

# 2018

Saturday December 15th 2018

## *Holiday Greetings !*

To Our Family, Friends, Georgetown Neighbors, and Valued Clients:

I am 63 years old and most days I feel like I am running out of time. Take today for instance: I promised myself I was going to wake up, make espresso, skip reading the papers and immediately start writing this Christmas letter. I got up at 6:30 AM. I am sitting down to start this letter at 12:36 PM. It turns out I am not able to not read the papers with my morning coffee. And Opal expects a bit of attention each morning. And David expects a full breakfast when he returns from the gym on the weekends (meaning hash browns started from scratch with a potato I previously baked ~ I plan ahead). And it further turns out I am otherwise easily distracted: I just spent the last hour hanging art on walls. Now I'm looking at the clock and feeling a tremendous amount of pressure about this letter. David knows how much we've had going on of late, and now we are not yet fully moved, and the angst I have around getting our old house ready to be a rental, and he suggested it could just be a New Year's letter or even a Valentine's Day letter. But David wasn't with me at the dentist the three days ago when, as I was checking out, a woman working there addressed me by name and said, "We're all really looking forward to your Christmas letter." I was completely surprised. I had no idea we mail a letter to our dentist. And I was yanked out of my calm, relaxing afternoon by the awareness that the letter hasn't been started yet. Pressure.

This has not been a great year. When it started out we assumed (foolishly) that it would be a great year. After all, we were going to build a new house and move into it. How could it not be a great year?

Well, shit happens. This year it seems like a great deal of the shit in our lives was caused by death. In September my mom, just shy of her 88th birthday, died. And then, just a few days after Thanksgiving, David's mom, 95, died. In both cases there was the agonizing sadness of reconciling that it was their time to pass with simply not wanting to lose your mom. It wasn't shocking in either case: 87. 95. Brain power diminishing, the slow loss of muscle and mobility, the slow slipping away, it's just not shocking. What it is is monumentally sad. And in both our cases distance made all of this even harder.

I was in Seattle packing my bag to catch an early morning flight to Detroit when the phone rang at midnight. I could see it was my sister Lynn calling. Midnight here is 3:00 AM in Michigan. No one calls you at 3:00 AM with good news. While Lynn was at home sleeping, and Dad was in his apartment sleeping, and I was in Seattle packing a bag, mom died. In David's case the distance to Spokane is only 50 minutes on a plane or 5 hours by car. When David got the come now call he tried to book a flight but, as it was two days before Thanksgiving, every seat on every plane was booked. So he jumped in his car and drove. David made it to Spokane before his mom died, but as far as he could tell, she never knew he was there. Both David and I were amazingly lucky to have a sister in the city where our moms lived. My sister Lynn lived (lives) about 3 miles from my Mom and Dad's apartment. And David's sister Susan lives very close to the assisted living complex where David's mom lived. David and I often commented to each other how lucky and grateful we were to have sisters on site AND how guilty we felt for living far away and not being able to relieve our sisters of the great burden of all of this.

### **I Always Knew In The Back Of My Mind . . . . .**

Lynn and I were on the phone several times a day, each day, starting when Mom was first hospitalized. We were trying to judge how serious things were at first and whether or not Mom would bounce out of it. They turned into calls about when I should come. I was incredibly sad to be here and sorry I couldn't immediately be there. And then, once Lynn and I had a plan and I had plane tickets, the 3:00 AM phone call came. I always knew in the back of my mind that this was likely how this would go down. I knew I was 3,000 miles away. I had run this scenario in my mind many times over the last decade. But each time I'd start to worry or feel guilty about it, I'd think of what I call (to myself), "Our Driveway Moment" and I'd stop worrying and be okay about what I feared would likely happen someday. Because I believed my parents would be okay with it.

I drove out of Mom and Dad's driveway on West Warren Road in Westland, Michigan on Monday June 10th 1978. I have such a clear picture of day. I think of that morning, which in my mind I refer to as "Our Driveway Moment," whenever I question my being here so far away from them. I not only have clear memories of that moment. I have 40 year old photos of that morning.

I was driving alone to Seattle to start a new life. I was 22 years old.

I had a Ford 150 pickup truck with an open trailer that my dad made hitched to it. Months of planning went into making this moment happen. Dad and I drove to Flint where I traded in my car and purchased the used F-150 pickup on a used truck lot. We found it in a tiny add in the classifieds. Remember buying cars that way? Dad and I made the trailer using an old axle he had around, welding angle iron to it to make a base, and then using 2 X 4's and some plywood to build the sides of it. I helped him build it as much as I could and then we spray painted it using some old brown-ish paint he had around his shop. The three of us, Mom, Dad, and me, slowly loaded that trailer together in the week proceeding the driveway moment. It was like a jigsaw puzzle getting all of my stuff in there. Mom wrapped small things carefully and filled drawers and cabinets. Then she filled in the small gaps between the larger items. The pickup had a cover on it and that area was my mattress and sleeping bag and ice chest. I had no money for motels.

