com](http://UpdikeGaspari.com). Lee and his partner **Mark Weeks** are visiting Seattle soon and **Mark**, a wonderful photographer, is bringing us an 11" X 17" photo of **David and I** that he took here at the house in the woods prior to moving to London. We're seeing them the night before we take off for our holiday vacation!

### January

To read back over what I've written so far you'd think the only thing we did in 2006 was build a waterfall. That was sorta my point, but it's not completely true . . . . .

For instance on January 7th of 2006 we had **Gary Tucker** over for dinner and forced him to watch, for his first time (how is THAT possible?) *Love Actually* with us. **David and I** have the DVD and we watch it, along with *White Christmas*, every year at this time. As soon as this letter is in the can **David and I** are going to crack open a bottle of amazing rye whiskey that he bought over the internet (based on an article he read in the New York Times) and watch both movies again. I cannot tell you how many times I've seen *White Christmas*. I'd guess once a year for 51 years but I may have missed a few years early on. Then again, in my sappy twenties, I'm sure there were years when I saw it three times.

**David and I** always honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. by spending his birthday weekend in Palm Springs and 2006 was no different. We don't know if **MLK** ever visited there, but we're sure he would have liked the weather there if he had, especially on the second weekend in January. We know we do. By then the fuss of the holidays are over and we're left with a Seattle winter. Bow down to the real estate gods who guided us to our little house in Palm Springs way back in January of 2001. Hey, now that I think of it, we actually bought our little house in Palm Springs on **MLK's** birthday in 2001. Even before we had a house there we were spending the second weekend in January there each year. We had done that for several years in a row as tourists. In 2001 we were there as tourists when the real estate gods made it rain all weekend and told us to take refuge inside of open houses. We did as the gods planned. **David** has already been to the Alaska site and bought our tickets for **MLK** weekend in 2007. Some traditions (*Love Actually*, **MLK** weekend in Palm Springs) must survive.

January always starts out slow. I took three different law classes (real estate law obviously) in the first few weeks of the year mainly because I had the time to do so. Extra time, and I need the clock hours to renew my license with the State.

### February

Went to dinner at Calypso (it's so hard to find good food north of the Ship Canal) with **Kevin** and **Rachel**. **Kevin** is, was, and now is again, an architect at JAS Design Build. This dinner was in **Kevin's** "not" phase and while **David** was distracted with **Rachel**, **Kevin and I** began sketching on a napkin. Well I don't sketch. At least not well. (Unless it is with orange spray paint.) **Kevin** sketched and I talked (quietly so **David** couldn't focus on what was being discussed). Remember I said when looking out the kitchen window I thought the back corner of the yard needed *something* there? Something, but what? I had some ideas. Actually I had a full on vision. But I knew better than to talk about my vision much around **David**. I see things. He sees an old kitchen in desperate need.

A week later **Joe** and **Kim** took us, with **Cherese** and **Rebecca**, to Le Pichet for dinner downtown (all of the really good food is south of the Ship Canal, trust me on this). During dinner, again on the DL, I quizzed **Joe** about who could make my vision a reality. **Joe** offered up some ideas. I was looking for a guy with a hammer, not a full on construction crew. **David** remained in the dark.

The next night (these things are not related, I'm just jumping around now so don't look for a thread) **David** and **I** attended the first annual *Night Of Love* party at **Lance** and **Marcia's** house. We went with **Frank** and **Gary**. **Marcia** did an absolutely amazing job of this - it was like full on catered but she made all of the food. The theme, perfectly pulled off, was Valentine's Day. There was chocolate sauce to dip things in. Great fun. *Brokeback Mountain* had just been released the week or so prior. So there we are, 4 gay guys at an all straight party. I got to overhear several "Brokeback" jokes . . . so clever and amusing. Things like "Don't go all Brokeback on me," or, when one clown hugged another, "Hey that was a little Brokeback doncha think?" I'm not complaining, I'm just retelling. The four of us had a great time. Someone went to Vassar, I got to hear all about it. The food was wonderful. **Lance** made a CD (oh yes) of his favorite love songs (**David** and **I** still question *The Crying Game* ending up on this disc). At the end of the evening (for the 4 of us), I announced as we were heading for the door, "The gays are leaving now" and told them they could talk freely, or do whatever they do, after we left. We were promised this would be an annual event, complete with a new CD of love songs each year, however **Marcia** is with child now, due about then, no time to cook and plan *The Night of Love* with a newborn.

