

Kingwood, December 17th, 2022

Dear Family and Friends!

Eventful. The word that sums up the year 2022.

As I write this, Christmas is just seven days away, and we will spend our first New Year's Eve in Houston in thirteen days.

We left behind 23 years living in the Seattle area, moving three times steadily northward from Newcastle to Kirkland to Mill Creek. Each time we moved, we did so because the landlord did not renew our lease.

It was Saturday, April 30th. We were having dinner with the pastor of our church and his wife when I opened the envelope. It was a letter telling us to leave the Mill Creek home within three months. We knew this was coming, just not that fast.

We were about to leave behind many friends, our church, a neighborhood, the grocery stores, the restaurants, and everything you take for granted, like Mount Rainier suddenly appearing out of nowhere while driving on the freeway.

With the notice in hand, we planned and scrambled.

We had to decide what to keep, what to give away, and what to dump. We did not have a small household. We have shelves of books and music in every physical shape going back decades, LPs included. We had to move several hobbies and a business. We had no intentions of downsizing, but some things had to go. The baby grand piano went to friends. Some items we posted online to be picked up at the front door. Some furniture was too rickety to survive another move. In German, there's a saying, "three times moved is once burned down." By that adage, we've burned down twice. Over the past 47 years, our cities are Montreal, Chicago, Cleveland, Greensboro, Seattle, and Houston.

I came to Montreal in 1973 as a graphic designer and embarked on a career in real estate after fourteen months in Seattle. Some of my clients became my friends; one became one of my best friends. Other friends we made through the church, bible study, and chance encounters. Some of them became real estate clients.

During the move-out of Mill Creek, when our home was no longer livable, we spent the last five nights as guests of dear friends in their Redmond home. On Sunday morning, July 31st, we drove our trusted 1997 Honda Odyssey van to Hope Presbyterian Church in Bellevue for one last time. After the church service and potluck lunch, we went east over the Cascade mountains with Houston as the destination.

But first, let me explain how Houston became the destination.

Because we knew that the lease of the Mill Creek home would end, we had spent some time exploring the where-to-next question. Mainly, we considered Ohio, the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida. Ohio because we lived in Cleveland for sixteen years, and Frances Ann grew up in Columbus, where we got married, and her brother still lives. Eventually, we decided to compare Florida and Houston firsthand.

On May 21st, we flew to Houston, where we rented a car and stayed in an Airbnb. For one week, we explored different areas located on Houston's periphery.

For those who don't know, I should add that Frances Ann's second cousin, Bill, lives with his family in Kingwood, a northeastern suburb of Houston. Bill's father and Frances Ann's father were cousins. We had visited them before, and they had been to Columbus several times to see Frances Ann's father, who passed away on August 22nd, 2021.

Other reasons for considering Houston were the benefits of living near a metropolis with outstanding medical and cultural facilities and events. Finally, the prices of the homes in Houston are less than half of Seattle homes.

After one week of exploring Houston, we took off in our rental car, with the first destination being Jacksonville, Florida. We made the trip in three days, crossing through Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama and stops in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Pensacola, Florida. We stayed in an Airbnb in Jacksonville for six days and scouted out areas up and down the northern parts of Florida's east coast. We saw some beautiful neighborhoods in Ponte Vedra and explored Fernandino Beach, Flagler Beach, Ormond Beach, and St. Augustine, the oldest town in the United States. There, we enjoyed a seafood dinner courtesy of friends from our church in Bellevue who had already moved to Florida.

From June 6th to the 9th, we took a break from sightseeing and house hunting. We stayed at a vacation condo overlooking Ormond Beach. The weather had been cooperating for most of our journey, and now the sound of the waves and the blue sky invited laziness. We did not venture far into the water but instead took walks along the sandy beach and watched the birds doing likewise.

June 9th was the day of a long drive across Florida via Orlando to Sarasota. In the Orlando area, we made two stops. The first stop was in Sanford, the home of Ligonier Ministries. We visited the chapel and walked the grounds, where we stopped at the burial site of R. C. Sproul. I have listened to more of his sermons than any other preacher.

The second stop was to have lunch with the former pastor from the Bellevue church (seeing a trend here?). In the evening, we arrived in Sarasota, tired but happy to check into yet another Airbnb.

I had been to Sarasota the year before while visiting with a close friend from my early corporate days in Chicago. John had retired and lived with his wife in Naples. He had been afflicted with a disease that was destroying his nervous system. I am so glad I saw him one more time because the illness took him earlier this year. On the trip north from Naples to

Clearwater Beach, I stopped in Sarasota, where I met a former client for whom I had done work over several years without ever meeting her. One year later, I met her again, this time with Frances Ann. She would have liked us to settle in the Sarasota area. We saw several homes but ultimately decided it was too pricey for what we wanted.

Still, Sarasota was excellent, with the most pristine beaches and the best seafood and ethnic restaurants we found on our trip. There was even a German delicatessen store that was equal to or better than any other I had been to in the United States, including Chicago.

On Tuesday, June 14th, we started our trip back to Houston. Driving first north, we stopped for a night in Tallahassee, and going west, we spent one more night in Baton Rouge. Back in Houston, we rented another Airbnb in the Woodlands, the largest of Houston's planned urban developments. Kingwood, where we eventually purchased our home, is Houston's first of its kind. We stayed for another week to explore the Woodlands and surrounding areas before flying back to Seattle on June 23rd.

