

2020

(The suckiest year ever)

Saturday, November 7th

Holiday Greetings!

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

I have to start the letter early this year for reasons that I'll get to in a moment. Usually I'm doing this in the middle of December while the holiday parties are raging and you've got lots of invitations to do festive things. But I'm not thinking parties and festive things are going to be happening this year. I've never started before December 1st and certainly never in November. But there I was on Tuesday, November 3rd, debating starting the letter. It was election day. And I couldn't do it. I was going to be glued to the TV all day and all night. I just didn't see myself wanting to give a blow-by-blow of the day and the night and the counting in the letter. So I held off. I figured I'd wait until the next day, or maybe two days, when we actually had the results to start the letter. Well that day or two stretched into five days. Even today when I woke up the race was undecided. But it was close and close in our favor. (By "in our favor" I mean people who think Donald Trump is reprehensible.) By time I had my second cappuccino, the networks started calling it for Joe Biden. I'm too old for partying in the streets, but I did breathe a giant sigh of relief.

A really huge giant sigh of relief. I did not go to **Facebook** or **Twitter** or **Instagram** to post to the choir. I did not call anyone. I did not leave the house. But I assure you I was greatly relieved. I was not, however, thrilled or elated. No, in order to be thrilled or elated it would had to have been a spread of at least 10 points: 60% for Biden and 40% for Trump would have been thrilling. 70% for Biden and 30% for Trump and I would have been elated. I was hoping for a victory so large it would have been abundantly obvious on election night. I was hoping for a complete repudiation of Trump. What I got barely was satisfying. What I got is the realization that almost 50% of my fellow Americans think that Donald Trump is acceptable. Enough has been said about Donald Trump. I'm not going to

list all the reasons why he's completely unacceptable as a President (or as a person for that matter). My fear is that the closeness of this election might foreshadow what could be four more years of painful disagreement. Already there's talk of Donald Trump running for President in four more years. I will be super old by then and I might just retreat, oh I don't know, to a place in a blue state where it's warm all year long and I have a swimming pool and two Weimaraners and I live in a bubble with my husband. At that point I might turn off the news. No more **MSNBC**. No more **CNN**. Just saying those words makes me shake at the thought of no news, but I seem to know people who live this way. By then I'll be almost 70 years old. Perhaps I'll just listen to music all day long and when I need to take a break from music I can stream every episode of *Friends* in order starting from season one again. (David and I are currently doing this exact thing and we've made it to season seven, episode four.)

Anyway I, like the rest of the country, need to move on from my obsession with Donald Trump. I don't know if that's going to be possible until January 20th 2021. I'm still riveted to **CNN** and **MSNBC** as the truly embarrassing part plays out. There's a button on my **DIRECTV** remote called **PREV**—it stands for PREVIOUS—and it allows me to jump from **CNN** to **MSNBC** at every commercial break. I must admit there is some small part of me that wants to see armed soldiers showing up at the White House and physically taking Trump out of it. Maybe that would provide the closure I need; maybe then I could finally move on.

My Scalp Hurts

I had **MOHS** surgery a week ago. For those of you who do not know what that is, all I can say is, "Ahh, to be 35 again." For those of you who do know what that is, all I can say is, "Welcome to old age." I like to think of **MOHS** surgery as a special procedure reserved for redheaded people who grew up in Michigan with a massive amount of freckles, a swimming pool in their backyards, and no sunscreen. It's all fun and games when you're 15, but add 50 years to the equation and it's visits to the dermatologist twice a year, biopsies every other visit, and **MOHS** surgery about every year and a half. This is my life now, and I'm right on schedule. I had **MOHS** surgery in March 2019 and then again in last week in November 2020. And this was not my first time at this rodeo. These were **MOHS** surgeries number three and number four. I had two earlier **MOHS** surgeries, but I've lost track of the dates. I guess the earlier surgeries happened before I realized I was going to be a regular lifetime patient. Anyway, the upshot is I have eight staples in my scalp closing up a wound created by scooping cancer out of my skull. I ask David to photograph my scar every other day so I can keep tabs on it. It's on the very top of my head where the bald spot is and I can't see it on my own. Photographs help. I offer to show the photographs to people but so far nobody wants to see them. There's always **Facebook** or **Instagram** but I'm not participating in those things for the time being. Tho' I must say I'm amused by the idea of someone logging onto **Instagram** and getting a look at this scar with no explanation. Anyway, the eight staples hurt. They really hurt. I know it's been a week but they don't hurt any less.