Oh, by the way, it's a GIRL. I always knew that because I pay close attention and I care deeply.

### March

**Gary Sarozek** convinced me to go bowling for a good cause. Need I say more? I went bowling. **David** went too, as did **Frank** and **Gary** and **Lance** and **Marcia**. We bowled. I wore other people's shoes.

**Julie Heyne** and I spent a day having lunch and visiting art galleries in Pioneer Square. We call it Art Day. Well she calls it that, I horned in on it. We don't go on Thursdays. I bought a drawing.

I went to Palm Springs for four days alone. On the fourth day **David** joined me. On the fifth day I flew back to Seattle and **David's** mom and step dad flew from Spokane to Palm Springs and he stayed on another 5 days with them playing tour guide and hanging out. I was here at the house in the woods alone. **But while I was there alone for the first four days this happened:**

So it's March 18th and I'm alone in Palm Springs on a Saturday night. It had been a great day. The sun was up before I was and I spent the morning moving between my laptop, the swimming pool, and the 104° spa. I met my friends **Rick** and **Tom**, who are now LA hipsters having moved from Seattle to La La Land, for lunch (at Tyler's, a.k.a., the world's best hamburger joint). After lunch we toured homes for sale and construction sites in Palm Springs (a favorite pass time). We parted for the afternoon and I returned to the pool, spa and laptop. For the evening I decided on an early dinner alone (at El Mirasol, a.k.a., the world's best Mexican restaurant) and then a movie alone (**16 Blocks**).

It's a warm lovely night. I arrive for the movie wearing my favorite pair of black boots, blue jeans and one of my five extremely young and hip t-shirts (the "Think" t-shirt, the red one with the daisies on it). I walk up to the counter feeling great about the day past, about me, about my life.



Here's how it goes:

Me: " One please for 16 Blocks. " as I'm pulling \$9.00 out of my money clip.

Woman selling tickets: " That's \$4.50 "

Me, clearly confused as I hand her a five and four ones: " Ah . . . . it's nine dollars ??? "

Woman selling tickets: " Adult or Senior ? "

Me, hesitating as what is happening is slowly dawning on me and I wonder if I should lie and go for the \$4.50 admission: " I'm not 60 yet. "

And I pay my \$9.00 and walk away.

And for a moment I am no longer having a great day. I am no longer a hip guy out on the town alone in Palm Springs. Now I'm an old fat sixty year old man wearing a completely inappropriate t-shirt. And as I think about this I realize the woman selling me the ticket isn't a teenager who could easily (and understandably?) mistake 50 for 60. No, it's worse than that. The woman who sold me the ticket was an adult woman, a woman likely in her forties, a woman near my age actually, a woman who should be old enough to easily recognize a hip 50 when she sees it.

The movie was only okay - not enough explosions and fire for my liking. Or maybe it was a great movie and I was just in a foul mood.

April

Kevin and Kent and David and I went to see James Blunt at the Paramount. Looking back on this it's actually embarrassing for me to type that. The audience was made up of . . . well never mind. Don't make me describe who was there. It wouldn't sound nice. At one point Kevin pointed to a group of women, all dressed as if they were in a rap video and STANDING thus blocking everyone's view, and said, "They're title reps." I don't think I want to explain that but I'll always remember it.

Six days in April were spent once again in Palm Springs (there are many short and frequent trips to Palm Springs) this time with my favorite cousin, Marsha, from Michigan. She made us hike and eat at home. But while there she and David concocted an idea for a trip to a warm place for Christmas (a trip that is now a mere 9 days away). The 3 of us had a great time for six days in the pool, just hanging out, talking, reading. And going on her "hikes." We humored her.

I went to see a urologist. Now I have a urologist. I am 51. I am now at the age where you might get to have your very own urologist. I never knew how to pronounce or spell "urologist," of course in my 30s and 40s I never had a reason to. Now I can both spell and say "urologist." Yes, I've already had the colonoscopy, a word that no spell check ever seems to like. What else do I have to look forward to? Don't know but I do know that in another five years, if I'm still producing this letter for our household, I plan on devoting an entire letter to our toenails, pills we get to take, surgeries, veins, our various doctors, blood sugar levels, our second round of colonoscopies and a pair of medical support hose (flesh colored) that David got to wear for several weeks earlier this year! I'm going to hang out at Jensen's in Palm Springs having cheap bad coffee (it's a grocery store, our favorite one

actually, but they have booths near the bakery where I see people much older than me gathering for coffee each day) and talk to anyone who will listen to me about what's wrong with being 56 and how it's different than being 41. I have plans.