Never once during the weeks and weeks of planning that led up to this driveway moment, never once while working on the trailer with Dad, never once did either of my parents question my decision to relocate to a city I knew nothing about and had only visited once for a week. Not only did neither of my parents ever try to talk me out of making this move, they were nothing but fully supportive of it. Dad was 52 and mom was 47 the day I pulled away. This past June marked the 40th anniversary of our driveway moment. In the 40 years since I have never once heard either of my parents say they wished I hadn't moved, or express any regret over our distance issue. In fact, when I'd bring this up once or twice years later I was shut down by Dad who liked to talk of my job, my friends, the many houses David and I have lived in, and the life I made for myself here. Rather than any sort of regret or sadness from the two of them, I'd get a sense of pride that I made it. In keeping with my Dad's mantra that he just wanted everyone to be happy, he often told me how impressed he was with my success in establishing a full life here. I love both of my parents for happily helping me go.

### **I Just Read All Of That Back And, Ah, Wow**

Sorry. I certainly didn't mean to open a holiday letter like that, with so much sadness. But maybe all that only makes me sad. Anyway, it's what flew out of my fingers. (Fingers that are TRYING to not double space after each period ~ it's hard to not.) I have, sorry to say, another death on my mind. Then I'll move on. Promise. Three days before Thanksgiving I was at our post office box around 11:00 AM and my phone rang. It was a call from a friend telling me that another friend has just died. By just died I mean within the past hour or so. I was probably the 4th or 5th person to be giving this news. Unlike when an 87 year old, or a 95 year old, dies this was completely shocking. Our friend was home with his wife on Queen Anne and he died in his bathroom. He was 59. Likely heart issue, perhaps a heart attack. This hit me hard. I still can't stop thinking about it. He worked in my office, one of the real estate agents I manage, but our friendship had long since moved beyond the office to dinners with friends and great discussions about food and cocktails and places to go in Palm Springs and boats and planes. I had promised to have him and his partner and our two other friends (we were a band of six) over for dinner soon after our new house was finished. Now I'll never see him again. It was the third death for us this year and it came right between our Moms. I am really not going to miss 2018 at all.

### **In Life It Helps To Be Wealthy**

It turns out building a house when you are not wealthy is a lot harder than you would expect. Because we are not wealthy we could not afford to hire a traditional residential builder. We interviewed several of them but knew we could never get approved for a construction loan that would cover what that route would have cost. So we had no choice; we had to go in a different direction. We hired a spec builder who was paid a monthly fee for managing all of the subcontractors who built our house. There was no cost plus, there was no profit and overhead, there was no percentage at the bottom of a very long spreadsheet. What there were only three things: **1**, what something cost, **2**, sales tax on what it cost, and **3**, his fixed and very reasonable monthly fee.

Wait. I just remembered not everyone is in real estate. Let me tell you what the term "spec builder" means. You might hear someone say, "building on spec," it kinda refers

to the same thing. And please know I do not mean to be dismissive or disrespectful in my description. Neither do I know everything about the house developing biz. My terms might be wrong or off base. My understanding is that "a spec house" is a house that is being built on speculation that someone will buy it. It does not have an owner. Yet. It may not have an architect. It might come from existing plans sitting on a shelf that are "modified" to fit a certain building lot or density allowance. Think for a moment of all of the 3 floor townhouses with roof top decks going up everywhere in Seattle. If you have been in 17 of them you've been in all of them. I'm sure I've been in 100 of them which is why when I go in new ones now I think, "I've been in this floor plan before!" All of those homes are being built to go on the market on speculation. And a "spec builder" is the person who builds that townhouse or house. The spec builder may not be the owner of the land and may not be in charge of the plans and permits part of the project. That would be what is referred to as "the developer."

So you have the guy or gal who puts the project together with land and plans and permits and you have the guy or gal who builds the house, usually for a flat fee. It is possible for the developer and the builder to be the same person or have joint financial stakes in the project.

And it's possible I have no f'ing idea what I'm saying. That said let me stick my foot further in my mouth and say obviously the world of spec housing is about making money. In order to make a profit things need to be inexpensively done, or done as inexpensively as possible. And time is money so they need to be done fast, or as fast as possible. It is all about getting it built quickly and efficiently and to market so it can sell to some buyer at a profit.

Does any of that sound like David and Michael hiring an architect and thoughtfully designing and building a one of a kind house that is completely unlike any other house you've been in? Does any of that sound like the experience you think we might have been looking for? Whenever we'd want to slow down and think about an issue or a way of doing something our builder would talk about time and slowing things down. In his mind we needed to finish as fast as possible to get it to market. We'd point out that this house would not be going to market until 2031 at the earliest. And whenever we'd talk about cabinets or iron work or toilets whatever, he'd look at us and always say the same two words, "Sounds expensive."

Imagine what he had to put up with compared to what he usually does for a living. Two picky old gay men who've seen a lot of houses and who have a lot of high falutin' ideas but no wealth to back up their tastes and who want to take their time and savor every aspect of this once in a lifetime chance to build their custom dream home. Compared to slamming up a spec house for a developer who just wants to make a profit.

Our builder had an amazing rolodex and knew great people for almost every phase of the project. David and I researched and interviewed roofers and siders because we wanted a metal roof and metal siding. Have you ever seen a spec house with a metal roof? Have you ever seen a row of townhomes with metal siding? No, you have not. Metal takes time and money. In the end we ended up with a membrane roof and metal siding because we could not afford both.

David and I also found and brought to the project the window company (we had to or else we would have had white vinyl windows on a black house). And we insisted on using our cabinet maker even tho' he cost more than the cabinet makers for spec houses.