Wednesday, November 11th

Okay, I took a break for a few days. I confess I got caught up in watching street parties on **MSNBC** celebrating the end of Trump. People seem genuinely happy. I hope they're so happy they can stop smashing storefront windows. How smashing and trashing Starbucks helps anything, any cause, is something I can't grasp. Trump showed up in public today (it is Veteran's Day after all), but he didn't speak. Trump hasn't spoken for five days. I'm pretty happy and getting happier all the time. To not hear his voice, to not hear the way he speaks, to not hear his fifth grade vocabulary is just a blessing. However, he's firing people, military people. It's hard to be calm when he seems to be up to something and you can't imagine what it is.

The Worst Year Ever

At this point I could just say, "Covid" and close the out the letter. If I wanted to go a little deeper I could say, "COVID-19 *and* lock down *and* Corona Virus *and* quarantine *and* stay at home orders *and* social distancing" and then close out the letter. But there's more to our year than that. On January 8th I had a stroke. It was such a minor event that I had to convince myself it was happening. I woke up at 3:00 to have some water. When I got back into bed I realized my left hand wasn't able to turn off my bedside lamp. My finger wasn't coordinating properly with the switch on the lamp. Thinking nothing of it I thought, "Oh well, I'll use my right hand," and I turned off the lamp and lay back down. But I couldn't fall back asleep. Something wasn't right. So I got out of bed and came out to the kitchen to try to figure out what was wrong. I heard that sides of your face might sag if you're having a stroke, so I kept going to the bathroom and looking at my face but nothing was out of the ordinary. But my left arm was not working properly. Then came the googling. I actually googled the symptoms I was having, and the search results kept coming back as TIA or stroke. I never heard the phrase TIA before, so I had to read up on that. It took me almost an hour to convince myself that something was wrong, all the while worrying about having to wake David up.

At 4:00 I woke David up and said, "Honey I think I need to go to hospital, I think I'm having a stroke." He popped right out of bed, loaded me into the car, and we drove the 5 miles to Swedish hospital. At the emergency room there were people milling about and I went up to the desk and the woman handed me a clipboard and a sheath of papers and started to tell me to fill these out and then I interrupted her and said, "I think I'm having a stroke." She pulled the clipboard back, she pushed a button on the wall, and three seemingly huge orderlies burst through the door, put me on a rolling table, and whisked me off. I remember thinking, "Wow, I jumped ahead of everybody in line."

I was in Swedish overnight. And I don't mean the first night when I got there at 4:30 AM. No, I mean the second night. A full day in the hospital and then a night. There were many doctors. They ordered many tests. I met my first neurologist. David was there; he got to hang out with me most of the day.

They did an EKG, they did an ultrasound on my heart, and they did scans on my brain. They couldn't find a thing. My left arm started working again, I was fully operational, and I wanted to go home. David came to get me at eight in the morning, but it took almost four hours to be released. I remember the place I wanted to go was **Geraldine's Counter** for a good breakfast and I remember talking to my office letting them know that I'd been released. My office must've told one of my agents where I was because this particular agent, Kristin, found the restaurant, called in, and paid for our entire breakfast. I don't remember if I've ever properly thanked her for that. I had actually completely forgotten about it until just now while trying to think back to that event and the details around it. Thanks, Kristin!