May

Another month, another trip to Palm Springs. Or should I say another TWO trips to Palm Springs?

Trip one, me alone, no **David** this time, was the typical 6 day trip, Thursday through Tuesday, at the start of the month. Visiting this time, from Michigan again, was the only friend I'm still in contact with from the years 1 to 23, **Lisa Walters**. She drove out in a typical mother's mini-van. She made me a mixed CD of songs from years 1 to 23. We hung out in the pool, talked a lot, and listened to Meatloaf. She did not make me hike and I don't think she knows how to cook so going out as often as I'm used to was not a problem!

Trip two was BUMPED UP to a full 7 day trip due to Memorial Day Weekend. This time Thursday through Wednesday and with **Cherese** and **Rebecca**. **David** too. The four of us travel with laptops. So . . . add laptops (3 real estate agents and an event planner) into the pool time, talking a lot, and hanging out parts, keep eating out and you've got it. Honestly **Cherese** and **Rebecca** don't really like music so take that part out and put in reading and surfing the internet for stuff. Still no hikes.

**SIDEBAR:** Before they get a chance to start complaining, and they will, at the reference to not liking music let me just say, they don't. Not really. Two days after Thanksgiving they were here for dinner and we had music on, very low, but on. And it was not Meatloaf. Something calm and dinner party like. In each room where we have speakers, and that's not all of the rooms mind you, we have volume controls. First I had to turn the music off in the kitchen. They say they can't talk with music on. Later I noticed **Cherese** get up and go into the living room and turn the music off in there. They will say they like music because they go swing dancing on Friday nights. I will say that is simply not the same thing. And I know because I have **5,600** songs in my iTunes library now. I just checked again. That's the number now. I've been importing with every keystroke.

Speaking of keystrokes, did you know that **Lance** was taking typing lessons last year? With twelve year olds? Will I catch hell for saying that?

June

We keep a calendar in our kitchen. It's a big one, it hangs on the wall. It is the master calendar. I use it both for planning AND as a diary of events. All of our social engagements are on this calendar, either before OR after the event. I just turned the page to that calendar (that's how I remember all of this stuff) and only one square is filled in: **Melissa Etheridge** with **Gary Tucker** at the Paramount. (**Cherese** and **Rebecca** were at that concert as well. This will be more proof that they LOVE music.) That was on the 25th, the night of the gay pride parade and stuff in Seattle. All of the other squares are blank. In a large green marks-a-lot, those BOLD thick tipped markers, I have scrawled over the whole month, in huge green sloppy writing spanning the whole month, like graffiti on a wall in our old neighborhood, the following:

" the yard, the shed, trees and the garden "

Ah, June, my kinda month. Evidently we went nowhere, we did nothing, there were no trips, nothing. We worked (David has been doing a lot of that this year) and I came home to my garden planning and building. I think the gas grill on the patio (near the waterfall and pond in case of emergency) was used a great deal this month.

July

Well I can't be expected to stay here for another whole month without a trip to my second favorite place to travel too . . . . so another solo trip to the desert for me. Alone again in Palm Springs, this time for only 4 days. Still this is truly relaxing and, for me, the perfect mini-vacation. So it's July 1st, a Saturday. It's hot. The town is kinda quiet. I goofed off all day and didn't run any errands. I decide I'll need food and things for the morning. I head out. I'm in my rental (always a Ford Escape) and go up to Ralph's (a grocery store open 24 hours a day, it's quite late now) to shop. When I'm done I'm leaving the parking lot, which is empty, there are no cars in it, it's like one in the morning and the town is dead anyway, I drive slightly over the yellow line that separates the IN lane from the OUT lanes near the Starbucks on Sunrise. Just slightly over the line mind you. And no one is around. But coming IN from Sunrise is a hispanic man, looks to be like my age, or what I would think is close enough to my age, in a large pickup truck. As he passes me coming in, I'm going out, he rolls his window down (mine were already down) and he hollers:

" Pay attention grandpa ! "

You know Palm Springs is really starting to piss me off.

More July, and August Too

There were plenty of social events in Seattle in July and August. I have the calendar by my side. I notice that on Monday, July 17th we had our "going away" dinner with Mark and Lee who, as I said earlier, moved to London (due to immigration laws pertaining to Lee being from there and Mark being from here, that's why they moved). This night was the when our 11" X 17" photo was taken - which I'm looking forward to seeing in 8 days!

