

# Seasons Greetings!

## 2015 in Review

There is nothing like spending an hour or so in the local Hallmark store in mid-November to get one in the right frame of mind to write a Christmas newsletter. It's already full of Christmas paraphernalia, gifts and specialty cards. I get a lot of strange looks as I stand there and weep like a baby reading some of the cards meant for Mom, family and friends. Mom is 94 years young this year, and here we are at my brother,



Jim's beautiful house, about a year ago.

For years, I have envied friends who are fortunate enough to spend the winter months in the sunny south. Last year, around October, we started looking and found, by sheer luck, a 3 month rental in North Port, Florida. We left just after Boxing Day, and arrived New Year's Day.

Driving was the only option because, of course, we had to take Oliver! He is now a registered Service Dog, believe it or not, and no hotel or motel can refuse our stay.

The house was located about an hour from Sarasota and 30 minutes from Venice. It was a 3 bedrm, 2 bath + den bungalow. Almost upon our arrival, we joined a gym and they offered a great class called Silver Sneakers 3 x per week. Because of Helmut's



Parkinson's Disease, it is very important that he stays active; otherwise, his mobility will deteriorate.

Our friend, Susan, was staying in Clearwater at the same time, and we were able to visit her and



her dog Teagan. Great place! She introduced us to a restaurant with a doggy menu! We also met a wonderful couple, Jack and Nella Berkhout

from Port Colborne, ON, who have wintered in Florida for many years. They helped us celebrate Helmut's 75th birthday and our 11th Anniversary.

Susan came to stay with us for 2 weeks in late February. We were able to



Cruising - Feb 2015

take a day for ourselves to Venice and had lunch at 'Sharky's on the Pier.' She also dog-sat Oliver while we took a 7-day cruise out of Tampa on the Norwegian Sun. It was a lovely break for me - no cooking for a whole week! And they had a great exercise room which we used everyday!



Oliver and Teagan



Unfortunately, we had to cut our trip short. On March 8th, Helmut experienced some unusual pressure in his upper chest. We thought he might be having a heart attack, so we immediately went to the Sarasota ER about a kilometer away.

They could not find any heart-related issues so ordered an MRI which uncovered multiple small suspicious-looking tumours in his lungs, on other organs and in and about his abdomen. We went back to the bungalow in shock, packed up everything, and drove home. Upon arrival in Ottawa, our GP had made an appointment for Helmut at the Cancer Assessment Centre; the opinion was that these tumours had probably been slowly growing since Helmut had prostate cancer 5 years ago. He had a lung biopsy done and our worse fears were confirmed by Dr. Seely. Stage 4 inoperable cancer. His Oncologist, Dr. Malone, started him on hormone therapy immediately - pill a day and a hormone shot in the stomach once every 6 months. Not too invasive. We go for blood tests every month so that his PSA levels can be monitored. (PSA stands for Prostate Specific Antigen found in the blood produced exclusively by prostate cells.) We will find out December 23rd at our next visit if they have improved. Even if they are maintaining the same level, that will be good news. Our fingers are crossed.

Now, Helmut looks good, has regained the weight he lost, is feeling well (except he tires easily), eats nutritionally balanced meals, exercises regularly and sleeps well; he is in no pain and is in good spirits. No vital organs are blocked. So, we are grateful for small mercies. His Parkinson's creates far more issues for him than the cancer!

In August, Helmut's nephew, Frank Mueller, wife Petra and children [Max (18) and Lisa (21)] came to visit us. They live in Oberkotzau - a small town in Germany. Frank is a Dentist and Lisa is in a special school to become one as well. When they told us in late May that they had decided to come to Canada, it provided the needed incentive to start cleaning up the cottage, inside and out. See page 3. It was a very nice visit for all of us!