Next Up, Three Normal Months

The little minor teenie-weenie stroke did not slow me down. I was back at work the next Monday holding meetings, interviewing agents, answering questions, doing what I do. I had a solo trip planned to Palm Springs to coincide with Martin Luther King Junior's birthday (a trip I always make either solo or with David ~ I like to start the year off right). This particular trip was business: I was meeting a contractor to have a **NEST** security system, complete with a doorbell and outside cameras, installed on the house. People think it's all fun and games but it's really not—there's work to be done.

Continuing with the theme of normal months, February was perfectly normal. I started the month off with a very short trip to Palm Springs that started as a solo trip, but then two days later David flew down with his friends Jennifer and Mike. There were four of us for two days, and then I left and came back to Seattle, leaving David there with his friends to explore and relax. Back in Seattle, back at work. It was a simpler time. Ah, work. Work, work, work—I really miss it. I can't believe I'm saying this but I actually miss meetings. I miss the people. I miss getting out of the house.

Restructuring Our Lives

If you've been paying attention the past few years, you know that David and I live in a brand new house built on the side yard of our previous house. Our previous house was turned into a rental for a year while we figured out what we wanted to do with it. At the end of the year we realized we wanted to sell for two reasons: 1) We're both way too neurotic and compulsive to be landlords, and 2) It might be nice to have no credit card debt, no car payments, and some money in the bank. Our tenants moved to Portland on January 30th and, as soon as we both returned from Palm Springs, we began cleaning and staging the house for sale. Everything from minor repairs to pressure washing the walkways and decks, from appliance repairs to an entire new dishwasher, from a complete refresh of the interior painting to expert staging ~ we did it all during the month of February.

We listed the house (aka "hit the market") on Thursday, February 27th. I flew to Palm Springs that day, actually midnight the day before, in order to not play Gladys Kravitz, obsessively watching

everyone come and go. Plus my good buddy Colton and his fiancée Laura were going to be in the desert visiting friends of theirs, Frank and Lex, and I wanted to show them all our house. (Fun fact: In last year's letter Colton was referred to by the initials of his name, CVV. In July he married Laura and they've combined their names and now his initials are CVB—the V is for Vander and the B is for Black. The name that started with the other V was unpronounceable anyway so it's just as well that they dumped it.)

On Tuesday, March 3rd, our most wonderful listing agent, Sharlane Chase, and David and I sat in the conference room in our office with five offers on the table all from people vying to buy our little jewel box of a house. Very flattering. And very rewarding because we really did put a lot into that little house. In the end, as is always the case, it really came down to two offers. One from a gay couple represented by a gay couple who actually work in our office and the other from a straight couple from Australia represented by some random woman who we never heard of. While it would've been lovely to work with our gay friends and end up with gay neighbors, in the end money won out and we went with the straight couple from Australia. I guess we're not that shallow. And the couple from Australia is simply lovely. We had them over for wine and some noshes while social distancing on our patio. If not for Covid I'm certain we would've had them over for dinner several times by now. Covid really does ruin everything.

Thursday, November 12th

Well, it's the next day again. I had to stop last night as I was just exhausted. Under the best of circumstances this letter is a several-day ordeal for me. And, as you're about to find out, I'm not writing this letter under anything close to desirable circumstances this year. I keep a calendar on my laptop. This calendar is where all of my appointments and all of my meetings are scheduled. But in addition to coming events, at the end of each day I go back and fill in the gaps with what I actually did. So on one hand it's what I plan to do but on the other it's what I actually did, almost diary-like. I just went back and checked, and the first mention of Covid in "my diary" was on Thursday, March 12th, when the entry said, "I worked at home all day due to the Corona Virus." That was literally the last entry in my calendar. After that the days are literally blank. Nothing, *nothing*, is filled in. Between the 12th (when I said I worked at home all day due to Covid) and the 25th, everything was about preparing to "lock down" our lives. Those of us in management at Windermere were making signs, locking doors, closing down kitchens, closing down offices, and generally preparing for the worst. We were preparing to comply with the governor's orders to shut everything down that was to take effect on Wednesday the 25th. So on Tuesday night we went to sleep knowing that the next day the Covid lockdown would begin.