Then, a mere 4 nights later, on Friday the 21st, David and I hosted what we called, "The final Mrs. Madrigal Event" (as David Wertheimer always loved to call me) here at our house: We had all of the final group of tenants from the Dubois Apartments out here to the house in the woods for dinner. We toured the yard, the shed, "the grounds" and house. We grilled. We ate outside near the pond and waterfall. We drank into the night. It was the turning of the last page in that rental chapter of our lives. And they were all there: Jeff and Kara, who still live in the Dubois in the unit David and I lived in before our big JAS unit was finished, Matt and Mo, who David (ah, well, let's say Kevin and maybe David) sold a condo to in West Seattle, and Mark and Lee now days away from a new life in London, and me and David. I'm still obsessed with that apartment and the life we had there on Capitol Hill and I still drive by it almost once a week. Since this dinner I've been trying to let go more and move on fully. It's an odd thing. An odd thing I don't think David shares with me.

Mid-August there was a trip to Portland with Inga, a road trip, the best kind. We stayed at the Heathman, a place we love because they love Inga, and we shopped and shopped and shopped. We bought two side tables and a dresser for our bedroom (the one upstairs that we don't sleep in) that haven't arrived here yet. We seem to think there are better stores there than here for house

stuff. That can't be true, right? Seattle's a bigger field with more players, right? Still it seems, to us, Portland has better shopping. Certainly for house wares, house fixtures, house furniture, and so on. Maybe it's just that it's all different and fresh down there. Of course they have a lighting store, LUX, that sure seems better than the two lighting stores we have here in Seattle. We bought lights for our master bathroom remodel (on going now with JAS Design Build), lights for outdoors here and in Palm Springs, a lamp or two, and so on. A great weekend. And so many air miles.

**David** thought this was **HIS** year. **David** thought this was the year of some huge big trip for **HIM**. This is because **David** turned 50 on August 28th. It was his year, but not his year in India or Africa or some other deadly place he wants to drag me to. He got the wine country in California instead. And nine days in a car with **ME and Inga** . . . . another ROAD TRIP. Not Egypt, but so much safer. There's wine. There's food. Amazing food. There are no guns and no roadside bombs.

First, because it was **HIS** year, there had to be a party. He of course said he didn't want a party (it seems like everyone says that, but really, WHO doesn't love a good party?), and certainly NOT a surprise party. So I planned a surprise party. **David's** favorite place to eat, or very near the top of his list, is Via Tribunali on Pike Street on Capitol Hill. We used to walk over there from the apartment (STOP thinking about that) at least once a week. I called up and found out that they are closed on Monday nights (his birthday was on a Monday night this year) and that I could rent the entire restaurant if the charge card had enough room on it. It did and I did. **Lance** made a funny and absolutely adorable party invitation (he can't type, but he can graphic design with the best of them!) and I stopped by Via Tribunali to select wines and pizzas. Lots of planning, hushed phone calls and meetings. I was supposed to have 65 people there but . . . well you know how you should always over invite figuring not everyone will be able to make it? Sometimes everyone will make it. We were at about 82 people that night - the place is set up for like 65 to 70 max. It was crowded, but it was fun. **David was surprised**. In a good way. His entire family from Spokane drove over. The inner circle was there. It was a special night

The next day we were in the Hybrid Escape, with **INGA**, and on our way to the wine country!

The surprises weren't over yet however. **Wade and Judy**, our friends and old neighbors from the BIG house on 17th, couldn't be at the party because they attend the Shakespeare festival in Ashland every year. Our first night (and last night) on the road trip? Why Ashland! So we planned that I would take **David** to a certain place, their favorite place, and there they were. We had a lovely time, they treated **David** to a birthday dinner, and, again, **David** was very surprised. Great fun. And when you get back to the hotel room, **Inga** is waiting for you!

The rest of our road trip was two nights in Napa at a very cool place, two nights in Sonoma at a very bad dive, and then, it ends on a high note, two nights in San Francisco at the W Hotel, where the love **Inga**, near Market Street. So much wine. So many great meals. Lots of time together.

## September

Okay I took a break there. It's much later now the same day, still Sunday. **Lance** called and tried to spontaneously get us to drive down to Capitol Hill for dinner. When you live out in the woods you just don't do things like that very often. And certainly not spontaneously. They just moved back into their kitchen after a huge remodel by Lance Hood Design and Build. He called just after I told the world (well 707 people in the world anyway) that he can't type. I was feeling some guilt.