In the end we got the house we could afford. Well, wait, the jury's out on whether or not we can afford it still. Our interest only construction loan is going to convert to a regular 30 year fixed mortgage on January 1st and when we see our new payment, well maybe then we'll decide if we can afford this. We only have one charge card in our household and when we started it had a zero balance. This is no longer the case. People ask if we went over budget. They ask this because they assume we were smart enough to have a real budget when we started. What we had was a one page spreadsheet with numbers we pulled out of our \_\_\_\_\_. Well it had numbers on it. Like for appliances the number was \$15,000. I guess you could outfit a whole house with appliances for \$15,000. But we did not. So did we go over budget? Or was that number a fake number all along? Was it something I filled in on a form to bamboozle the bank into thinking we could afford to do this? I have other examples from that same form. But let's move on.

It turns out that it is very true that you get what you pay for in life. In building this house we got what we paid for. Of course we would have rather gone the full blown custom residential builder route with a cohesive team and a project manager who would have overseen things from day one to the end, but, well, we would never have been able to pull this off. But I was driven. I really wanted to make this happen. Against all odds. Against all better judgement on several points. We pushed this forward any way we could. We'd hit a block and I'd find away around it. Some of the road blocks were construction related, but most were money and bank and construction loan related.

I am so relieved that this is over. In the end I am typing this letter in our new house and I am grateful to be here.

### **A Quick Summation With Dates And Numbers**

As most of you know I can be quite obsessive about the oddest things. I thought it would be good to know how many days from start to finish it would take to build our new home. So on the first day I made an entry in my calendar (on my laptop) that said, "Day 001." Then, the next day, I started to type "Day 002" and before I could finish the word "day" my calendar auto-filled in "Day 001" again. Hmmm. My calendar finishes events and sentences and notations based on what I've done in the past. It turned out to not be as easy as I would have liked to do this BUT, complete nut that I am, I found a way to force my calendar to accept a new number each day. It involved duplicating "events" (like a previous day's number) and then editing that "event". This went on for 417 days. CrAZy. It's little wonder why I always feel like I have no time.

You'll notice there is a 10 day gap between when we were allowed to move into our new home and when we actually did. This is because at the start of the year we had to cancel a trip and get plane tickets and vacations packages refunded. This was sad, we did not want to cancel the trip, we wanted to go on the trip with our friends. But we were building a house and we're not wealthy so, no trip. But when the ticket money came back into our "Wallets" on Alaska Airline David saw that we had enough money to buy

FIRST CLASS round trip tickets from Seattle to New York. He found a set of tickets we could cover with the "wallet money" and we debated what to do. I was sad because we had to cancel our trip and I said the thought of going to Manhattan sitting in first class made me happy so do it. The tickets were for November, around Veteran's Day, and from a Thursday to a Tuesday. (We usually only travel around holidays, and always from a Thursday to a Tuesday, we don't like to be gone too long.) David asked what about the house? I said, "Oh don't worry, it's not going to take a year, we started in September last year, we'll be in by October this year, we'll be moved and settled by then, do it, buy them!"

And of course the house took longer and the City gave us occupancy three days before our Manhattan vacation. There was a brief debate about canceling Manhattan and moving but, well damn *we really love* Manhattan and I didn't want to give up those first class seats. Had we been in coach we might have bailed and moved in our house instead.

We also debated moving in a rush before we left in three days. I was uncomfortable with that level of chaos and leaving two houses in a state of disarray, and break-ins at the new place and it was just all too much. So we went to Manhattan and put thoughts of the house on hold.

I have tried so hard to block this from my mind, but looking at my calendar and the five days listed below, I see it there and now I'm thinking about how awful it was again. Day 286. Without a doubt the worst day of 2018 for me (aside from deaths).

- Day 001 • Monday, September 25th 2017 • A backhoe broke ground
- Day 286 • Saturday, July 7th 2018 • Major vandalism at job site
- Day 407 • Monday, November 5th 2018 • City of Seattle granted us occupancy
- Day 415 • Tuesday, November 13th 2018 • FINAL City of Seattle permit signed off
- Day 417 • Thursday, November 15th 2018 • Movers arrived, first night new house

I was in Palm Springs alone for a few days in July, around July 4th. David was in Seattle with Opal. David wanted to drive to Spokane to see his mom who was having some problems. And since I was gone he thought he'd just take Opal with him. We had had minor - minor ! - vandalism issues at the "job site" (meaning our new house right next door) a week or so prior so we both felt someone should be present at all times. My flight home was on Friday the 6th. I said to David leave on Friday, I'll be home by dinner time, I'll watch the job site, you go, it will all be fine. I got home, it was all fine, I walked the house, it was all looking great. The sheetrock was all up. All of it. Every room and closet and the garage, all "rocked." Next up was the mudding and taping and sanding. A definite milestone in the process starting on Saturday, the very next day.

On Saturday I wake up in our old house, I go to the kitchen to fire up the espresso machine, I collect the papers and I start to have my morning. At 7:00 AM I see cars of workers pulling up next door, at the job site. It is the mudding and taping crew. They use the contractor key box and they go in. A few minutes later I look out the window and something does not seem right. I hear yelling. It is in Spanish so I don't know what's going on but the tone was not good. I see running around. Workers running into the house, workers running out of the house, workers with a shovel heading to the street. I dress and get over there. They were going to the street to shut off the water main. The house was flooded. I go in the house and almost become sick to my stomach. It was so depressing to me, so upsetting. Only a fire burning it all to the ground could have been worse in my mind. I started having "Why me?" thought patterns much stronger and greater than when I was told I had a tumor in 2009. Honestly, this was more upsetting to me than my own cancer diagnosis.