This was the night I had my second stroke.

This stroke was nothing like the first one. This stroke was much more serious. I was not awake when it happened. I really don't remember much about it. I remember being on the floor at the foot of our bed, I remember David calling 911, I remember people arriving and loading me on to a gurney. Later I remember being at the hospital with David for a very brief period of time. Then I was admitted. What I wasn't able to put together then was that this was the first day of Governor Inslee's Covid lockdown. What I wasn't able to put together then was that when they rolled me away from David, I would not get see David again for 10 full days.

The Worst Ten Days Of My Life

As you know, I'm no stranger to hospitals. But even during the darkest days of the laryngeal cancer scare (which was over a decade ago just for some perspective), I was never alone in a hospital room for ten full days. These were the most difficult ten days of my life so far. I'm going to skip over all the embarrassing things that happened, I'm going to skip over all the indignities I suffered, I'm going to skip over the relentless testing, and I'm going to skip over all of the disagreements with the nurses about what was a new condition and what wasn't. In the end it all came down to my ability to swallow. The doctors who were visiting me did not like the fact that I have a hard time swallowing. They assumed it was a stroke-related. I kept telling them that it was cancer-related from radiation treatments I was given over a decade ago. I was fairly certain the swallowing difficulty would pass. They did not want to take my word for it. So we argued about the need for a feeding tube being installed in my stomach. And during the days as we argued, they stopped feeding me. IV drip only.

After a few days of only being able to talk on the hospital phone that came with the room, David managed to work around all of the Covid restrictions and found a nurse willing to meet him in the lobby and bring me my phone charger. This opened up the world of FaceTime tho' not without the nurse's help, as my brain wasn't quite up to the riggers of technology yet. David called her, she answered the phone and then handed the phone to me, and all of a sudden I could see David again. I need to move on and stop talking about the stroke. Let me just say two other things: 1) Being locked up in a hospital room for 10 days with no access to my husband was truly miserable. I went straight from a stroke lockdown in a hospital room to a Covid lockdown in our home. Once home I went back to my news consumption and found myself empathizing to the point of tears with all the stories of Covid victims dying alone in a hospital rooms. And 2) My entire right arm does not work. My right arm does not function. My right arm does not respond. I am right-handed.

Saturday, November 14th

Where was I? Ah, yes, getting out of the hospital. I went into the hospital on Wednesday, March 25th, and David picked me up and took me out of there on Friday, April 2nd—exactly ten days later. And then nothing happened. Nothing happened for a very long time. I was pretty fucked up after ten days

in the hospital. I was very weak and moving very slowly and very cautiously. I weighed 135 pounds when released (I'm back up to 162 now).

Now is the point where I could just say Covid and end the letter. There are no calendar (or diary) entries for the months of April, May, and June. We were in Covid lockdown, and we took it very seriously. Only David left the house and that was only to go to the grocery store. We did finish the landscaping at the house, and by that I mean the final planters were made and installed. David planted tomatoes and other herbs and vegetables. And we ordered a huge umbrella for the picnic table on the patio. We have an eight-foot table, perfect for six-foot social distancing. After exhausting zoom cocktail hours, we moved to social distancing with one other couple at a time on the patio. In retrospect it feels as though we did manage to have something of a summer with friends.

After three full months of going nowhere, and after five months of not seeing our home in Palm Springs, we decided to get outta Dodge and take a good old-fashioned road trip—just us and Opal, our trusty travel companion—to the desert. This was actually pretty safe from a social-distancing standpoint. There is no Covid in our car and we can put masks on if we ever have to get out of the car and go near people, which we rarely had to do. What with self-serve gas stations and **McDonald's** (only acceptable when on a road trip) and drive-through **Starbucks**, you can now drive from Seattle to Palm Springs and come in contact with only three people (I counted) the whole way down.

