

Dear family and friends,

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! We hope the holidays find you healthy, happy, and prosperous.

Emma will be 2 ½ at the end of December. She enjoys playing with her toys (while talking non-stop), reading books, watching movies (only on the weekends), singing, walking in the forest, and climbing on everything. Her favorite books are those about Curious George, Peter Rabbit and friends, and Winnie the Pooh. Her favorite movies are Snow White and Mary Poppins. Her musical tastes have expanded beyond Raffi (thank goodness). Now she likes banjo music, big band, and anything with Julie Andrews.

Michelle has put a lot of time into the garden. Nearly everything that was there has been dug up and replaced with new perennials. She also planted vegetables in the raised beds during the spring. The greens (spinach, chard, kale) did very well, but the sugar snap peas were eaten by a deer who decided to jump the 6-foot fence! She has attended playgroups in town with Emma and met several other mothers who live here. Emma has her first friends. They have taken field trips to the fire station, to the lake, and to some of the local farms to see sheep, pigs, goats, etc.

I'm still working at Actional. We merged with another company called Westbridge; the joint company is called Actional and now has about 70 employees. We did another round of private funding which will keep us around for a while until the market heats up. Meanwhile the company is doing well building up a small but distinguished list of customers. I'm traveling off island a couple of times each quarter, usually to the east coast or to California.

Our cats had some adventures. Thing 2 ran away the night we arrived. He never even saw the place in the daylight. He was gone for over 8 months and we thought we'd never see him again. After a chance sighting by our neighbors I put up a picture at the post office and we got him back. He had survived most of the time on his own, but he found a family on a farm several miles away and adopted them for a while. Tigger also ran away. She was gone for over 6 months until we finally caught her with the help of our neighbors. Thing 2 keeps the peace between Tigger and her sister Runtling, so they are all now happy and safe together.

It's almost a year since we moved here to Orcas. Our old house finally sold soon after we moved here. We arrived here in the dead of winter and got to watch the entire island gradually bloom into spring and summer. The summer here was full of long beautiful days with over 17 hours of daylight. The average rainfall here is about the same as the bay area, but it's spread more evenly across the year. The hottest days in July hit high 80s and the coldest days in December and January just barely reach freezing. There are more people here during summer but it never seems crowded until you're trying to catch a ferry on a Sunday afternoon. We put our property into a program called "Open Space Timber" which means we maintain it as healthy undeveloped forest. I've learned how to identify various plants, pulled a lot of noxious weeds, and felled and cut up a few dying trees. There are lots of animals too: rabbit, deer, a few snakes and mice, and incredible numbers of birds including hawks and bald eagles.

The best part about living here, though, is the people. We have great neighbors and shared Thanksgiving with two of the families. We agreed to make Thanksgiving a tradition and trade off hosting it each year (this year we hosted). Also, everyone in town is so friendly. It's nice to go to the post office and have them hand over our mail without even asking who we are or what our post office box is. What a great place for Emma to grow up.

Take care and love,

Mike, Michelle, and Emma
<http://www.mclements.net>