



2019

Monday, December 2nd

Holiday Greetings !

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

Now we live in a time when there are people who are known as "influencers." I guess they have a whole lotta likes on Facebook or Instagram. Supposedly they are trustworthy and have authenticity. And they have "followers" galore. I hear they have the power to affect decisions I make, mostly around the purchasing of items. And I hear they somehow make money by virtue of being an influencer. I have absolutely no idea who these people are or who gives them money. But I am pretty sure they have never affected any of my decisions. Just today I bought 34 carpet tiles for our home from Flor. I went to flor.com and just did it with no one influencing me at all. Except David of course; David picked the pattern and color. David ALWAYS gets to pick the pattern and color and finish. That's just how it is. There is not one surface in this house that I picked. David chose all of the colors, the tiles, the countertops, the finish on hinges and door knobs, the plumbing fixtures, and so on. Wait. There was *one* surface I held out for and finally got: all of the plywood walls and their placement in specific areas of our home.

A week ago we purchased 4 small tables from West Elm for sitting drinks on near our couch. Our friend Frank refers to this as our "soft seating" area, a term we like but that I also make fun of in a mocking sorta way. Mostly because it is taking so darn long to finish it. Partially this is because David likes to drag out a decision. Rapid decisions are just not possible. I can pick a color on a computer screen; David needs to order samples. Samples add time. I just want a chair to sit in so I can read a book. The chairs finally selected (after the samples arrived) by Frank and David are ten to twelve weeks out. Our "living room" is taking over a year to pull together.

Frank is definitely helping. Frank also got to help look at all of the tables online and rank them. I went to the West Elm store across from Whole Foods and made the final decision. Definitely, for the soft seating area in our new home, Frank is an influencer. But alone in the West Elm store I was the one who made the final decision. You know what really influenced my final decision? The tables I settled on were 25% off AND had free shipping that day only. All of a sudden our 3rd choice table became my 1st choice table!

You'd think I'd be known as an influencer. I've been influencing people for 34 years now about housing, neighborhoods, mortgages, rentals, condos vs houses, commutes, and so on. And now that that mantle has been taken over by David, I've moved on to a new area of influence: careers.

For the last 23 years I've managed a good sized real estate office for Windermere Real Estate Company. I have 63 brokers working under me and only about 10 of them were working as real estate agents when I influenced them to come work at my office. The other 50 or so brokers working with me today were in some other random field when we first met and I influenced their career change. I have two other "influencing sessions" (a.k.a., interviews) scheduled with people who are not involved in real estate in any way in this coming week.

Sidebar: I am an old dog and I'm only willing to learn a new trick *if I like the trick*. I really need to like the trick. Right now I am struggling with only spacing ONCE after each period. I have been typing (fast and surely) since I was 15 years old so that's 50 consecutive years of spacing TWICE after each punctuation mark. As I type this letter I have to stop constantly and go back and remove spaces. I can't make my fingers or mind space just once. But I am trying. Not because I like this new trick, but because I'm sick of a few people nagging me about it.

Likewise the preceding paragraph wherein I use the terms "agent" and "broker." Another new trick that I do not like. I love the phrase "real estate agent" and that is the phrase that comes to mind and rolls off my tongue. I became a real estate agent 34 years ago and that's how I think of myself. Anytime anyone asks me what I do, I don't say, "manage an office." I don't say, "Branch Manager." I always say, "I'm a real estate agent," first and then clarify later that I haven't sold a house in 23 years. Anyway, my point, and I did have one, was that a few years ago the Department of Licensing in Olympia decided to change the term for me from agent to broker. Curiously, at the same time, the cost to be a broker went up. Way up. Their new broker's license cost way more than their old agent's license did. Nothing else changed, no new requirements, (well fingerprinting was added, so that was new), but mostly it seemed like a name change to increase revenue.

I am not a fan of the word broker except for when it's applied to a mortgage lender, i.e., mortgage broker. Other than that one usage, I find the word broker somewhat ominous. So, like the spaces after a period, I struggle to make myself say "real estate broker" while my mind is saying "real estate agent" over and over and over.

This all reminds me of a new phrase that I learned just this week: **Ok Boomer**:

The phrase "**OK Boomer**" is a pejorative retort used to dismiss or mock perceived narrow-minded, outdated, negatively-judgemental, or condescending attitudes of older people, particularly baby **boomers**.

I love a good mocking phrase, even when it is aimed at me. I am already adopting this phrase when David is going on about something. "Ok Boomer" is my new "Whatever!"

32 Years And Counting

Welcome to my annual holiday letter. I probably should have lead with that, right? This is my household's year end holiday letter in case you are new to this this year (some people are). Happy holidays, happy end of year tradition stuff, happy food consumption, happy parties to show up at and performances to attend. Try not to let yourself get stressed out. That's my goal. Mostly around the writing of this letter and the process of getting it out, but I also don't let gift shopping stress me out (I just don't do it), or holiday events (we get invited to so few as we get older), or decorating (we run off to Palm Springs in about 15 days and since we're always out of town between the holidays we just don't decorate.)

This is my 32nd letter. Other than David and real estate, there is nothing I've ever done for 32 years. Well, besides continue to breathe. Which, if you've eaten a meal with me in the last 10 years, you know is touch and go! In order to psych myself to write this letter, to get in the mood as it were, I often go back and read the previous year's letter. This year I went back two years and re-read 2017 and 2018.

Time seems to be moving faster. In 2017 I had two living parents who had an apartment of their own, and lived on their own, in Grand Blanc, Michigan. Now, in 2019, I have joined the ranks of my friends who has lost both of their parents. Mom died in September of 2018 and my Dad followed her by exactly nine months: Mom September 25th of 2018 and Dad June 26th of 2019. A whole lot of loss in less than a years's span. But it often happens that way with older couples from what I've heard and read. I think of each of my parents almost daily. Mostly as it relates to the many odd quirks that I have (thanks Mom) and my ability to charm people (thanks Dad). I don't want to dive into a pool of sadness here so let me quickly move on.

I Am Paying Attention !