Palm Springs is a completely different place when it's shut down and none of your friends want to come out and play. And it's 115°. You can't escape to a matinee at the peak of the day's heat, and you can't meet your friends for smart cocktails at your favorite bar. All we found to do was look around our house and think perhaps now is the time for a major project. Remember we had a little money from selling our rental house. And given Covid, it didn't look like we'd be coming down here in the near future. So why not give a large check to your favorite contractor and replace every window and every door in the house, resizing most openings along the way? And why not gut two bathrooms? And while you're at it, why not redo one of the bathrooms completely? Removing a door, moving another door, tiling a new shower, and ordering a custom cabinet from **kerf Design** in Seattle—why not do all of that too? And while we're messing with plumbing, why not replumb the whole house? Why not remove the hot water tank that just sits there making hot water day after day after day in a mostly vacant house? Why not install two tankless hot water systems, one at either end of the house? And if we're really gonna make a mess, let's do the messiest job of all: Let's go into the two attics and drop down new electrical to each of the four bedrooms. (I say two attics because the center of our house is like an A-frame—there's no crawlspace or attic above it, those are only above the bedrooms at either end of the house.) While we're up there, let's remove all of the 45-year-old insulation, complete with rat poop and 45-year-old mummified rat bodies, and let's seal up the old attic access points and make new access points in more convenient locations in the house. Then let's install

completely new, fresh insulation. Then close it up. I'm sure it's been 45 years since anyone's been up there and I'm hoping it'll be 45 years more years before one of us needs to go up there again.

Once we made the decision to do all of this work, we met several times with our wonderful amazing contractor, Edy Fernandez. This is \$75,800 worth of work. The bulk of this is replacing all of the doors and all of the windows in the house. It's like 15 or 16 openings, and there's dry rot to contend with, in addition to resizing every door. If any of you saw how cavalier, how completely loosey-goosey, David and I are about embarking on a project like this, you'd be shocked. David did the bathroom design on a 3 x 5 card with an ink pen. It is sketched on a 3 x 5 card! I used a tape rule (back when I had two hands and could use a tape rule) to measure where the new door openings would go, and then I put blue painter's tape on the floor where I wanted them to end up. Edy, for his part, threw out numbers. We'd ask how much to do all this work in the attic and he'd think for a moment and then respond, "\$5,000" and then we'd say okay. Two weeks ago, when they were almost finished, I had an epiphany that now is the time to replumb the other side of the house. It just makes sense to do all of the plumbing, 100% of the plumbing, now, while the house is torn up. So I called Edy and asked how much to remove the current hot water tank and replace it with a tankless variety and then run all new plastic plumbing from the tankless tank to the bathroom, the laundry area, etc. Edy said \$4800 and I said do it. As I said it's all very cavalier but if you're working with someone you like and trust and think is competent, well, it can work.

Once we made the decision to do all of this work, we decided to cut our time in Palm Springs short and get out of there. It was very hot and we were very bored. We headed to Carmel so we could be near the ocean and stay at an inn formerly owned by Doris Day. This meant dogs were not only welcomed, they were encouraged and doted upon. The next night we spent in Ashland, Oregon, and all I remember is we had dinner at an amazing restaurant with seating outdoors in the garden and tables that were very far apart. Next stop, Seattle. Next thing to look forward to, more social distancing. Though some restaurants were open for dinner and you could dine inside, most were not. **The Corson Building** was set up for charming outdoor dining which we took advantage of four or five times this year. It's so close to our home and the food is of such high quality. It felt like a splurge each time we went, and yet we could rationalize it as doing good for a neighborhood institution in stress. We went alone a few times and a few times we went other couples. Always a good experience; an even better experience if you take your own seat cushions.