As I write this, we are again in sunny Florida. A client referred me to a couple who own a Minto condo bungalow in Sun City Center. Until they are ready to retire, they rent it out. They restrict the rent to six months which seems like a long time, but we didn't want to miss the opportunity. We drove down for the 1st of November, but we have flights booked to be home for Christmas. We've even found a place for Oliver to stay while we're in Ottawa called Camp Bow Wow! We are missing our friends, but are making new ones. Sun City is an amazing 50+ community with abundant activities and a wonderful lifestyle. Life is short, as we fully understand, so we intend to enjoy what we can while we can.





## How to Increase the Sale Value of your Home ...



If you're thinking of selling, it is almost required to do some 'staging' these days in order to get the best value for your house. Here are some things that you can do to improve its saleability:

- \* **Fast fix for the linen closet.** Do the towels on your shelves look as rumpled as those in the hamper? Try folding them so that all decorative bands line up. Or, roll and stack towels to evoke the image of a high-end hotel or spa.
- \* **Colour-code clothes.** Crammed closets look chaotic. Hang clothes in order, from light to dark, for an upscale-store feel.
- \* **Create cozy nooks.** Cluster furniture in snug conversation areas, leaving a clear pathway 20 inches wide. Your goal: intimate but not cramped.
- \* **Don't forget the kitchen.** Organizing underneath the sink makes everything look orderly-even the plumbing.

- \* **Keep fireplace mantels sparse.** Put away all but a few well-chosen accessories. The empty space allows buyers to imagine their own knickknacks decorating the house.
- \* **Spruce up your shelves.** In the kitchen, turn all cans and boxes so that the labels face outward, giving cupboards a tidy grocery-store appeal.
- \* **Remove family photos.** Depersonalizing the space makes it easier for others to see the house as their own.
- \* **Hide the cosmetics.** Put all toothbrushes, razors, and night creams in a makeup bag in the hallway closet. No buyer wants to imagine other people attending to hygiene issues in their future home.
- \* **Set an attractive table.** Help visitors imagine a warm evening in their new home by clearing off the table, then setting it for dinner.



## 'Staging' makes a huge difference ...



Curb appeal was needed - overgrown shrubs were removed and flowers planted. Black mulch created a fresh look! Created a great 1st impression!

In November, we sold one of our investment properties located in the lovely neighbourhood of Alta Vista. It had been rented to diplomats for the past 5 years and needed very little work to make it saleable. But, we wanted a good price for it, and that meant 'staging'; btw, that's a service I routinely offer my Seller clients. Dymon Storage has a locker full of furniture and décor items that I have collected over the past many years, but if I don't have just the right item, National Rental is always there to help me. I sometimes use paintings and décor items from home, too. Something that I've found improves any bathroom is big colourful towel - as many as you can fit in. Fresh flowers are important and creating a comfy ambiance too, if possible. For example, note the bottle of Dom Perignon on the coffee table - a gift to the lucky purchasers!





## The Housing Outlook — Winter 2015/Spring 2016

With the election behind us, all Realtors are optimistic that the real estate market will take a positive turn in 2016. It seemed to in November when 990 residential properties sold through the Board's Multiple Listing Service®, compared with 891 in November 2014, an increase of 11.1 per cent. (The five-year average for November sales is 944.)

There was a positive increase in condo sales too, which may be explained by buyers moving to Ottawa to accept positions with the new government. November's sales included 199 in the condominium property class, and 791 in the residential property class.

The President of the Ottawa Real Estate Board says condo inventory levels are balancing out, which is good news for those who have purchased condos as an investment. In other words, stay the course!

If you have a condo to rent, please remember that most Realtors will gladly help you find a good Tenant and usually the cost is just one month's rent. Credit checks on prospective renters can be done for you which provides often needed reassurance that rent will be paid.

As I have said many times before, we are fortunate to live in Ottawa where property values continue to rise, and incomes remain relatively stable. This is a perfect recipe for buying and selling .... so if you are contemplating either one ..... please remember that I would love to help.



## Cottage on the Big Rideau ...



When we learned in late May that Helmut's relatives were going to pay us a visit, we started a major clean up of the cottage. I feel that I can now share some pictures with you.