And, largely because of living with me, David is mostly paying attention too, sometimes against his will. Politics. All of the talking heads on TV. The Impeachment Hearings. All of the witness testimony prior to the actual trail and now, this week, the trial itself. I am watching. I am paying attention. I have it on all of the time. (Currently muted so I can write.) I wake up and find my recorded copy of *The Today Show*. (I like the opening 5 minutes and since I tape it, it's always seven AM no matter how long I stay in bed.) After I can't stand *The Today Show* anymore, I just alternate between MSNBC and CNN until bedtime. Unless I'm in my car: Thank the baby Jesus for NPR.

I'm not sure this letter just moved in a better direction. I've jumped from a pool of sadness to the swamp of Washington DC. I'd share with you all of my thoughts and opinions on everything going on but, well who cares what I think? Let me save us some time. I'll tell you who David and I record *daily* on our DVR and you can guess how we feel about things. You can guess what camp we are in. Mind you we do not watch all of these shows every day. We merely record them. In case. In case something happens. In case we have the time to watch them later. And they don't pile up because you can set a DVR to save only one show. Basic talking heads and their news shows we save for only two days. Fiction we save for ten days before it auto deletes.

If my Dad were reading this he'd say, "CNN is fiction." Yup. A Michigan Trump voter. It made my sister and me crAZy. We'd complain and he'd say he was voting for Trump for us, to make the country better for Lynn and me when he was gone. I'd have to watch Fox News at his place.

I love DVRs. Remember the first VCRs that came out? They were the size and weight of a suitcase filled with pebbles. And they were so cumbersome to set anything up to record on. And by record I mean on tape on a video cassette. David and I bought one as soon as they were commonly available (circa 1986 if I recall correctly). For that matter remember places like Magnolia Hi-Fi? I think it was on Roosevelt near 60th. David and I could not spend money in that store fast enough. I remember our first DVR, top of the line at the time, cost us \$800 and we thought money be damned, we must have this! Then came the laser disc decade . . . there's a pile of money I want back!

Back to understanding our household based on what we record. And please remember that prior to any of this there is the *New York Times*. On our doorstep. An actual newspaper printed on paper rolled up in a plastic bag and delivered to our doorstep. All days start with espresso and the New York Times. We do read. Then we pick and choose from this list:

What And Who We Pay Attention To

The View

Anderson Cooper

Chris Cuomo

Don Lemon

Rachel Maddow

Bill Maher (*Real Time with Bill Maher*)

Stephen Colbert (*The Late Show*)

Seth Meyers (*Late Night with Seth Meyers*)

John Oliver (*Last Week Tonight*)

Trevor Noah (*The Daily Show*)

Brian Stelter (*Reliable Sources*)

60 Minutes

and, of course, *Saturday Night Live*

Of all of those shows the one that is most likely to be watched daily, at least the first 20 minutes of it, is *The Rachel Maddow Show*. This is because "Rachel" (as we call her in this household) happens to come at the exact same time we are most likely to have our end of the day cocktail. At ten minutes to six David usually calls out, "Would you like a drink?" (a most unnecessary question). Since the house is mostly one large open space, I can hear him wherever I happen to be and respond, "Yes, that would be nice." He asks what and I usually say surprise me. A few minutes later David calls out, "Rachel's on," and the next thing you know we are sitting in our dining nook with salted nuts and some cheese and crackers and our cocktails. Opal is at our feet. Rachel comes on and our evening of surfing through the many recorded liberal television offerings begins. After we get the gist of where Rachel is going with her story of the day, one of us says, "Should I start dinner?"

Saturday December 7th

I always know this is Pearl Harbor day even without being told. I wake up and I know it, kinda like 9/11 now. One of those days I lived through and the other was just drilled into me in school as a child. Saturday. Sadly this year there was more bad news around this historical date.

Other than a couple of dog walks through the 'hood, I have nothing I have to do today but this. I think it's time to open the calendar on my laptop and scroll back to January and take a final trip down 2019's Memory Lane. (I do miss the days of our large paper wall calendar filled with notes made in many colored inks, but alas, the future.)

Don't Worry We Are Gonna Move Soon

We were tortured by teeny tiny black ants in our first Georgetown house. Only in our kitchen, but annoyingly so. I'd spray them with Windex and wipe them up with paper towels. After awhile I'd just smash them with my finger to save time. It was an old house and I just figured it was part of the deal. I knew it wasn't us - we are obsessively clean and tidy as only two old gay men can be. So I'd say to David, "Don't worry we are gonna move soon. When the new house is finished, with its 38" tall concrete base, ants won't be coming in. It's all gonna be great." We were not in this new house a month before we started having the same teeny tiny black ant problems again. At first this was massively depressing (to me), especially coming after the agony of the construction wrap up and moving process. Ants were all over the kitchen. We could see them coming out of electrical outlets over our kitchen counter. Obviously the 38" base of concrete meant nothing to them. One day David called me upstairs to the guest bathroom. The ants were all over the floor and toilet. I lifted the lid off the tank and it was filled with swimming ants. We are on the second floor! There is no food on this floor. WTF are they doing? We have a ADU on the back of the house, over our garage. We were using it as an Airbnb. We are out to dinner at some friends and I start getting text after text. Our Airbnb guests were freaked out by a line of ants walking in a line from one end of the apartment to the other, through the bedroom. They packed up and left. I wanted to go with them.

A week or so later I happened to see a pest control truck on our street while walking Opal. We literally stopped and waited. Opal was confused. A guy returning to the truck was carrying ant spraying gear and was in a uniform and I greeted him and we engaged. We talked ants for a

for about 20 minutes. I got his card, had his firm bid the two side-by-side houses (our new house and the now rental house) and I hired them and paid for a year in advance on both houses (you get a discount). They now come quarterly to both houses and they come in-between scheduled quarterly visits if I'm having a special ant crisis. David and I also bought off the shelf and spray stuff at Home Depot and liberally use it, in doors and out when the ants reappear. At first I was worried about the chemicals and the plants and dog and us - is it bad for us? - and so on. Yes I guess the chemicals could kill me. But the ants were making me suicidal so it's a toss up.

January Michigan Trip

For the past 20 years David and I have spent the weekend around Martin Luther King Junior's birthday in Palm Springs. First as tourists, then as homeowners. But this year I went to Michigan instead. Mom had passed the year prior and Dad was alone in his apartment.

Coming up on one year later now and it's hard to fully get that Dad is not here. This this trip in May ended up being my second to last and thankfully it was a great trip. Obviously in retrospect I'm extremely glad I made it. Dad was living on his own, we took him out to dinners and for drives, we had a great visit. My sister, Lynn, had been doing all of the heavy lifting on her own (her family lived less than 3 miles from Dad's apartment) and it felt great to give her a brief break. It was the last visit when the end was not quite so near and clear.