In mid-August Lisa, my BFF since we met in the dorms at college in 1974, came to visit with her husband, Eric. They live ½ a mile from our home in Palm Springs now. They used to live in Michigan. Three years ago they moved to Palm Springs, ½ a mile from our house. (I get a kick out of saying that.) They wanted to beat the summer heat as well, and I'm sure they too were going a little stir crazy. So a road trip! David and I have the perfect socially distanced guest room. It's a whole

apartment over the top of our garage that we used to use as an **Airbnb** until I got annoyed with **Airbnb**. (I got annoyed with **Airbnb** months before Covid hit—I stopped Airbnbing in October of 2019 and I haven't regretted it since.) Lisa and Eric stayed only four days but we packed a lot in. Takeout dinner from **Machiavelli**, burgers at home, lunch at **Iver's** on the waterfront, and dinner at **Matt's In The Market**. A tour of our office (yes, I still work, David still works too), **Hat & Boots** park, general sight-seeing driving around.

How Much Netflix Can One Couple Watch?

Once Eric and Lisa left, we were left social distancing in Seattle with our friends again. And I had a full complement of stroke-related appointments that kept me pretty busy. By the end of the summer, I had six appointments a week that really kept me running around. Fortunately I can drive with one hand, and I do, but everything has to be perfect in the car before I put it in drive. Mirrors adjusted, seatbelts on; there's no point in having a beverage with me because I cannot reach for a cup in the cupholder. My right arm does not work and my left hand needs to stay on the wheel at all times. I can't even change the radio station once I've pulled out of the driveway (NPR all of the time).

Two appointments at Swedish Cherry Hill each week with an occupational/physical therapist, two appointments a week with a personal trainer at a gym, and two appointments each week with a chiropractor in Madison Valley. (Can you believe I actually joined a gym? It was my idea. David was floored when I inquired about it. I joined the same gym David goes to, it's a few blocks from our office in one direction and a few blocks from **Vivace** in the other direction. It's very convenient and so far I actually like it.) However I've gone from zero activity a week to six activities a week. It's a lot of running around and I don't know how long I can keep up the pace. Nor do I know how long it's going to be allowed: Covid news is bad and getting worse.

Sunday, November 15th

Well, I woke up today and was reading the **Seattle Times** over my morning cappuccino and the news is not good. The Governor is going to speak at 11 o'clock today and likely issue new, more stringent stay-at-home orders. I don't know if it's gonna be a full lockdown again. I don't know what it's going to mean for my office.

Speaking of my office, let me just say that real estate has not been affected by the Covid crisis or the resulting lockdowns. The way we do business has certainly changed, but the amount of business we are doing has increased across the region. When the first lockdown happened, our office was closed and nobody was allowed to go there under any circumstance without calling me first. Gatherings of more than three people were banned, and open houses were out of the question. But none of that slowed down my agents. They could still show houses; they just needed to have a specific appointment first and limit the number of people who would be in attendance. The first 3 to 5 days of

real estate during the lockdown were confusing. There were lots of procedural questions, but we dealt with them as they came up. Keep in mind that management at Windermere had never been through a pandemic lockdown either, so a lot of our answers were our interpretation of Governor Inslee's orders with some common sense thrown in.

As I've said, none of this slowed the pace of the real estate industry one little bit. Agents had a blip for a few days but once they got their bearings it was off to the races. Kudos to all of my agents who rolled with the punches and had a very successful year. I think special kudos should go to real estate agents who are also parents. Can you imagine this? I can't. Imagine your career is thrown into turmoil because of a virus, which, at the same time, forces your kids to stay home and you to become a wizard of online learning. But again, they rose to the occasion.

My job this year is the same as my job was last year with the exception of one thing: **Zoom** meetings. Zoom meetings and virtual events. This year I attended a two-day virtual real estate convention held by Windermere. I virtually participated in **The Battle of the Barristers**, one of my favorite Realtor events each year. And I attended countless **Zoom** meetings. All designed to keep me at the top of my game for my agents, for my staff, and for my own personal edification.