We were able to have the dead trees and those that had fallen on the property after the ice storm (1998) removed. We found someone who had worked cutting redwoods in BC in his younger years and who wasn't afraid of heights! Then, our contractors, Claude and Frank started to rake and clear all of the smaller fallen branches and debris from the cottage area to the entrance of the property. An amazing improvement.

The inside was cleaned from top to bottom and all those boxes, magazines and junk that had been sitting in the living room for years were either discarded or stored in the attic.

The kitchen counters and cabinets were cleaned as well as inside every cupboard door—something that had not been done in at least 40 years. The fridge and stove were cleaned too.

New sliding glass doors were installed on both the front and rear balconies.

The garage and carport were finally 'finished being built' and were stained to match. Still have to clean out the workshop and perhaps have a garage sale. Although there's always maintenance on any cottage, I think it is now in good shape for us to enjoy. There is at least 250 feet of frontage, and the water is clean (but lots of zebra mussels). Oliver loves the water and fetching his Frisbee!



Helmut's catamaran is for sale! This is an old picture (about 1977) but the only one I could find. It is in pieces lying in and about the garage and carport. Repairs are needed, but it is a fantastic experience if you are so inclined. Asking \$5000. (Yes, that's me!)



*"The best and most beautiful things in this world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart."*

# OTHER STUFF!

## 20 Ways to Maintain a Healthy Level of Insanity

1. At lunch time, sit in your parked car with sunglasses on and point a hair dryer at passing cars. See if they slow down.
2. Page yourself over the intercom. Don't disguise your voice.
3. Every time someone asks you to do something, ask if they want fries with that?
4. Put your garbage can on your desk and label it "IN".
5. Put decaf in the coffee maker for 3 weeks. Once everyone has gotten over their caffeine addictions, switch to espresso.
6. In the memo field of all your cheques, write "For smuggling diamonds".
7. Finish all your sentences with "In accordance with the prophecy".
8. Don't use any punctuation.
9. As often as possible, skip rather than walk.
10. Order a 'diet water' whenever you go out to eat, with a serious face.
11. Specify that your 'drive-thru' order is "To Go".
12. Sing along at the Opera.
13. Go to a poetry recital. And ask why the poems don't rhyme?
14. Put mosquito netting around your work area and play tropical sounds all day.
15. Five days in advance, tell your friends you can't attend their party because you're not in the mood.
16. Have your co-workers address you by your wrestling name "Rock Bottom".
17. When the money comes out the ATM, scream "I won! I won!"
18. When leaving the Zoo, start running towards the parking lot, yelling "Run for your lives! They're loose!"
19. Tell your children over dinner, "Due to the economy, we are going to have to let one of you go."
20. And the final way to keep a healthy level of insanity .. copy and send this page to someone to make them smile. It's called ... therapy.

**HOME**Evaluation.ca™

If you would like a complimentary, no obligation, Home Evaluation, please go to:

[www.homeevaluation.ca/myra](http://www.homeevaluation.ca/myra)



### Eggplant Parmesan

from my friend Susan!

#### Delicious:

1 medium firm eggplant...try to pick one that is not too fat, has a flat bottom and is very firm and shiny.

Slice the eggplant into slices approx. 3/4 " thick.

Place in a colander, sprinkle with salt and leave to sweat for about 15 min.

Pat dry.

Mix 50% dry bread crumbs and grated Parmesan cheese together on a small plate.

In a separate bowl, beat one egg; dip eggplant in the beaten egg and then in the crumb mixture.

Put a small amount of oil in a frying pan, heat the pan and oil; then fry the eggplant until golden brown on both sides.

Transfer to a baking dish.

Cover with spaghetti sauce, grated Parmesan cheese and Mozzarella.

Bake in 350 oven for approx. 30 min. or until bubbly and baked through.

You can do the same for boneless chicken breasts.

Very fast and easy especially if you have the sauce already made up.

**Enjoy!**

# Merry Christmas!

This comes with more wishes than most greetings do,  
Because it's from me and because it's for you!



**Myra McKeen**  
Broker of Record  
613-294-8545

# Happy New Year!

**milestone** REAL ESTATE BROKERAGE