Solar Panels ~ Perhaps I Was Wrong

Did you know the LEAST amount of money the City of Seattle can charge you for electricity each month is \$5.40? Yup, I'm looking at our bill which just came last week and the amount is \$5.40. That is their base charge. Our last 9 bills have been for \$5.40. I finally called them last week just to confirm that everything was proper. They helped me "read" my bill. Last month our solar panels generated 1005 kilowatts. Last month our house used 370 kilowatts. The unused 635 kilowatts went back to the electric company. And we were billed \$5.40

Don't be too envious. Don't be jealous. Do this math: We are paying \$478 a month to a credit union in Olympia to cover the payment on the loan they arranged for us with our solar company to put the 40 solar panels on our roof. See? We are paying \$478 in order to only be billed \$5.40. I keep saying to David \$478 is like having a car payment! Speaking of cars, I have not been to a gas station in over two years. My car is all electric. Those 370 kilowatts our house used *included* keeping my car on the road.

Getting solar panels is not cheap. And of course, using my "in for a penny, in for a pound" way of living, if 40 solar panels can fit on our roof, then let's get 40. Yeah we could have paid way less and only gotten 20 panels but, well, if I'm gonna do something, I'm really gonna do it. If we are doing all of this paperwork with the solar company, and paperwork with this credit union they are hooked up with, and filing out all of these State of Washington incentive forms, and dealing with permits and City Light, well . . . why do it part way? I'm all in kinda guy.

I remember there was a huge RUSH to get this paperwork filed before January 1st. David started all of this in November as the house was being wrapped up. I remember mocking this whole idea

by asking things like how many years could we pay our monthly electric bill for what this is costing us? What if I don't live long enough to get all of the incentives back? I was at death's door once already I'd remind him. But he wanted solar panels. David felt our house deserved solar panels. And then I got caught up in the idea that this huge statewide incentive program was about to end (on December 31st, evidently it didn't get funding in the new State budget). So we rushed and did it. We were told we'd get incentive checks. I didn't pay attention to how often (really, I didn't). But I did take notice when a check arrived out of the blue last week for \$1,335. It was from the State of Washington and it actually had the word "incentive" on it. It may take 10 years to see if all this pencils out or not. For now tho' I love getting electric bills for five dollars.

OH - I just remembered (speaking of how this is going to pencil out) last year, well in April of this year is what I mean, I was sure David and I were going to OWE the IRS some money for the 2018 tax year even after all of the money David and I paid them during that year. The day Marci calls me to tell us she's finished with our return (OUR RETURN! Finally we get to file ONE joint return as a married couple), I learn we are not going to have to pay any money to the IRS and in fact we were getting something like \$9,000 back from them. I was surprised and obviously, pleased. We got to use some Federal solar panel tax credit for just shy of \$10,000.

Yes, this all sounds great but don't forget we still have a \$30,000 loan with that random credit union in Olympia. Our solar panels might take years to break even. If I were more careful with money I'd track all of this. \$30,000 thousand dollars out to start and then small amounts in here and there. I wonder how the monthly interest on the loan at the credit union compares to what we are NOT paying on our light bill each month. If I were better with money, and if I cared more, I'd have a spreadsheet.

February Snow Days

David and I went to Palm Springs the first weekend in February to make up for not going over MLK's holiday weekend. Always a relaxing lovely time. The weather there is, have I ever told you? always warm and lovely. The day we came back to Seattle it was snowing. A lot. Our plane landed and then the airport sorta shut down. Flights out were cancelled for a day or two and Seattle did that thing Seattle does when snow sticks around for two or more days: it shut down. I used the down time to place all 20 of my TV lamps on shelves specifically designed for them (by me) in advance. Then I started to unpack our books and fit those books around the TV lamps.

We Go To Austin Now

Annually. It feels like we are going to be doing this annually. Cherese and Rebecca left us for Austin years ago. So we go there to see them. (Friends leaving us could have been the central theme of this letter this year but don't get me started.) We were only in Austin for the three day holiday weekend (President's Day) but it felt like we ate enough food for a full week. Lots of nice cocktail bars, lots of great restaurants, quite the food scene. We always try to use any three day holiday weekend for a short get-a-way because I am an employee and my office closes on those Federal holiday that create those three day weekends. This is something agents (i.e., independent contractors) never even think about. They don't have to. I'm an employee; I have to.

March PRE Gardening Days

Ah, spring. All I can think about is buds on trees and plants in our very manageable front courtyard and the equally manageable planting areas I have created near our front door and on the alley side of our house on either side of our garage. I met a guy. Previously, back in 2016, he worked here on our old house when he was the employee of the contractor we hired. Back then decks were being dismantled, cut back, and then re-built so they didn't cross over the property line (know in my business as "encroachments") between our old house on Flora and our soon to be new house on Flora. So this guy worked here on carpentry projects but not directly for me. Let's call this guy CVV. I am not supposed to give out his name as he has a full time carpentry job and doesn't really take side work. I don't remember how, but somehow I managed to stay in touch with CVV long after the work on the old house stopped. Once the encroachment was cleared the backhoe came in and, well, there was no need for carpentry during the construction years. But somehow, and I honestly don't remember how anymore, I managed to get CVV's phone number and stay in touch by text for two plus years.

Fast forward to the spring of 2019. Once again David and I are living in an unfinished house. We don't have front steps, let alone a front porch. We have sliders off our kitchen with a drop that would not have been dangerous when we were 35 but seems dangerous now. And there is the area where 3 doors open onto another drop and no one who sees it understands what this area is meant to be. Decks are needed. And privacy fences are needed. And gates, many gates. And posts planted in perfect straight lines are needed. I had a vision but I needed a really good carpenter to pull it all together.