Vandals had broken into the house to steal copper. The copper was pressurized with water. The plumbing was all installed and roughed in. They went upstairs to the ADU and ripped out about 14 inches of copper from the shower. Water gushed. All night long. The water filled up the ADU and flowed down into the garage and our master bedroom. In the master bathroom on the main floor they also tried to take some copper, failed at it, but managed to puncture a hole in a copper pipe that sprayed water into our pantry. All of the new sheetrock was toast. All of the insulation behind the sheetrock was soaking wet. There would be no mudding and taping today. Or for weeks. They also took all of the copper lines (by ripping them out of the sheetrocked walls, that went to the 4 "mini-splits" (little AC and heating units). And they clipped copper from electrical outlets. And the copper: In the ADU there is a separate electrical panel for the unit. Because that panel was in a wall that separates the ADU from our house, and because that wall was going to be plywood later, not sheetrock, they were able to see the whole panel. They cut every wire - EVERY WIRE - going into that panel. All of the "home runs" in the ADU were cut. To this day I wonder if Opal would have heard something and crazy barked.

Once the water was off and the gushing stopped and the mudding and taping crew was all gone, the rest of my day was giving policemen tours, filling out forms, and making a list of who I needed to start calling on Monday. Sub-contractors who thought their part of the job was over and who had moved on to their next spec house had to be called back. All of the wet insulation had to be trashed. Several subs basically had to start over. It was like losing six weeks of forward motion. And it was massively depressing to me.

### **Are We Old Now ?**

I've been writing and reading all day and at 5:00 PM David brought me a cocktail. We are the guys who have a cocktail and nuts every day of the week between five and Rachel Maddow (a.k.a., 6:00 PM). So we took a break for cocktails and a few snacks. While enjoying our Black Manhattans with cheese and crackers and nuts I turned on our new Direct TV service. I found an old episode of the *Dick Van Dyke Show* that had been "colorized" ~ the only thing on at five in the afternoon on a Saturday. So we're watching it and we are actually laughing and chuckling at jokes clean enough to be allowed on TV in the 1960s and prat falls. At one point we were both laughing hard and I turned to David and asked, "Are we old now?"

### Something That Drives Me Crazy

While watching Dick Van Dyke we saw a commercial for a drug with a made up name. I know you know what I mean. All of these drugs on TV being promoted, all with lengthy disclaimers at the end of the commercial, and all with stupid made up names. Why are drugs even being advertised to regular people? Are we supposed to go to our doctors and say, "Hey I saw a commercial on TV for ***New-Drug-With-A-Stupid-Made-Up-Name*** and I think you should prescribe it to me? But the part that really slays me is when they say as part of their lengthy disclaimer, "Do not take ***New-Drug-With-A-Stupid-Made-Up-Name*** if you are allergic to ***New-Drug-With-A-Stupid-Made-Up-Name***. Really?

### Speaking Of Annoying Medical Shit

Early in the year one of the 26 doctors that I have in my Rolodex thought that some number in some blood test of mine indicated that I might have Sleep Apnea. I laughed. Well, more like scoffed. I love sleeping and think it is one of the things I excel at. But I really like this particular doctor and want to stay in her stable so I agreed to check out a sleep clinic she sent me to in the Central Area. Home tests followed by over night tests in the sleep clinic (you have to actually try and sleep there) followed by interviews and charts and a trip to a sleep clinic on Union Hill Road in Redmond and **BINGO** you have Sleep Apnea. I only half believe it. Actually I don't believe it at all but I'm respecting their directions. I know this though: I used to love and sleeping. Now I don't due to a machine called CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure).

When I was a fairly new real estate agent, about 4 or 5 years into my career (this would be around 1990 or so), I was hired by an attorney to represent an Estate in Madrona where a vacant house that was owned by a gay couple was coming to market. I was going to be the listing agent. I did not know the couple. Both men had died of some new and strange ailment within months of each other. Prior to listing the house there was an estate sale to clear the stuff out of it. I went to that sale and I purchased two things. I have both of those things to this day and they are two of my favorite possessions. I'm oddly sentimental about things. These two items always make me think of the massive sadness of the HIV / AIDS crisis in the 1990s, which is sad, but they also remind me of how excited I was to be a real estate agent when I started in my thirties. No one knows what I think about when I see these items in my home, but I never pass them without thinking about these things and those times.

Case in point: The other day I came home and found dog treats in a large glass jar I have. I had to stop and immediately find something else to put the dog treats in and then run the large glass jar through the dishwasher. The jar is so large it barely fits height wise in the dishwasher. I keep the jar in the kitchen near storage containers. What David does not know about this jar (when I moved the dog treats I decided to tell him) is that in 2009 when I was sick as a dog from radiation and chemo Cherese made chicken soup on Capitol Hill and filled this huge jar with soup and brought it to me in Matthew's Beach. It was wonderful homemade chicken soup. I never use this jar without thinking of her and that time in my life. (I wonder if every hoarder has a story for every bottle they can't throw away?)