To sum up, I could quote statistics and news articles. For instance, last Friday's **Seattle Times** had an article with a headline that read, "**Top 4 hottest housing markets in U.S. are in Washington state.**" It went on to identify Olympia, Bremerton, Tacoma, and Seattle as those four markets. But I'd rather quote Tracie, my most awesome office manager and the soul of my office. Just last Friday Tracie called me completely stressed out. She informed me during this call that so far, year-to-date, she had processed 619 files. A file could be a listing (a property put on the market for sale) or it could be a sale (a property that one of my agents has sold). 619 files as of November 13th. Do you want to take a guess what last year's number was? Last year's number was 555 but that went all the way through December 31st. It's no wonder she's stressed, working under Covid conditions while processing so many files. So, despite Covid, we are up 64 files from last year. Kudos to Lindy, Lars, Jeannette, and Tracie for keeping the office humming along and for being so kind and helpful to all of our agents.

Back To My Calendar Of Events

There's one more fun thing that we did in the fall: We visited **Dabob Bay**. Our friends Mario and Mark own a fairly private and secluded cabin there (sold to them by David a few years ago), and they invited us up for a weekend, Opal too. They know how to entertain, and Mario is a great cook. He made pasta from scratch for a meal one night. Who does that? We watched movies, we had cocktails, and we relaxed. All without masks. A whole three days of not wearing a mask. Scandalous. But heavenly.

I can't put papers in an envelope. I can't put papers in a file folder. Thus, I cannot organize my office or my desk or any of my paperwork. When a letter is finished I will not be able to stuff it inside of a calendar, and I will not be able to stuff the calendar inside of an envelope. And I don't think I'll be able to get mailing labels off of the sheet and onto an envelope.

If I allow myself to think about this for too long, I get very depressed and in a funk. The use of my arm may come back someday but it could be three months or three years or six years—there's no predicting it. Being at home during the initial Covid lockdown was extremely dispiriting. I had a million things I could have done at the house with two hands. I could have organized closets, cleaned the garage, put my office together, sorted my books, made wonderful dinners, worked in the yard, and on and on. However, none of those things were possible and that was dispiriting.

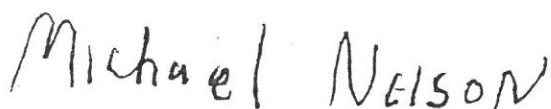
But let's end on a positive note. The one good thing that I discovered because of the stroke was spa treatments on my hands and feet. Yup, a mani and a pedi. I wasn't home from the hospital more than two weeks when I realized my nails needed to be cut and I could no longer do that. David tried to do it but it was an unsatisfactory experience for both of us. So, one day I called Linda Moline (one of my agents) because she's a Madison Park babe and I wanted to know about **Frenchy's**, the nail salon in Madison Valley, and I knew she'd know. And she did. She turned me onto another place telling me that she and Darcy (Breene, another of my agents) go there for mani-pedis often. The other place is better organized and—this doesn't hurt—less expensive.

That was all I needed to hear. David rolled his eyes when I announced I was driving to the U-District to get my nails done. I liked it so much I've been back five times. I'm about to go back again this week. Everybody is so friendly and I just sit in the chair and relax for about an hour while women work on my hands and feet. It's a great system. After my first visit I announced that it was so worth it to do this that even if my arm comes back tomorrow, I don't think I'll ever cut my own nails again.

One last thing: This letter was dictated into Microsoft Word. I've never used a Microsoft product before. I was all Apple all the time and I used whatever word processing program came on my laptop. But my BFF Lisa happens to be an editor, a freelance editor, and she works in Microsoft Word. And as I was ringing my hands and complaining about the daunting task of doing this letter, David checked and found that Microsoft Word could be talked to, dictated to. So this letter is two firsts for me: 1) The first time I've ever dictated anything and 2) The first time I've ever allowed anyone to read the letter ahead of time as I asked Lisa to edit the letter. (Please don't hold Lisa liable for the editing of this letter; she let many things slide because she knows my style and peculiar ways.)

Happy Holidays!

Michael Nelson

Handwritten signature of Michael Nelson in black ink.

David Updike

Handwritten signature of David Updike in black ink.