Somehow I managed to charm CVV with my winning personality (again, thanks Dad) into taking on ALL of this work on for us. I kept emphasizing it could be at his pace and that we'd schedule around his real job completely. This was a back burner project when he had the time. This worked perfectly because I was in no rush to do this work. I just wanted to work with someone I liked and who had infinite patience since I was making this up as I went. In my mind I have a vision of what I want when it's finished, but I tweak it in real time as it's being built. CVV did the fence first. Slowly because staining each board a different shade of black or brown or grey was my job. I bought pure pine tar on the internet and had it shipped from the East Coast. CVV sized and cut and sorted all of the boards; I set up a staining area off the kitchen where a deck should be and most sunny days in the spring I was out there listening to music and staining boards various shades of brown, black, and grey and natural. CVV would check in by text to see if there were enough boards finished and ready to be put up to make it worth his coming here for a day or so on his weekends.

I always try to explain to David that there is an order, A LOGICAL ORDER, to how house projects need to be done. The final yard work here this spring involved all of CVV's magically wonderful carpentry BUT also needed was hardscape. Pavers, paths, gas lines, and, the biggie, an underground irrigation system. I have another guy for all of that stuff. He does this full time, not as a side gig, and I'm allowed to give out his name and number. His name is Jose. And all of his trucks have his name on them. Name and phone number. Wades Sowers, one of my first real estate clients 30 plus years ago, told me once that he only hired people who had their name on their truck. Obviously this stuck with me.

Even though our yard is quite small, I decided that now was the time. You can't easily put in an irrigation system after the pavers are down and the decks are in place. CVV started on the fence posts in late February. After the posts were in place and I could see where I was going, I bit the bullet and hired Jose to put the underground irrigation system in for the whole property. Then Jose put the pavers down. At least 100 pavers. Pathways on both sides of the house, and the front entry walk, and the pivotal patio in our courtyard. All connected visually by the same pavers. It looks awesome (to me), it looks professional, it looks complete and properly finished.

Obviously the decks and steps needed to go in AFTER the pavers so the connection between wood steps and concrete pavers would be seamless. After Jose was done and gone, CVV was the last contractor needed.

On Wednesday August 14th CVV screwed the last screw into the last Ipe deck board. I was stunned. For the first time EVER David and I now lived in a house that was completely finished. There were no more projects that needed to be finished. If you know us well, you know that has never happened before. Prior to this house we have never lived in completely finished space. I posted some deck photos on Facebook that afternoon and commented that not one nail was left to pound at our new house. It really was done. Basic maintenance from here on out. So calming.

It's Your Boyfriend

So, for me, from February to August 14th, everything was about planning and finishing the outdoor spaces here at our home. I didn't want go to movies or plays, I no longer wanted to go out to eat, I barely wanted to visit friends, and work - *work?*- well what do you think? All I could talk about was Jose or CVV and what we were doing next. It got to the point where CVV would text or ring my phone and David would look at it and say, in a withering tone, "It's your boyfriend." Sometimes my phone would ring and we'd take turns singing, "Let it please be him, oh dear god it must be him or I shall die, or I shall die. Oh hello, hello my dear god it must be him" I assume you know the rest.

1,813 Square Feet + 469 Square Feet + 530 Square Feet = 2,812

In March we decided to test the size of our new house by having not one couple stay with us, but two. Years ago David and I went to see a Sarah Brightman concert with our friends Dirk and Mark. It was an over the top spectacle that we have joked about ever since. One day I heard an ad on the radio that Sarah Brightman was playing at the Paramount in Seattle. Even though this was months out, I was on line immediately. Just as I was about to push confirm on my purchase I remembered a friend who works at the Paramount and thought I'd give him a call. I did. He said hold off, let me see if you can do better tomorrow. Boy was that a lucky call. I ended up with 4 seats dead center and almost too close to the stage. I happily paid for them. They were much better than if I had pushed that confirm button. So Dirk lives in Palm Springs now. Mark lives in Seattle. They commute to each other. We blocked out our ADU on the Airbnb site so no one could book it and had Dirk fly to Seattle and stay in the ADU. Then we invited Mark over for dinner. Surprise!

During dinner I showed them our tickets for the Sarah Brightman concert that coming Saturday. Great fun, I love a good surprise. Mark and Dirk stayed here that week in the 469 square foot ADU over the garage. March was when Jose was putting in the irrigation system. I remember the pavers were not in and the valves for the sprinkler system were being installed right on the path to the ADU. It was March. It was raining. There was a huge hole filling with water that Mark and Dirk had to carefully navigate around in order to get to their apartment.

At the same time Cherese and Rebecca were coming to Seattle. Cherese, a professional stage manager for hire, had a gig here and Rebecca came along. They stayed in our 1,813 square feet with us. Yes we have a guest room but lord is it tight. For about a week there were three couples living here, testing the limits our our new space. The Sarah Brightman concert was worth every bit of effort and every dime of the tickets. I love her voice and can listen to her endlessly.

This house looks big from the outside. But those square footages cited above are spot on. It looks big because there is no floor between the main floor and the lofted space. It's open just open from the concrete floors to the rafters. But you can't place furniture where there is no floor thus the square footage is much less than it looks. The garage is the 530 square feet. David and I have shed a lot of stuff, hard decisions for us, and still 1,813 square feet is tight. But we're making it work and frankly I'm a lot happier in smaller space. It curtails my shopping, it makes me keep driving when I see a garage or estate sale, and it makes me really like the stuff we kept, the stuff that "made the cut." And really all I need is a huge TV and a tiny laptop. And some books. And David. And Opal. And some private outdoor space.

May Michigan Trip

While I just wanted to lose myself in all of this fun yard stuff that was going on, life was still going on. As was the slowing down of life. David and I were trying to keep up with work, with social dates with friends, with unpacking from the move, and with a myriad of medical things and at the same time I'm checking in with my sister almost daily to monitor what was going on with Dad back in Michigan. On May 14th I flew back to spend a week with my sister moving Dad from his apartment near her house to a VA Hospice Facility in Saginaw, Michigan. Dad was really done trying to live on his own and he and Lynn miraculously found a room for him in this VA hospice. It was a hour away from Grand Blanc where they lived, but it was the only option our family could afford. It was a very good option other than the distance from Lynn's. Everyone who worked there was very kind and capable. They treated Dad well.

After a week in Saginaw it was time for me to return home. I was visiting Dad in the hospice right up to when it was time to head back to my hotel in order to catch an early flight out of Detroit Metro Airport the next morning. Usually when you say goodbye to someone you say something like see you soon. It's very odd to say goodbye to someone when you both know this is likely the final goodbye. I had a few things I wanted to tell my Dad about his raising me and what a trouble free life I've had. And Dad had a few things to say to me. After we each said what we wanted to, we said goodbye. It was solemn and very sad. But I can't imagine how it could have gone any better than it did.