But I digress. Back to the two possessions from the Madrona estate sale:



One is duck TV lamp that also has 3 baby ducks that came with it. The baby ducks don't have lights, you just position them in front of the bigger mother duck which is the lamp. It was the very first TV lamp I ever purchased. Now I have about 30 of them. [Sidebar: When I asked our builder and his electrician for 15 electrical outlets in a row (so 30 plugs) on one wall about 7 feet off the floor all wired to the same switch they thought I was nuts. After they were in place every vendor, every sub, and every inspector who came in wanted to know why those plugs were there. I finally left 3 books on TV lamps on a table near the outlets for show and tell when questioned.]

The other possession from that early estate listing is a classic lava lamp. By classic I mean one of the original ones perfectly proportioned, gold metal, and a slightly blueish color with golden lava when fully operational. For years I kept this lava lamp on my bedside table and I called it the Lamp of Love. I'd turn it on when I was in the mood or when I thought it was about time and I'd joke with David that the "love light" was on. Today that lamp is on the "mantel" in our kitchen dining nook. On my bedside table there is a CPAP machine. Time marches on.

### **How About Some Not Annoying Dental Stuff**

One day I was complementing my dentist on what a nice job he did on the caps on my front teeth. As kid who always had terrible teeth, and as an adult who didn't care about teeth, and who would certainly never spend money on teeth, I was surprised to end up with top front teeth looking half way presentable. The idea of spending money on my teeth was so foreign to me. I can't see my teeth, but I can see a nice piece of art on my walls was always my reasoning. Plus I had grown accustomed to them, awful tho' they were. Plus they didn't prevent me from finding and lasting with David.

Anyway one thing led to another in the conversation with my dentist and the next thing I know I'm agreeing to modern day braces for my completely f'ed up lower teeth. The braces are called **Invisalign** and they are a full year commitment. You get these things they call "trays" and you put them on your teeth and wear them as many hours a day as you can. The trays are clear plastic. You can't see them. By the end of week two they are less clear however and starting to look yellow and nasty. They hope for 22 hours a day. Hah. They are lucky to get 16 hours out of one of my days. I won't wear them while eating or drinking in an attempt to keep them clear plastic (except for clear water) and I seem to eat and drink at least eight hours a day.

Anyway, I love them. I love wearing them. They are not uncomfortable. They are not hard to use or wear. They don't keep me awake or spoil my sleep. And I can tell they are working. Every aspect of these is exactly the opposite of every aspect of my CPAP machine. I got my first tray on June 27th. I get three trays every six weeks, each tray is good for two weeks. There are 26 trays all in all. I don't know how this ends or what happens after the 26th tray. I guess I'll find out in June. A very attractive waiter at Cheeky's saw me pop them out prior to lunch one day and he asked me if I'd mind a few questions. He was about to get them. He looked to be in his twenties. Kind of makes me wonder why I didn't do this in my twenties. I guess because I didn't have the money to afford them in my thirties. And they didn't exist. (The waiter told me his mom was footing the bill.)

Think of something you have absolutely zero interest in. I have zero interest in many things so for me this is an easy thing to do. Quickly, off the top of my head: football, golf, 23 and me, guns, ferrets, breweries, jazz, motorcycles, snow skiing, hunting. Look that's ten topics of zero interest to me in less than five seconds! But looking at those ten I realize for the purpose of my next topic they won't work. Some of you might like golf. I'm searching for something truly uninteresting to the broadest audience possible. Kilts. Bagpipes. Bagpipes, that's the ticket. We're gonna go with bagpipes.

Okay, you have zero interest in bagpipes. But others do. Others want bagpipes, and easy access to them. But it's going to require an election, people are going to have to vote on whether or not bagpipes should be allowed. You could easily vote against the bagpipes as you have zero interest in them but you think everyone should be happy and so you vote for the bagpipes. And the bagpipes win. And soon you start to regret your vote!

Not really regret it I guess. Again you have a live and let live philosophy, allow others their happiness. But soon you really become exasperated with bagpipes. First it is the bagpipe stores. They start popping up everywhere. EVERYWHERE. Your former vet becomes a bagpipe store. A hoagie place you used to love becomes a bagpipe store. Some of the, ah, deader retail strips in Seattle are now lined on both sides of the street with bagpipe stores. Huge bulletin boards on many streets become ads for bagpipe stores. You just passed a bagpipe store they yell out at you. Slow down, there's a bagpipe store at your next left. The retail landscape is now littered with bagpipe ads and stores. A Mexican restaurant you loved that was walking distance from your house closes and then - *surprise* - you learn it's going to become a place where they make bagpipes. And one of your favorite lunchtime reads, The Stranger, turns into nothing but full page ads for bagpipe stores.

And you still have zero interest in bagpipes. You know you are never going into a bagpipe store. To you it's just all wasted retail space, space that could have been something you'd find useful or enjoy, but now that's not gonna happen. Every time a bagpipe store opens up I just sigh deeply, roll my eyes, and think more places not for me. To me it's all just a waste of space.

I'm sure you were smart enough to figure this out but bagpipes = marijuana.

### **Sunday December 16th**

David actually helped me today and we got some serious shit done around here! Again my focus is supposed to be on getting this letter out but there's so much to do to get our old house empty. And then clean. And then ready to rent. To strangers. Complete strangers.

Our old house has a generous one car garage. We are not renting that out. We have an off street parking pad, a nice one, for two cars and that's where we parked for the last seven years. If i was good enough for us, it's good enough for complete strangers. We are renting he house, the lovely deck and yard spaces, and the parking pad. But I am covering the windows of the garage with butcher paper and not renting it.

