



Wow – I can’t believe a month has gone by since the Christmas season!

Our two kids, Michelle and Marc, came back home (Michelle from the Bay area and Marc from sunny Hawaii) and we’ve had a tradition of seeing the “popular” big movies out at that time of year.

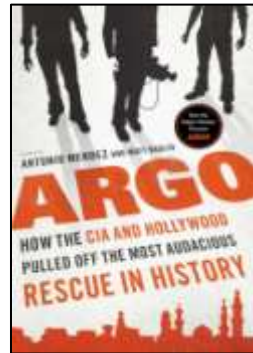
So this season we saw Les Misérables (excellent movie, but bring the Kleenex), Skyfall (great James Bond with all the attendant explosions, action, etc) and Argo (a gripping drama about the true story of an audacious plan to get Americans trapped in Iran out safely).



Then home for more pumpkin pie!

On a separate note, Don and I are part of a local church where I’m involved with a group of about 25 women who help meet the needs of people in the congregation.

A couple of weeks ago this group met for a Saturday retreat, to get to know each other better, to listen, and to share of ourselves. At the beginning of the day, I encouraged the women to set aside their distractions and to *focus on the moment*.



I shared that when our kids were little, Don and I would cup our hands behind our ears and ask, “Do you have your listening ears on?” For me – in the “busyness” of life and its attendant responsibilities – it’s easy not to have my “listening ears” on to so many things.



With that thought still fresh in mind, I saw on Facebook the story of the Washington Post experiment in 2007 with the violin virtuoso Joshua Bell playing as a street musician at the Washington Metro on his \$3,500,000 Stradivarius.



Joshua Bell playing at L'enfant Plaza, Washington D.C. courtesy of the Washington Post

Three weeks earlier, Bell played Boston’s Symphony Hall. Two weeks earlier, he’d played at Bethesda’s Music Hall. This was an experiment in context, perception and priorities as the Washington Post writer explained.

While his choice of music is beyond my cultural experience, as the Post writer explained, this was not the test. “These were masterpieces that have endured for centuries on their brilliance alone, soaring music befitting the grandeur of cathedrals and concert halls.” I encourage you to Google the story! I wonder - would I have scurried past? Would I have had my “listening ears” on?



Leslie Nelson



Not true!

Well – in my opinion, this headline doesn't give a true picture of how high average home prices have climbed here in the Ventura, Oxnard and Camarillo areas. This recent Los Angeles Times article explains that many factors in some areas can skew the numbers.

“Median” means the middle number. I'm certainly no mathematician, but in my statistics I use average, which I think gives a more accurate picture. There's no denying that we've been seeing an increase in price points – the trend line is up. But the average home value in our area hasn't jumped 19.6% in one year!



This headline from last week's LA Times is probably more close for Ventura County. I haven't specifically researched it, but we've seen filings slow down (still high though).

However...

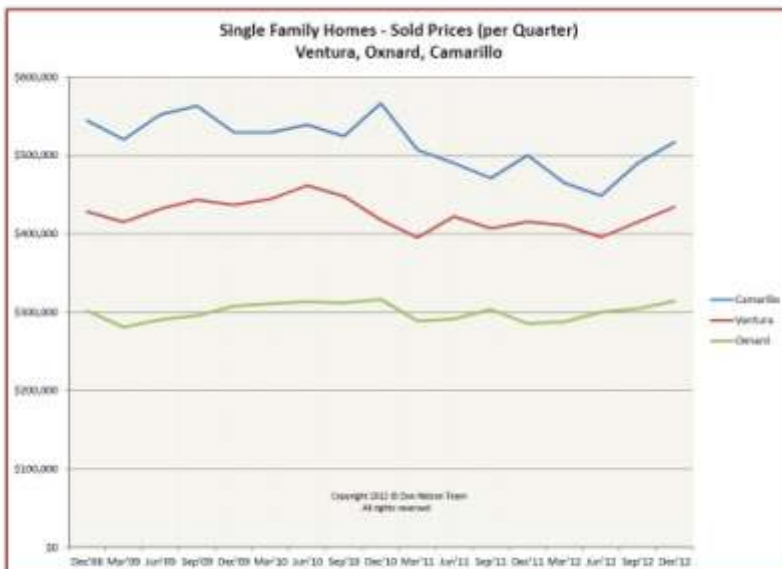
I'm not sure this headline gives a correct, nuanced answer, because effective January 1st, the new California Homeowner Bill of Rights went into effect.

This law has a number of significant protections for underwater homeowners, or for homeowners facing financial distress, but it also means that if a homeowner doesn't meet certain criteria, the lender can foreclose.

Without going into too much detail, it may be that foreclosures might go into a “lull” this first quarter – as some homeowners try to complete a loan mod or apply for a loan mod – but now in 2013 if things don't work out, the servicer/lender **will start** the foreclosure process.

If you know someone in this situation, we would encourage them to **always try to get the loan mod**. But if, for whatever reason, they can't get that loan mod, we strongly recommend they consider the US Treasury HAFSA (Home Affordable Foreclosure Alternative) short sale program before the Notice of Default is filed.

Here's how the quarterly chart looks like from 2008 through 2012:



I like to use the quarterly chart to see how prices are moving – it eliminates some of the monthly spikes, and gives a truer picture.

Depending on which town you live in, prices bottomed either last spring or last summer and are showing strong gains.

As always, Don and I appreciate your business and friendship, and when appropriate – your referrals. **Again, thank you! We don't take it for granted!**