Tuesday December 10th

In a few hours I'll be going to my company's annual holiday party. This year it is in the hoity-toity gated community of Broadmoor. I'll go despite this. I'm taking an Uber there and back. Uber is not a cheap way to get around. But I can be in the back seat taking care of business on my iPhone and can ignore the rain and traffic. And I don't have to park. And I can have two or three cocktails (three is very unlikely) and not have to drive. I have the Lyft app on my phone but I've never used it. Actually I have never opened it, never signed up. I keep meaning to do this but as more and more and more cars pick me up that have BOTH an Uber sticker and a LYFT sign in their windows, well, it's the same car and same driver no matter which platform I use. Why bother? One might be cheaper than the other but, referring back to the solar panel paragraph, we've established that I'm not a good steward of money. If I were I'd have a transportation spreadsheet comparing Uber and Lyft rides!

Some people keep a calendar in Outlook or in Calendar (on Apple devices) (I'm the latter) and they use it to set appointments of what's coming up, for planning. Obviously I do that. I really like to set up reminders of annual things like car tabs expiring or, my worst fear, post office boxes expiring. I'll never forget back in the fall of 1997, when I started my management career at Windermere, that I got so busy I stopped picking up my mail for awhile. Back then my reminder to pay for my post office box came on a green card the post office people put in my box. I didn't get the card, I missed the renewal, and when I finally went my key didn't work in my box. I was shocked. That box number (2448) had been my address for 19 years at that point. I got the box in 1978 shortly after moving to Seattle. That was the address everyone from my Michigan past had. That was the address every bank had. That was the address the IRS had. And in one short month **POOF** gone. That was the address that allowed me to change my living situations every few months (or years at least annually). It was located at the MAIN downtown post office at 3rd and Union and in those days every bus seemed to stop in front of that post office. In those days I didn't drive and there was no Uber or Lyft. My first decade here was on public transportation. (I was in my early twenties in the late 1970s.) I moved around a great deal when I first got here and that box was my one constant.

Losing a post office box will never happen to me again. I now have two post office boxes, one in Seattle and one in Palm Springs, and both have annual reminders set up in my calendar - multiple ones, 3 months out, 1 month out, the week of, you get the idea. My box here is on Broadway so I go to Capitol Hill at least 3 times a week on my lunch break. I get our mail, which often includes a magazine or two, and I buy coffee beans at Vivace. Even tho' we don't live on Capitol Hill anymore, I can't imagine a week without going there. Just like how in my mind I'm still a real estate agent, in my heart I'll always be a part of Capitol Hill.

As for the Palm Springs post office box, shortly after we bought our first house there in 2001, I got our post office box there. I get "pool appropriate" magazines there and junk mail at this point. But I am so ready for the day when I close out the post office box on Broadway and put in a change of address to the box in Palm Springs. I am ready. And organized. The box is in place.

Did you know the post office will now give you a STREET ADDRESS and let you use your box number as if it were an apartment number? So it looks like an address? Think packages. Think medical supplies. Think shipping address on any website you go to. Think Amazon. It seems like every day on the Next-door.com site for both Georgetown and Sonora Sunrise (our Palm Springs neighborhood) I see people going on and on about their mail being stolen. And packages. They have doorbell videos of their packages being delivered and then, sadly going away in the hands of thieves. I shake my head and think, "People it doesn't have to be this way!" David and I have never missed a piece of mail or had any thing meant for us stolen. So easy to avoid. When I get to Palm Springs walking Opal to the post office daily is going to be my exercise. I have a plan.

I digress. Back to my calendar. Every two or three days I open my calendar and think back to what I *actually* did over the past few days. And then I write it down. It's like a diary without the woo-woo parts, more of a log of what I actually did. Impromptu dinners with friends that weren't planned in advance get logged. Work meetings that came up in my crazy work schedule get logged. Issues that I have resolve for agents working for me get logged. Even nights at home with David and Opal get logged. All in different colors. I can open my calendar and without reading it know if a night was spent with friends or if we dined out just the two of us or if we were home with Rachel and a martini. If an entire Saturday and Sunday were spent in the garden with CVV, well that's a dark green block for the whole day. Words not needed. If I see light green blocks, well those are all dental or doctor appointments (or "procedures"). Sadly, and annoyingly, there seems to be more light green blocks in my calendar these days (I track David's light green appointments as well, but only his light green ones).

Day At A Glance

I'm just trying to compensate for the oversized "Day At A Glance" paper wall calendar we relied on for so many years. And it sure helps when trying to write a summation of your year in your annual holiday letter! Let's get back to that.

May

May 6th of this year marked ten years to the day since I had my last chemotherapy and radiation session. My final treatment was May 6th 2009. A full decade ago. I'd forget this date except I've put an annual reminder in my calendar. It pops up every May 6th and I think about how my breathing and swallowing and voice are what they are and clearly won't ever improve. But I can live with that. I remind myself that I'm not dead and move on with my day.

July

Two fun things happened in July both worth mentioning. Over the third weekend in July, David and I made a road trip north back to Guemes Island. Opal of course was along for the ride. Remember Guemes Island? We barely did as it had been so long since we'd been there. While there we had lovely meals with David and Paul while soaking up the many improvements and changes they made to the house and garden since they became the sole stewards of the perfect waterfront island property. It was a great weekend get-a-way and they are the perfect hosts. And their dog did not kill our dog. But our dog was afraid, very afraid.

David and I flew to Detroit on July 24th and stayed for 6 days. Dad had died back in June but before he did he left very specific instructions with Lynn as to how he wanted to wrap all of this up. Lynn had two urns of ashes, one for each of our parents, and Dad selected a specific spot in a VA managed cemetery where he wanted those ashes spread. Dad was very clear about this. No funeral. No service. Nothing of any kind was to be done other than the scattering of both their ashes at the same time in the same spot. My father was the youngest of 11 children. He died at 93. He was the last of his siblings left. Obviously there are many many nephews and nieces and cousins out there on his side but we really don't know any of them as they were so much older than we were growing up. Lynn and I really were never a part of that side of the family.