It's going to be my storage locker, I just won't have to drive to get to it. I even had the deadbolt and knob lock changed and now only I have the key. (This annoys David although he knows the 4 digit code to open the big door to get his open house signs. I guess it's the principle of it.) David was in the mood to work today (very rare) so we began by emptying out the old garage. We filled my little pickup truck with stuff I won't be hoarding, and we cleaned the spider webs off the walls and vacuumed the floors. Then we moved storage cabinets into place and built rows of industrial metal shelving to hold file boxes filled with crap I have not seen in 17 years but can't seem part with.

Oh, and CDs. I think there are about seven boxes filled with CDs. Some are Mark and Dirk's. Some are Kevin and Kent's. When both of those couples last moved I scored their discarded CDs. But most are CDs David and I collected in our 30s and 40s. We were consumers then. (Jump from our 30s to our 60s and it's the opposite we find.) David was shocked when a few weeks ago a box arrived for me and I opened it up and it was a SONY 400 DISC CD PLAYER. ***Beyond old school.*** I had to search online to find one. Once I figured out the model number of the one I wanted it got easier to find one. Now that I don't have to clean fish poop out of a koi pond, and now that I have less garden to maintain, I am going to have the time to touch every CD in each of the 7 or 8 boxes. I'm going to revel in the liner notes. I might alphabetize. There will be sorting and debating and I'm going to pick out 390 of the best CDs we have and then fill the SONY 400 DISC CD PLAYER. I might make a spreadsheet. Lisa would. And yes, of course I love Pandora, but Jesus don't you just long to hear a full album with all of the songs the artist put on it in the order the artist put them there, the weak songs and the great songs, every once in awhile? I'm gonna be able to do that. Yup, that's my plan.

### **Highlights From 2018 That Were Fun And Worth Remembering**

As I said, not a great year in so many ways. I actually let David read the letter this year (I usually do not) since both our Moms were mentioned and I wanted to make sure I got it right and respectful. David read up to the cleaning of the garage part as that's all I had printed for him at the time and when he was finished he said, "God this is depressing." I promised him I'd try to end with some high notes. Here goes, our high notes.

#### **March = Sister's Birthday**

My sister's 60th birthday was March 1st. The realities of this house were not clear to me at the time so I was feeling flush. I bought round trip plane tickets for Lynn, and her husband Hugh, to fly from Detroit to visit us Palm Springs. I flew down a day prior to their arrival so I could clean the house and freshen things up and get the yard furniture out and so on. I think this trip might have been a big deal for them, getting away without, or from, their kids (who are grown now). And I think Lynn told me it had been many years since either she or Hugh had been on a plane. Detroit to Palm Springs is not an easy ticket to find but Detroit to LA is very easy to find. They flew into LA and snagged a rental car and thus got to experience real traffic, not Grand Blanc, Michigan traffic.

The first few days it was just the three of us. We had a great time. Hugh and Lynn really seemed to enjoy being there. We ate out at several places I wanted them to see. We went to Joshua Tree. I don't remember if we did the Tram or not. (I lose track of the Tram after how many times I've been up it.) David flew in for Lynn and Hugh's last two

days (he had to work back home) and joined us for some good meals their last nights there. The best part is Lynn had a camera. Not a cell phone, an actual camera. She was taking pictures galore. She got some amazing photos of hummingbirds. It was a great week and the first time my sister and I got to spend time together separate from our parents and the rest of our small clan back in Michigan. Oh, and the weather was perfect for them the whole time.

### **March = Rebecca and Chereese Visit**

As you know, Chereese and Rebecca chose Austin, Texas over us. They have retired there as opposed to Palm Springs where I think we'll end up. What can you do? Of course Chereese is actually not retired at all but, as I said to David when I handed him the first ten pages of this to read, "Remember *The Lifespan of a Fact*. I'm the Bobby Cannavale character." Not quite sure on these facts but pretty sure Chereese comes to Seattle every March to manage the annual stockholder's meeting for Starbucks. We know they are coming again this March so that must be what it's for.

Anyway they stayed with us in Georgetown. They're pretty busy and come and go often while here but using our house as home base means we at least get to start or end our days together. There were many cocktails. There were great meals. But without a doubt the highlight of their visit was seeing *Hamilton* together at a Sunday matinee at the Paramount. I scored some amazing seats thanks to an old tenant turned client of ours. And the best part? The road show production that we saw in Seattle was better than the production we saw on Broadway in New York. We were all so happy and thrilled to get to see it together.

### **How To Tell When The Me Too Movement Has Gone Off The Rails**

Was it when they drummed Al Franken out of office? Perhaps. For me that was the first indication. I am certainly not against the Me Too movement. I'm as happy as can be that Bill Cosby is sitting in a jail alone in Pennsylvania. And it seems that Matt Lauer and the rest of them are mostly getting what they deserve. But can I draw the line at attacking two deceased song writers from the 1940s? Frank and Lynn Loesser, a married couple, wrote one of my absolute favorite songs in 1944. It is a duet for a man and a woman. It has been covered by countless singers. One of my favorite covers is by Barry Manilow and a woman I don't know named K.T. Oslin. (I don't know her but she has a great voice and is perfect for this song.) The song is *Baby It's Cold Outside*. If you don't know it I don't even know what to say. I really don't think Frank and Lynn were thinking about date rape in 1944 when they wrote this song. If loving this song unconditionally puts me at permanent odds with the Me Too Movement, well that's fine with me.