David's home now. Christmas music be gone. David has a playlist on the iMac called "David's New Age Music" and that's what's on now. It's very "Blade Runner like," to the point that Claire, who is hanging out in my office for some reason, seems like she's a robot.

I unabashedly watch a lot of television. I proudly watch a lot of television. And I love nothing more than to find other like souls to discuss it with. Yeah yeah yeah, I know, you only have one TV in your house and it's seldom on and mostly you READ. Or you only listen to NPR. Well, I only listen to NPR too (in my car) and I read (witness the stacks of magazines by the toilet and the espresso and 3 newspapers routine every morning at 6:30 AM). But till TV rules. I have Tivo boxes (we're not supposed to use that word to describe DVRs but let their lawyers come after me) on all but one of the TVs in this house. As soon as our master bathroom remodel is finished I'm getting another TV, and DVD player and another Tivo box. Consumer electronics = me = happy.

Anyway I was just watching Larry King Live (he's a dolt) and I saw one of my favorite commercials:

Two women, one a bit older, one a bit younger, are in front of a mirror in a bathroom touching up their makeup. Older woman with quite a disgusted tone to her voice, picks up a bottle and says:

" Oh Sharon! This stuff won't get rid of the mold in here. "

Younger woman calmly says:

" Will it help you forget our address? " [pause] " Could you pass me the brush? "

I'm easily amused.

In September David and I spent a week in a place we'd never been before: Scottsdale, Arizona. All thanks to Windermere. It was our version of a convention. There was a two day segment for all of the people like me who manage a Windermere office and then three days of courses for both agents and managers on various topics - all earning us the much needed, State required, clock hours. That was in the day time. In the evenings we had a rental car and a city to explore. Meals out, exploring, shopping, sight seeing. David and I had a great time. We went to a big Frank Lloyd Wright place where he trained architects. And the weather! 8 full days of beautiful weather (of course David and I tacked both weekends on to our "work week" there . . . we figure if we're going all that way, and we're not likely to go back, we might as well make the most of it while we can. Plus this trip was legitimately work related. I think the IRS even wanted us to take this trip!

### October and November and December

Well the girls each had a birthday so there were two dinners as a foursome. Rebecca's was at our house, I cooked, her choice. Chere's choice was Kingfish. In between those two birthdays I turned 51. I turned 51 on a plane to Manhattan. We flew on the 11th, my actual birthday, arriving in a very bad rainstorm. We had the cab ride from hell, with a person we didn't know sharing our cab, from Newark to Times Square. The normal 30 minute cab ride took over 2 hours and 40 minutes. And we had tickets to see the revival of **A CHORUS LINE** at 8:00 PM. The details are bad. The story ends with us running, in our "air plane clothes" from the sidewalk in front of our hotel where we left our luggage with a guy we hoped worked there, to the theatre 3 blocks away. In the pouring rain. During the run David lost his fancy-pants smart PDA cell phone, a Treo it was.

**Frank** and **Gary**, who were in Manhattan a few days before us to see the Barbara Streisand concert (the one where she told the guy to "Shut the f\*^K up" - they were in the audience for that!) were meeting us at the show. They knew we were running behind. They didn't know we'd arrive literally dripping wet. We watched the show, on my 51st birthday, a show with no intermission, soaking wet. Afterwards we all went out for a nice drink and dinner after the show. I'm not likely to forget that birthday. We finally checked into our hotel around midnight. Our luggage, including my laptop (what was I thinking, such a crazy risk!) was safe and sound. We slept in the next day, woke up like it never happened and enjoyed my absolutely favorite place to travel to for five more days. Over those five days **David** purchased a new smart, super smart, PDA cell phone in Times Square.

The highlights of this trip to New York:

Lunch at La Boulue on Madison at 65th Street, a recommendation by **Kent** and **Kevin**, Ivana Trump in a corner in the front as we come in. She' alone. But when we leave we realize she was merely waiting for her lunch date to arrive: Star Jones. **Frank**, eagle eye, spots Star Jones first. While eating we were sitting on the path to the rest rooms. On her way to the ladies room Stockard Channing brushed the back of my chair. Twice, coming and going. This is partly why TVs are so helpful.

Dinner at Bar Central before a show one night: Lawrence Fishburn comes in, all of the tables are taken, he asks if he can eat at the bar. They say yes, he does. We observe from our table.