What we consider "our family" is based on who we were raised with and that means the children of my mother's sister. And mind you we really aren't even related by blood. My mother and her sister were both left on the doorstep of the same orphanage in Pennsylvania in 1930 or so. They were both adopted, quite by chance, by the same couple. Those sisters grew up and - get this - married two guys who happened to be best friends. So no blood relationships anywhere, sisters by adoption and rearing, but a tight knit foursome none-the-less. The foursome then had five children between them and this became our family growing up: 5 kids and 4 adults. Fast forward 60 or so years and, add in 3 spouses and 2 new children, and take out 3 of the adults who have died, and this family now consists of 11 people. You'd think 11 people could manage to meet and spread the ashes of two of their fallen without any drama, but you'd be wrong.

Detroit

Really, it's worth going there. Obviously David and I were not on vacation this trip BUT the tough parts of the loss were past us and we were there to carry out my Dad's wishes as he wanted. So not a daily grieving situation. And my Dad always said, "I just want everyone to be happy" so David and I took that to heart and tried to make exploring downtown Detroit a part of this final journey. We booked a room at the Shinola Hotel which we really wanted to experience. If you don't know who Shinola is or what they make, you wouldn't care. Like things that originate in Seattle, I am fascinated by things (other than cars) that originate in Detroit. David and I did a lot of walking in downtown, we googled for the best restaurants and then we ate at them. Great fun, and a much nicer place than what people have in their minds from things they heard several decades ago. If I were in my 30's, I'd consider living there and watching it grow again. We were at Shinola in Detroit for 3 nights. Then we moved to my cousin Marsha's on a lake in a town called Dexter, and then, after the final big final family bar-b-cue (11 total, wait one of my nephews had a girlfriend there so 12), David and I left for the airport where there is a Hilton Hotel IN the airport terminal. We had an early flight home the next day and waking up in the terminal made it that much easier. Now that my parents are both gone my goal is to get my sister to visit Seattle or Palm Springs again. I might be finished with Michigan now.

CVV Is Back!

Starting on July 30th all of the days in my calendar have huge dark green blocks on them that run daily for just over two weeks. The note on the first dark green block simply says: "CVV started on the three decks". That note runs right up to August 14th, the day the last screw went into the last board. Since that day I have been so happy every time I open a door here and see a deck.

August

On Saturday, August 3rd David and I decided to test our new outdoor courtyard set up by hosting a surprise 40th birthday party for Elisa, David's niece. Gregg, Elisa's husband, arranged catering from Bok-A-Bok chicken and took care of all of the invites. David and I cleaned the house, readied all of the outdoor furniture, and set up the bar. There were more people at the party than we could count and we were pleased they all fit in the house's main room and the courtyard. The expertly fenced, completely private, courtyard.

Those Light Green Blocks Of Time

David and I really strive for three things as we attempt to age gracefully:

1. To not be the people whining about traffic in Seattle and constantly bitching about how long it takes now to get from point A to point B.
2. To not be the people blaming all of Seattle's woes on Amazon employees, or Amazon executives, or tech worker at Expedia or Google or Facebook. We never say a bad thing about any of these people. We are actually grateful to have these people in Seattle making this city way more dynamic that it was when I arrived here in 1978.
3. To not be the old people who want to talk about how many pills they take each day, what their current affliction is, what procedure they had to have last week, and what procedure they are not looking forward to in two months.

As I said, I log every dental and medical and physical therapy appointment in my calendar in a block of time colored in light green. As I scroll through the weeks of my calendar I see these blocks. But we are not going there. Except for these two things, one for each of us.

On Wednesday, August 7th David had half of his right knee replaced.

And I, the guy who used to have a lava lamp on his bedside table that was on or off depending on how randy I was feeling that night, now have a C-PAP machine where the lava lamp used to be. Nothing says hot and ready like a full face mask similar to the one Hannibal Lector wore in *Silence of the Lambs!*

Enough with the light green blocks of time!

I Fell Flat On My Face

I asked David what he wanted for his 63rd birthday and he said to walk on the beach at the ocean with Opal. So four days in Cannon Beach. We stayed at the Hallmark Resort which has great views of the ocean. Our room was perfect. It had CNN and good wi-fi access and a straight on direct view of that big rock there. I think it's called "Haystack Rock." David's birthday was August 28th and, as requested, we spent the day walking on the beach with Opal.

One night, after dinner, while walking back to our room, I fell flat on my face on the concrete sidewalk. For no reason. I had only had one drink. Opal wasn't with us so it wasn't her tugging on a leash that pulled me over. Both of my knees still work just fine and I didn't trip on anything. There was simply no reason for this. David was obsessed with why this happened and made us go back to the exact spot where I fell the next day to investigate. David thinks it was a varied curb elevation at that point. Whatever. The amount of blood when your face hits concrete is quite stunning. I was wearing a white linen shirt; I didn't even try to save it. I wasn't upset by this in the least. The bridge of my nose and my left eye looked like *Fight Club* for a few weeks after however. This was unfortunate as kerf Design was doing a photo shoot of us and our cabinets for their website a few days after our return.

The Greatest City In The World

I didn't get asked what I wanted to do for my 64th birthday. David decided this months in advance. I turned 64 on October 11th and David made dinner reservations for that day for a fancy dinner out in Manhattan. David took me to a fine dining establishment called *Le Cou Cou*. We were only in Manhattan for five days but we accomplished a great deal in that time. We only saw two Broadway plays but one of them was a whole day affair, in two parts, a matinee for 3 hours and 15 minutes, break for dinner, and then part two after dinner ran for another 3 hours and 20 minutes. So six hours and 35 minutes. David balked at this. I pointed out he can binge watch TV shows about England's royal family for that amount of time with nary a problem.

The six hour show was called *The Inheritance*. We saw the original London cast right after it moved to Broadway *and* we saw it the first time they did both halves of the show on the same day. The performance we saw was the first time all of the actors did 6 hours and 35 minutes in one fell swoop. I really wanted to do this and I really enjoyed the entire play, both halves equally.

We also saw *Moulin Rouge*, a musical based on the movie from, was it a decade ago? The soundtrack to *Moulin Rouge* is a delight. A great theatrical experience for both of us, we loved it.

We were so excited about being in New York again. We did a ton of new tourist stuff, we ate great meals, we got caught up in HUGE Columbus Day parades, and we walked and walked and walked. I did not fall down. David's new knee posed no problems. Literally when we got home we booked airline tickets to go back in April of 2020. We love being there that much. And airline tickets are cheaper the farther out you buy them in advance.