### **April = Another Fateful Palm Springs Trip**

Still not understand how un-flush we would be once this house was finished, I decided it would be nice to take my old friend Michael Kuntz to Palm Springs. I've know Michael since 1978 (he'll correct me if I'm a year off) and perceive him as someone who doesn't get out much (he'll correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm not). Also he is recently divorced. So I purchased round trip tickets from Seattle to Palm Springs and we were off.

We flew down together on a Thursday and we flew back together on the next Tuesday. Simple and easy, my typical "long weekend" trip wherein I leave on a Thursday and return to Seattle on a Tuesday. Michael and I get there, settle in to the house, and then head out for late afternoon cocktails with Matt Ketchum, a graphic designer from Seattle who has now moved to Palm Springs, and his recently married husband. Michael and Matt are good friends from years of producing the GSBA Guide together, before Michael retired he was a graphic designer as well.


Now I don't remember if this cocktail hour was the very first day we got down there or if it was the next day. But there we are at **849** having martinis and Matt says to Michael, "You ought to move down here." And Michael responds, "I think I will." And there you have it. Michael, I think, had never been to Palm Springs before and had only been there about 7 hours (or 31 hours) when this happy hour was happening. Rash decision? Un-informed? Out of the blue? Yes, I think all of those things. But I have seen this exact thing happen before. In 2001 when David and I bought our first tiny house down there we invited Surrey Tribble to visit. Surrey returned to Seattle, had us put his house here on the market, and he moved into our house there. Surrey lived in our house before we did. Now, about 18 years later, Surrey lives in Palm Springs still, teaches school there, and is about to retire.

Michael returns to Seattle, sorts through all of his possessions in his condo, purges most of it (the furniture) and boxes up the rest of it (the stuff). And then somehow Tim Allen gets involved and Tim drives all of the stuff to our house in Palm Springs in a one way truck rental. Tim vacations there for a few days and then Michael flies him back to Seattle. Now Michael is living in our house in Palm Springs, our garage is filled with his stuff, and David is getting ready to bring his wonderful condo in Seattle to market. It's the Surrey Tribble sequence all over again. And I want to go on record as having been fully supportive of this crAZy spontaneous plan since the martinis at **849**. So much of this makes a lot of sense. Plus my BFF in the WWW, Lisa, lives one half mile from our house in Palm Springs. She too retired and moved there with her husband Eric. Michael and Lisa met through me (but how, it was pre-Facebook I'm certain) and are good friends sharing many interests. Someday I'll be down there and will join them.

We are, by the way, full service real estate brokers. If you have a house to list (with David) we have a house you can live in while you make the transition.

If any of the details in the above story are not exact save your breath and read, ***The Lifespan of a Fact***. Again I'm the Bobby Cannavale character. You get the gist of it.

### **May = A Huge Improvement In My Working Life**

I have had my job managing the Windermere Eastlake office for 21 years. I feel blessed to have a career that I love for that long a period of time. In May good things got a whole lot better for me. Well for all of us. Our office moved to a waterfront building on Lake Union. I ended up with a nicely sized office with a water view from my desk. And - lucky for me - it's a north facing water view. (I don't like direct sun when I'm working, and I hate glare on my laptop screen. If need a view I can head out to our west and south facing deck and make cell phone calls!) We are now located at 1177 Fairview Avenue North. It is just north of I  Sushi. We have a really cool and interesting sign out front.

## August = We Really Start To "kerf" Our House Out

On August 28th, which happens to be David's birthday, Nathan Hartman, the owner of kerf Design, began delivering our cabinet package to our new home. If you haven't been skimming this letter you'll recall that David and I had to really to stand our ground in order to use kerf. The bank would have been happy with Ikea. Our builder knew a guy who would cost less. But David and I knew what it would be like to work with Nathan and what we would end up with. I could go on and on and on about how wonderful it is to work with Nathan, his can do attitude, and what a problem solver he is. But I won't. I'm going to limit myself to three things that we marvel over daily here.

1.

Our range, which weighs a ton) was an inch lower than our countertops. Albert Lee just said "Huh" and left. Our builder shrugged his shoulders. Everyone said you can't just lift a Wolf range up an inch. Nathan comes here one day to continue putting in cabinets and we say we don't know what to do about this. David and I head over to our other house for lunch. We come back less than 45 minutes later and Nathan, alone, has somehow put something under each leg (in the back it's wheels) and raised the range up and perfectly leveled it with the countertop on each side. He asks if we want him to trim out the front of the range so you can't see under it. We are so happy.

2.

David bought two huge medicine cabinets for our master bath. They have lights in the mirrors and electrical outlets in the cabinets. They are meant to be sunk in the wall but for various reasons we had to surface mount them. But this meant that on each cabinet romex - electrical wire was sticking out of the side of each cabinet and the cabinet sides were unfinished. I have an idea. I run my half-baked idea by Nathan. The next time he comes here he has taken my idea, made it better, and completely trimmed out these two medicine cabinets so they look like this is what we planned all along. We are so happy.

3.