The next day, standing in front of our hotel in Times Square while catching a cab to take us to Gramercy Tavern for dinner, **David** and **I** see Christine Ebersole. She walks right between us.

The last night of the trip **David** and **I** are walking back to our hotel from Columbus Circle where we had a lovely meal at Jean-Georges. As we get to the theatre district we see Donny Osmond come out of the stage door for Beauty and the Beast and we watch as he is mobbed by female fans. He's about my age. I wonder if he has a urologist?

Shows we saw: *Grey Gardens* (starring Christine Ebersole), *Jersey Boys*, *A Chorus Line* and some off off Broadway fluff matinee called *Alter Boyz*.

You know you've been to Manhattan too many times when you wake up in the morning and you're in the best place on earth with tons of options for things to do and after you tick off the options and realize you've been there, done that, you decide to do the one thing you have never done there: Go to open houses!

It was Sunday. We got the Times, ate in a dinner in Chelsea, and then walked to about four of five different buildings and saw properties being held open. Great fun and a nice way to kill a Sunday afternoon while doing other things. The best part was meeting and observing real estate agents making a living in Manhattan. The next day, on Monday, we flew home to Seattle. It was time for us to make a living again.

The Gay Pride Parade in Palm Springs is always the first weekend of November. It's too hot for floats and walking in the street in June there. As usual, we were there for this weekend. It's not for the parade (**David** didn't even go), it's cause so many of our friends are there that weekend. **Mark** and **Dirk**, who now own a condo 3 blocks from our house (we can walk when it's not 115°) were there, and so were many others. It's just fun to bump into people there that weekend.

Palm Springs, Tuesday November 7th 2006: Why on earth did it take me several years to get a **Blackberry**? On November 3rd I got one, in Palm Springs (don't be confused by my 760 area code). Tho' I'm not very techie I figured out T-Mobile's web site and how to make my new toy talk to my ISP and pick up my e-mails. I figured this out on my own. I was proud of me. So we're going home now. On the 7th we're at the airport and I get an e-mail from **Tom Martin**. This is my first real e-mail on my new toy. All it said was "Brittney Spears files for divorce!" This cracked me up, and not because I care a whit about her life (hmmmm, perhaps **Tom** does?), but because I finally make the jump, get this device, spend the weekend figuring it out, setting it up, getting it ready for my new super connected life. And what is among the first breaking e-mails I receive? Brittney Spears is getting a divorce. Seconds later I got a breaking news e-mail from CNN saying the same thing. **Tom** was faster than CNN. My support network!

November 9th to November 17th 2006 = Big Equipment, Phase Two

Yup, the same really **BIG EQUIPMENT** again, this time only in the front yard. Mostly in the street in front of our house as a matter-of-fact. Loud Big Equipment. When it was all done this time I personally made the rounds on foot to our immediate neighbors and thanked them for their patience with us (and their patience with the huge trucks that brought in many more tons of rocks, brought in the sand and gravel, and then brought in the topsoil and trees). I promised our neighbors it was finally over. There will never be a need for the Big Equipment again. Our front yard is transformed. It is all (the front and back yards) still a big blank slate that won't fully be finished for a year or two, but when you look at it all now you realize there is a **PLAN**. It looks organized. It looks like it's going to **BE** something someday. From this point on it is just me and trees I can manage on a weekend and small plants. Well, me, plus I finally found a gardener who actually gardens, so him and me, and more trees and small plants. I've given the front yard over to **Scott**. I'm clinging to the backyard.

All Summer Long, 2006 = Small Equipment (a.k.a., Tools), Phase One

Remember me and **Kevin**, sketches on the napkin at dinner and then fishing around for a carpenter with **Joe**? Remember I needed something in the back corner of the yard? There had to be a, ah, a "place to go." There had to be a destination in the garden. **Kevin** did the plans. **Geoff Murphy** and his crew built my vision to a **T**. **Geoff**, his brother **Matt** and their most excellent carpenter **John Vouk** and their friend **Robbie**, they all descended on the yard with small tools sometime in May.

They started with a cement mixer and lots of rebar, they finished up months later with cool little "kerfs" that hold down the beautiful Brazilian hardwood deck boards so that not one nail punctures the surface of any board. They lived here all summer. All summer. I installed a sprinkler system around them, I dug trenches and ran power to the pond (for the pump) and to the "shed." I have electrical outlets, to code, in my yard. I planted 31 trees and many plants where the carpentry crew was not working. They just built. I worked all summer but I stayed out of their way.