Going there each year certainly helps us with keeping up our gold status with Alaska Airlines. I'm gold this year (the multiple trips to Detroit easily pushed me to gold) and David is MVP. But it's not the status that matters, it's the miles we have jointly. We are just shy of a million miles because we never use them. They just accumulate in each of our accounts. When we get to this many miles, about once every four to five years, David starts patiently planning to use them. Next up: South Africa in first class all the way for free using miles. He has the patience to figure that out. I would never do it if it were up to me.

Whoa! I have to put on a party suit and get outta here. The company holiday party is just 90 minutes from now and it's pouring rain so traffic - WAIT. I don't complain about traffic. Later.

Saturday December 14th

Hey. I need to wrap this up if there's any chance of bulk mailing it prior to us leaving for Palm Springs! Thankfully I'm already up to November and at this point I only have two weekends worth mentioning left.

Another Light Green Block Of Time

I was just fussing with my Invisalign "trays" (as they call them, most people would call them retainers I think) and remembered I should mention this process to you all. If anyone out there is wondering about this process let me just say, it is friggin' great. Is is easy. It is not at all painful. And it is surprisingly effective. I started the Invisalign process in May of 2018 and this June it ended. Or so I thought. After the "movement" by the Invisalign trays is over you have to go another 12 weeks (yup, three more months) of wearing trays that no longer move your teeth. They just "settle" everything in. I just finished those three months and in January we go back to regular dentistry. Sadly I'm doing this at the age of 64. Why? Why am I doing this now? I guess just because I can. I could not have afforded this at the age of 24 when I needed it. At 24 a winning smile during last call in a gay bar might have been helpful. At 64 not so much. I haven't seen the inside of a gay bar since I met David 35 years ago. (In a straight bar, the now defunct *Mark Tobey* which was a bar in the base of the *Alexis Hotel*. Is that hotel still there? I know the bar is gone.)

November

I Love Having Two Dogs

But we have one dog. So, assuming all things are right, and I'm home for a stretch, I like to dog sit another dog. In November we got to dog sit Coco, Opal's actual sister from the same litter. Opal is way calmer than Coco; they are such different dogs. But Coco is sweet and I like to have her around. In November her owner was traveling twice for work in almost back to back weeks. We basically had two dogs for two weeks straight. I dog sit well mannered trained dogs if my work meeting schedule permits. (FYI.)

Look At All The People

David and I went to Palm Springs with Frank and Gary, *who are not a couple*, over the second weekend in November. The four of us were on the same flight going down but different flights coming home. Neither of them had ever seen our new house and this was the trip to make that right. David and I had not been in Palm Springs for quite awhile and now we are in the odd position of almost having more friends there than we do in Seattle. Some of our Seattle friends have moved there. My best friend from college, Lisa, and her husband Eric, left Ypsilanti, MI and now live exactly 1/2 mile from our new house there. Another good friend from Seattle, one of my oldest in both ways that you could count, Michael Kuntz, sold his condo in Seattle using David and bought a condo in Palm Springs using Jim and Roy. Meanwhile friends from Seattle are abandoning us right and left for places like Austin, Port Angeles, or Castles in France that happen to be SIX HOURS from anyplace you'd want to be in France (i.e., Paris).

So David and I have less and less people to see in Seattle even tho' we have days on end here to see them and we have the reverse in Palm Springs: Always limited numbers of days there and more people to see than possible in those limited number of days.

We were only going to be there for 4 nights and many people knew we were coming and wanted to see us. David's solution was to have a cocktail party. David and Frank and Gary did the shopping for this and I made a list of everyone we know who I have an email address for in Palm Springs. The invitation (a simple, regular email, I have never done Evite and I never will) went out and that was that. If no one shows up at least they can't say we didn't try. (I find that if I go there and "don't try" people later find out I was there and throw shade about me not looking them up.) Twenty-eight people showed up. THAT was unexpected. I honestly thought with less than 48 hours notice only 5 to 10 people would show up. Twenty-eight was a nice surprise. I keep telling David I'm ready: I have a post office box there and 28 people who like us enough to visit.

Tim Allen is one of those Seattle people who have abandoned us. He was unhappy with the traffic in Seattle and I guess we weren't enough to counteract that. Like Michael Kuntz, he listed his home with David here. And, also like Michael, he was able to pay cash for a brand new home in Port Angeles. I think we're the same age, both 64 (he might be 65, I'm bad with ages as past 60 ages seem to blur to me). Anyway Tim's birthday was November 22nd and that conveniently fell on a Friday and I'd never seen his house and neither had Merritt and so ROAD TRIP. I drove and Merritt was in charge of snacks and beverages. For weeks prior to this we'd say to each other, "Save it for the road trip" if there was something we wanted to discuss. We managed to drive all the way to Port Angeles and never run out of conversation. We never turned on the radio. We never resorted to a podcast. We just talked. When I dropped her off after the road trip I said, "Okay I'm done with you now for a few months."

While in Port Angeles we had a great visit with Tim and his housemate Travis. A complete tour of the house and what Tim's done to it so far and what he plans to do (even though it is brand new construction and Tim's the first owner). We got a driving tour of Port Angeles. We went to a great store called *Swain's General Store* where the selection of Levi's amazed me at prices that were half of what a pair of jeans cost in Seattle. It was like going to the old Chubby and Tubby on Rainier Avenue years and years ago. A fun trip. I'll go back. Because it is not six hours from a major city.

That Was Our Year

And that was our year. I know that all sounds like nothing but fun and travel but it's not. I just gave you the fun highlights. We both work. We both work pretty damn hard. David is still listing and selling real estate with absolutely no plans to stop. He does not care about that post office box in Palm Springs. He likes to work, and he especially likes his work in real estate. This year, and we're both thankful for this, has been one of his best years yet. Certainly better than either of the last two years. He had some really gracious, nice, appreciative buyers this year, mostly young couples, who he got into their first homes despite the multiple offers so common in Seattle. On the seller side it was also a great year for him and Kevin, his partner (visit UpdikeGaspari.com). David and Kevin listed quite a few extremely nice condos this year. A great year for both of them.