Now the move was only a bit more than one month away. I have spared you earlier a description of packing and moving, and I will not dwell on it here because it was, in many ways, a disaster. After our prior moving experiences, we thought we had picked a better company, but we were wrong. I will skip the details and pick up where I stopped earlier when we left from the church parking lot toward the Cascade mountains.

Our first stop was Moscow, the one in Idaho. We visited several of our friends from early Seattle who had moved to the Moscow area. One of them had moved from Port Angeles, Washington, to Princeton, Idaho, a 30-minute drive northeast of Moscow. They manage an even larger farm than before and still run a concrete contracting business there.

After three days, on August 3rd, we headed south toward Bozeman, Montana, and the next day to Casper, Wyoming. We stayed for one night at hotels in both places and planned to do likewise at our third stop, Denver, Colorado. There, in the lobby of the Hampton Inn, we were scheduled to meet the notary public to sign the papers for our Kingwood home purchase. We made it in the nick of time. At least with my real estate background and Frances Ann's mortgage experience, we knew what we were signing.

What we did not know was what was wrong with our Honda Odyssey. Along the way, some strange noise alerted us to potential trouble. Frances Ann suspected the air conditioning, and unfortunately, she was correct. For much of the trip toward Denver and with temperatures around 90 degrees (32 Celsius), we drove with the windows down. It was Friday afternoon, and the search for a Denver Honda dealer was suddenly more important than signing the papers.

To make a long story short, we had to stay in Denver over the weekend. After a night in Dallas, we arrived in Houston on August 9. Our first stop was the REMAX office, where we picked up the keys to our second own home. The last day we owned our first home was July 3rd, 1998. That day, the moving truck left Chagrin Falls, Ohio, for Greensboro, North

Carolina. It is not without irony that during 20 years in real estate, I did not own my home but helped hundreds of people sell and buy them.

Our next stop was Kingwood Greens, a neighborhood of 219 homes where our home is located. After living here for four months, we know we've made the right decision. We were just here for a few weeks when we were invited to a block party where we met many of our new neighbors. Texas lived up to its reputation of southern hospitality in so many ways. First and foremost, that applies to Bill and Patty, who live only three miles away. We spent Thanksgiving with them and their five sons. One of them, Will, is a real estate agent who helped us purchase our home.

The home was built in 1995, and like all "used" homes, it needed some work. We also wanted to make some changes and improvements. We have accomplished a lot already, starting with adding some interior walls. Most recently, we completed the repairs of some of the exterior stucco finish. I was the one who was keen on having a pool. Now that we do, we realize that it is not only handy to have in Houston's sweltering heat, but the very sight makes us smile. Speaking of the heat, from the end of April to the end of September, you can count on temperatures in the nineties (30 to 40 Celsius) with matching humidity. Your outdoor activities end around nine in the morning and begin not before seven in the evening. We've just started our first winter here. Temperatures swing widely, calling for a light sweater one day and shorts and sandals the next.

It does rain, and when it does, it often pours. Roads and ditches swell quickly, and many drains can't deal with the deluge. Usually, it passes quickly, but flash floods can happen. This was never worse than in 2017 when Hurricane Harvey hit Houston. There isn't time or space to explain the details except to say that it was a local authority's fateful decision to release water from a local dam. The result was catastrophic damage. Our home was flooded about 50 inches (125 cm), meaning the first floor is almost brand-new. It is unlikely that the same will happen again, but just in case, we have flood insurance.

When we left Seattle, people asked me if I would retire. I had no such intentions. However, now that we are here, I realize I could spend all my time pursuing everything I like to do. There will always be work in and around the house. We've always enjoyed gardening, which is very different in this climate than in Seattle. We do miss the Northwest Pacific scenery with its snowcapped mountains. Houston's highest elevations are some of the freeway overpasses. But don't get me wrong, we live in pleasant surroundings with plenty of trees. Kingwood is called "the living forest" for a reason.

As some of you know, I began to live a healthier lifestyle late in 2020, which included losing about 50 lbs (23 Kilos). I also picked up Pilates exercises and began to walk and jog. I've continued with the jogging starting to look more like running. With the encouragement of Frances Ann, I began to take golf lessons. Watch out Bernhard Langer! Staying in physical shape also helps my mental capacities, which I will need to continue to work in real estate.

There are two reasons for me to keep an active license in Washington. One is to work with an exceptional client on a project similar to the Bellevue luxury home that sold last year for

\$5.9 million. The other is to concentrate on relocations between Seattle and Houston. For the latter, I need to get my Texas real estate license which means many online hours and studying for the eventual exam.

What takes us out of the house are mostly grocery and hardware stores, nurseries, doctor's offices, restaurants, church, and our respective Bible Study Fellowship groups. We have only one car, Frances Ann's van, with 195,000 miles (314,000 km). Speaking of mileage, from the end of May to the beginning of August, we drove about 6,250 miles (10,000 km). My other car, a 2001 Infiniti with similar mileage, is parked in Bellevue. After my next visit to Seattle, I plan to drive it across the country to Houston.

On the domestic front, I am the beneficiary of Frances Ann's talents for interior design and decorating. Over the 46 years we've been married, we rarely disagreed on matters of taste. Speaking of taste, our spacious kitchen has reawakened her culinary talents. With Christmas coming, that means she is baking cookies again!

You are invited to visit us. We have plenty of room (and a pool).

Frances Ann and I wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. May the peace of Him from whom all blessings come be with you during this season and the year 2023.

Affectionately,

Gerhard and Frances Ann

Where are all the pictures?

They are at: <https://reseatle.com/letter>

Password: 2022