Our house has an iron bridge in it. At either end of the bridge there is a pony wall, a short wall. The bridge sides come up to code height, which is almost the height of the pony walls (I was the one who kept trying to explain this to the framers but I don't speak Spanish.) It was all almost the same height when finished but the "hand rail" part of the bridge was completely unfinished and ugly. Again I run my ideas past Nathan. Weeks go by. He's measuring up there, he's mocking things up with wood and laminate, one day he brings in this very awkward long hand rail that he's testing out and then he takes it away. Finally, he brings in the finished two pieces (2 pony walls touching 2 "hand rail" sides of the bridge) and he puts it all together. I was not here when this was happening. I came in to see it in place and finished. And I was so happy. So impressed. I really thought this whole area was a gamble but what Nathan did just pulled it all together in a way even I didn't see. I am telling all of this to Nathan as he's doing something else and he says, "Yeah, that was the most difficult thing I've done in a long time. And the most rewarding."

**That was the experience David and I were looking for.**

### October = It's All About Rebecca

Rebecca's 65th birthday was October 1st. Cherese had a gig in Manhattan that week so the two of them were going to be there. Cherese texts us and asks if there's any chance we'd want to surprise her, join them there. We say oh we just can't. Plus we're going there in November. But shortly after the texting is over David checks flights on the Alaska site and finds tickets in coach that just aren't that bad. And we do need miles to keep our status up. If we leave Seattle on a Sunday we'd be there on Monday for her birthday and then we could fly home on Tuesday. And that's what we did. We both got there around four in the afternoon. Them from Austin, us from Seattle. We got to our hotel, dropped bags, and rushed to a coffee shop in the Village that we like. We planted ourselves on a bench out front and waited. Eventually Cherese and Rebecca were walking by (there is a boat load of texting going on) and Cherese said I'm going in here for a coffee wait for me outside. And - this was so perfect - Rebecca said but there's nowhere to sit. And we both dropped our newspapers down so she could see us on the bench and we said, "You can sit here with us." We were only there two nights, one full day. All we did was eat great meals and visit fancy cocktail lounges. We never went to Times Square. Best trip ever. It was so short there wasn't time to really do stuff, there was only time to visit and walk in the greatest city in the world

### October = It's Also All About Windermere

Long story short, Windermere was holding an education convention in Palm Springs for brokers who work in any Windermere office in any city in any state where there are Windermere offices (this is many, more than even I know). David and I flew down on my birthday - October 11th - and got the house and yard ready. And dealt with the caterer. And had a few days to ourselves as the convention wasn't until Monday the 15th. That Monday David and I rushed home from the convention center. Tracie, my awesome admin at work for all of my 21 years there (she's been there longer than me) and her husband Paul were staying at our house so they let the caterers in. And Dirk was around to help. By time David and I got there it as ready to go. We hosted an event for agents from Seattle at our house. There was a bartender and a full bar and cocktail party food. It was a great night. We were happy we could provide the venue for this.

### Bohemian Rhapsody Rules

Once in a while a big movie opens and I offer to pay the admission price (at a matinee) for any agent in my office who wants to skip work that day and go to the movies. This year that movie was ***Bohemian Rhapsody***. Those of us who went had a great time. I was so happy to see this movie. I loved it. And I loved even more reading in the Wall Street Journal (December 11th) that ***Bohemian Rhapsody*** is now the most streamed classic rock song of all time.

### November = Manhattan With Doing Stuff

Thursday to Tuesday, first class tickets, VRBO in the heart of the West Village, just the two of us, more lounges and nice restaurants, went to the **9/11 Museum** which was breathtaking, and saw three plays on Broadway: **Torch Song**, **The Cher Show**, and **The Lifespan of a Fact**. If we could go there three times a year, we would.

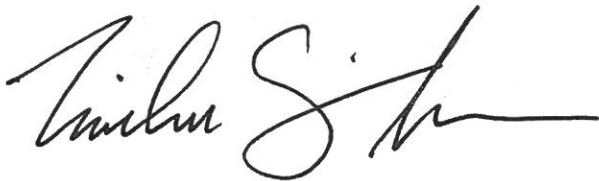
### Addiction

There seem to be a lot movies and TV shows and Netflix things centered around drugs. I am so over it. I watched one episode of Breaking Bad, the first. Now there are movies about beautiful boys dealing with addiction and popping up unannounced at the holidays. I don't plan on seeing any of them. I get it. I eat a large bag of Tim's Cascade Jalapeño Potato Chips weekly so I think I know a thing or two about addiction.

### Politics

More addiction. I just can't stop watching it. If I am home CNN is on. The Today Show, Rachel Maddow, Chris Como, Anderson Cooper, Reliable Sources, The Daily Show, Don Lemon, Seth Meyers - this is addiction. We recently went two weeks without television service in our new house (we still had it in the old house so we left one TV there) and I was very unhappy. I watched every minute of the Kavanaugh hearings. Oh, and Saturday Night Live, can't forget that. One of the funniest things I can remember from the past year was the opening sketch on Saturday Night Live where Matt Damon played Brett Kavanaugh. I'll watch that on YouTube now and then cause it's just funny.

# Happy Holidays!



**Michael Nelson**

michael@nelsonupdike.com



**David Updike**

david@davidupdike.net

206-328-2145

206-329-0484

[ Both of those are cell phone numbers and get both texts and emails ]

[ If you use Twitter you can find Michael here: @SeattleMichaelN ]

[ And if I ever find the time, maybe someday: <http://www.nowthetruthcanbetold.com> ]