And I have been hiring and training new real estate agents to beat the band. In between numerous new agent interviews I have an office to manage. My office has four staff people who are so good at their jobs, and so friendly to the agents they serve, that I don't really have to manage any of them. I have about 60 full time agents to help day in and day out. Wherever I am, I'm on call. This has been a really good year for Windermere Eastlake and I see no end to me loving this job in sight.

It just occurred to me that I missed a fun thing David and I did this year. On October 5th, a Saturday, we drove, with Opal, up to an area called Bow, Washington. Or is it Bow-Edison? Is it two small towns near each other? Not far from Anacortes, the gate way to Guemes Island. We went there because our dear friend Julie Heyne was having a private show at an art gallery there. It is the *i. e. Gallery*. I just googled it and it says in one spot that it is the *i.e. Gallery* in Edison, WA and then less than 3 lines below that it gives the address of the gallery as being in Bow, WA.

Whatever. We wandered the small (small !) town with Opal. We found a tablecloth that we just had to have and then we bought two of them. Later we realized we needed a third tablecloth to give to our friend Janelle. At the art show we really liked one of Julie's pieces called, "*It Could Be California*" so we bought it. We plan to take it to California and hang it in our house there.

Speaking of art, we stretched to buy a piece of art that I am just obsessed with. Also obsessed with it is every guest who walks into our house. They touch it (perfectly okay as it is 100% plastic), they photograph it, they want to talk about it. It first came here on Thanksgiving Day in 2018 but then it went away to be in a show at the *Greg Kucera Gallery*. It came back in February of this year and I just love it. The artist, Anthony White, lives in Seattle and was 23 when he made it. Google: "Anthony White Seattle Artist." Maybe you can google the name of it and actually find it: *Thicc Water*, yes thick with two "c"s and no "k."

Oh, one more thing before I end this: In June of this year, right around the week of the Gay Pride Parade and related events, I noticed an ad in the Stranger. I like clever. This ad was, in my opinion, clever. It is for a gay radio station in Seattle called *Channel Q*. The tag line in the ad was so smart: "Let's queer the air." Obviously a take on "Let's clear the air" and, to me, amusing. So I set a button in my car to 103.3 FM. Now in my car it's either NPR, very silly gay stuff with awesome dance music mixed in, or Marc Maron's podcast *WTF*. Well those three and business calls. Thank god for hands free features in cars these days. I take a lot of calls for a living.

The Best Thing In 2019

It took me awhile to realize this, it started to slowly dawn on me in the summer, but I'm falling in love with this house we live in. This is such a relief to me. I was in such a sour mood about this house from the day we got our final signed off permit from the City of Seattle until easily this spring. I've said it before (like in last year's letter) but building this house was hard. We were out on a limb dealing with the construction loan and closing this up with the bank and our builder. We were flat broke and had no spare money but things kept popping up at the last minute. After we thought it was all done, literally the bank construction loan was closed and we thought we'd be okay, our builder showed up with an invoice for twenty nine thousand dollars and some change. Somehow it got missed during the loan draws and, well, surprise you owe this.

It was all just too hard on me. Sadly it didn't end well with our builder (so far he won't return my calls or texts); I might have snapped once or twice around money. And when we moved out of our old house and into this house there was such chaos. The old house, though it looks tiny, has 2,240 square feet of solid floor space; our new house has 1,813 square feet. Getting rid of stuff to make other stuff fit, well that's stressful. We were fully in this house by January, we rented our old house to a nice couple, we paid off that surprise twenty nine thousand bill by February, yet I was still in a foul mood. And I wasn't taking much joy in this house.

We are deep in the midst of a home refinance. Right now. Our current loan is at 4.75%, fixed for 30 years. But we don't have an escrow impound so taxes and insurance are not included in our payment. I like it better when they are. And I want to distance myself from the construction loan company. The sooner I don't see their name anymore, the better. We are going for 3.375% fixed for ten years. After ten years it will adjust annually. My hope is to be walking Opal to my post office box in Palm Springs daily in ten years. So a ten year fixed rate at 3.375% seems good enough for me. Our new payment, for the next ten years, will include homeowner's insurance and our property taxes and will roll into it the \$478 solar panel loan payment and will still be a bit less than our mortgage payment is today. Yesterday I had to fight my way into the office in the loft upstairs to look for some documentation for the refinance. In doing so I ran across piles of files containing forms from the 2018 construction loan draws. I stated to get anxious and upset again as I merely moved them around. I can't shake that experience off soon enough. It was coloring everything.

I'd like to report that I am loving this house now. All of the bad stuff is fading away (except the builder not liking me any more, I want everyone to like me) and the horrors of construction loan are almost forgotten. This house is almost fully organized. There are a few small pieces of art to hang but I haven't figured out where yet. My office has folding tables that are meant to be temporary organizational tools in it that are piled with crap to put away but so far I'm worried that they aren't temporary. Other than the office area (which is going to be my January and February project), and the small art, and some bedding we don't have storage for, well, we are almost completely dialed in here.

The house is not drafty. I reach down to pick pebbles up off the floor (Opal's paws bring them in from the dog run) and I feel that the floor is warm. I forget that's how the house is heated, by warm concrete floors. In the summer on the hottest days it was cool in here when we came in after work. We seldom used the mini-split air conditioners. The light is truly wonderful. So many windows that are fortunately up high where you couldn't hang art anyway. And I love the floor plan. It's almost as if we had a hand in the design. I think I'll be happy here for a decade. That's the hope. That's the plan.

Despite Everything In The News These Days

After a long day of office management followed by some errands, I come home to find I'm alone. I have my afternoon cookie with me and an iced Americano. So happy to be alone for a bit. I sit down in the dining nook where the TV is and check what's recorded on the DVR. Even though I record it every day, I never actually watch the Ellen DeGeneres show because all of her game and competition bullshit, really the whole format of her show, makes me crazy.

But I notice that Wanda Sykes is her guest. I like Wanda Sykes so I click play. And there are Wanda and Ellen each sitting on a couch chatting. Wanda has a wife name Alex. Ellen has a wife name Portia. Somehow they start talking about "red carpet" events and that leads into whether or not their respective spouses enjoy these events. There they both are, on prime time TV each at the top of their game, casually mentioning the names of their wives as they say, "Portia likes this," "Alex likes that," just chatting away. And I'm thinking to myself, "This is so normal yet when I was a kid I could never have seen anything remotely like this."

It gives me hope for how things are going to go.

Happy Holidays!



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