Now we have the most amazing tool shed in the back corner of our lot. Oh - but it's so much more. It's 27 feet long. It's 12 feet wide. And it's really made up of 3 sections: the tool shed, the room, and the deck. The room is a fully finished room that is 10' X 12' complete with insulation, doors and windows. It has four standard electrical outlets in it. It has 5 lights in it. Both our laptops even work up there using our wireless network housed in the kitchen below. It is modern. But mostly:

**It is something to look at when you are standing at the kitchen sink.**

**John** stayed on after the main vision was realized and he also built an awesome little deck off of the dining room. **JAS** put in a large slider there during the remodel in 2005 but there was a three foot drop to the ground waiting for this deck to go in. Now **John's** building us two benches for this deck out of the excess Brazilian hardwoods from our summer projects. He does super fine work.

**Geoff's** crew did an amazing job with my vision. **David** calls it my folly. Many people visit and ask me why that room is up there, what it's for? I make up something different each time I'm asked (based on who's asking me). One friend asks and it's a tea room for afternoon tea, another asks and it's a yoga studio, another friend asks and it's a, well I shouldn't say, and another asks and it's my summer office. It's a reading room, it's a playhouse for kids (when we sell to the next owners), it's valuable real estate. And it's a place to go when you are wandering around in the garden. The garden to be.

### The Master Bath Project

For lack of funds it was put on hold in 2005. **David** was working hard and thriving this year and it looked as though, even with my landscaping follies, it was possible to finish this bathroom without HELOC damage (a.k.a., Home Equity Line Of Credit damage). **David** fussed the design with **Kim** and **Joe** and the **JAS** staff. A timeline was set, a budget was set, and it started sometime in, I think, August. It's 98% completed now and it looks great, stunning actually. Our lead, **Colin**, has a great attention to detail. It's on time (well, not really, I'm just saying it is to be nice) and it's under budget (really, I think we're under budget). It looks stunning. It looks like it's worthy to be in a two million dollar house (it's not in a two million dollar house, I just used that figure because you don't get as much for a million in Seattle anymore). We're just waiting on the shower glass, the vanity mirror and for some lights to arrive. As for coming in at or under budget (for us a first) I think the secret was never changing anything once it got started. For 2007 a beautiful new bathroom with heated floors. When it's done I hear we're actually moving out of the basement bedroom and into our master suite. Our bedroom set from our Portland weekend is due here this week and, after living here for just over a year, we'll be in a proper master suite.

### My Work Here Is Done

By time you get this letter this will be old news, but I've had a very happy work related occurrence of late. It's been hush-hush till now (at least I haven't talked about it), but by tomorrow at this time it will have become public knowledge. Two very good friends of mine, people I have known for, hmmm, I don't know 17 or 18 years, have decided to change offices and move to the Windermere office I manage: **Bruce Phares** and **Donna Bertolino**. They're great agents, but the best part is that they're Inner Circle people, our inner circle. Many of us in the **Eastlake Office** (a.k.a., **MY** office) are good friends of theirs. Many of us used to work together and now, soon, we'll be working together again. I was recently joking with **David** and I said, after **Bruce** and **Donna** let me know of their decision,

**" My work here is done. There's nothing left for me to accomplish now. "**

Seriously, my job couldn't be better. And it couldn't be going better. I've been the Managing Broker at the Windermere Eastlake office for exactly nine years now . . . it was nine years in October. Next year will be my tenth year. Shocking to think about that much time when it really doesn't FEEL like that much time. I think I manage 95 agents now, or will by the end of the week. I have 6 staff to oversee (a much easier number to track). I love my job. Agents, despite the bad rap they often get,



are generally exciting people to be around. And cool. And fun. They have to be all of those things, and more, to take the leap and do what they do for a living. My job is to keep them happy. And talk to unhappy people when their basements take on water. And talk to attorneys. That's perhaps the best part of my job, I'm not an attorney, but I get to talk to attorneys. Seriously, that I like.

David's Work Is Never Done

David's had another outstanding year. What makes a great year? Well basically many good listings and lots of happy, satisfied buyers. Those are the elements of a good year for any agent. But a great year? An outstanding year? To get it to that level you have to have fun. Lots of fun. David and Kevin, a solid team and a very good fit for each other, are going strong and enjoying their work. When not directly focusing on clients, they spent time working on [updikegaspari.com](http://updikegaspari.com) and marketing materials to compliment their web site and marketing efforts for their listings. Next week they are having their annual client party. I think the guest list was 104 people. That does not equate to 104 houses (please!). Clients often come in couples, there's the people who REFER those clients, and there's the support people Kevin and David count on to keep all of the balls in the air. For instance, I didn't buy anything from them this year yet I'm invited 'cause I'm a good content writer. And a good proof reader. (Dare I say that on page 17 when I'm bleary and likely to miss so many errors?)

Weren't The Elections Enthralling?

By coincidence the day the Big Equipment guy arrived to tear the front yard apart was two days after the November elections. Many results were in, but not all results. I had already scheduled the day off (and the night prior I hit the True Value store in Maple Leaf to stock up on cans of upside down orange spray paint). That Thursday I was up at 5:15 AM, very excited, couldn't sleep, the Big Equipment was coming! I started with the 3 paper and CNN. I had the election results coming at me all day long. I moved to the today Show from 7 to 9 and then back to CNN all day. I got to watch the Macaca guy resign (he made that word up, just ask him). I was watching when it was announced that the Democrats took the Senate. It was a great day. Excitement outside and excitement on the TV all day long. I can't imagine a better day (for me).

An Exact Quote From Last Year's Letter

" I'm saving all of the stuff about the house for NEXT YEAR'S letter.  
It'll give you something to look forward to. "

I lied. I didn't talk about the house at all. At least not the inside of it. My plan, last year, was to try and explain why I like this house so much. I was going to go room by room and tell you why my positive feelings for the house more than counter my negative feelings about having to drive on I-5 and Lake City Way. But now, I'm tired.

And now I'm at the end of 2006. I have exciting things to think about at work this week (tomorrow paperwork with Bruce and Donna, a few other agent interviews later in the week). I have an office Christmas party to plan (when you have 100 agents and staff you could have 200 people at a party). No small undertaking. I've got exciting things to think about and fun things to do this week. Thus I need to move on now. Plus I told myself that this year I was going to "power through this" (where did that phrase come from?) and only devote two days to it - these two, and now they are over.

Well the letter is done. And, this year, unlike years past, the mailing labels were PRE fussed and printed last week. **Michael Kuntz** "made" the envelopes months ago. **Tim Allen** picked up the 707 labels and the envelopes last week. I think **Tim's** stuck and sorted them all by now. I have no worries. Usually I have worries this week of the year. This is refreshing. I can sleep at night.

We've got three parties to attend next weekend. **David** and **Kevin's** client party, our office party, and then **Kent** and **Kevin's** personal holiday party. Three parties, three nights in a row, all held in the same house. Since nothing is happening here at the house in the woods there is no sign of the holidays here at all. No tree, no lights, no cards, nothing. Nothing you can SEE at least. I'm going to finish importing ALL of my Christmas CDs this week if it kills me. And it won't because I have no worries.

On Tuesday the 19th **David** and **I** fly to a place we've never been before: **Puerta Vallarta, Mexico**. This is the trip dreamed up by **David** and **Marsha** last spring. We've rented a 3 bedroom, 4 bathroom, top floor condo in the old part of town steps from the beach. **David** and **I** are there alone for 24 hours and then, on Wednesday, both **Marsha** and **Merritt** arrive. We're all there for a full week after that. **Merritt** speaks Spanish. I don't. **David** is worried about where we will eat on Christmas Day.

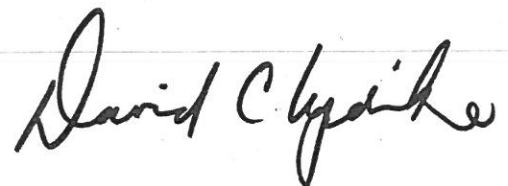
Goodbye to 2006. When we sign this letter it's as good as over. It's been a good year here, exciting and fun. **David** and **I** are in good health; **Inga**, who will be exactly 7 and 1/2 on Christmas Day, is in great health and still young; and both cats, **Calvin** and **Claire**, are alive tho' no one remembers how old they are (born, I think 1992, that would make them 14 now). Somehow we keep up with the mortgages and, after 21 plus years together, we still have things to say to each other over dinner in restaurants. (At home there's a TV on the wall in the kitchen with a Tivo box next to it! With Tivo there's always something ON and the pressure to have something to say is thus OFF.)

We sincerely hope life is a good for you and yours !

Keep in touch,



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