

We hope you and your family are well. We're still enjoying life on Orcas, even more so now that Mike is a pilot and has a Cessna 172. We're learning to be more opportunistic when it comes to weather so we can fly to the mainland instead of taking the ferry. Mike leaves his truck at a small airport on the mainland so we have something to drive for shopping. We share my car on the island, which can sometimes be a challenge. It's working so far.

Mike continues to work as a software engineer. In his free time, he flies his plane (weather permitting) and continues to play his flute in a local chamber music group. He also does big projects for me around the house. During the spring he installed a sprinkler system for the front yard and garden. Lots of digging but what a time saver! We were able to travel to California for ten days in July without having to worry about coming home to a dead lawn and garden.

We flew ourselves to California. Instead of two days of driving and an overnight stay in Oregon, it took us 8 (smoky -- remember those forest fires in California) hours of flying to get to Mike's parents house in Novato. We stayed with his family for several days, flew to Palo Alto to visit one of my old work friends, then flew to Madera to visit my family for a few days and attend my 30th high school reunion. The return trip was another 8 hours of flying, though less smoky with better views. Even flying, it's still a long trip, but it's nice to get there the same day and it's less stressful than driving.

Emma started first grade this fall. Her teacher is wonderful. He is gentle but firm and has an amazing command of the classroom of twenty kids (I help out in the classroom on Friday mornings). Emma is now an independent reader and enjoys reading all the books available to her in the classroom and from the public library. I have to pack a book in her backpack so she has something to read to and from school (she demands it). When she isn't reading she's often writing and drawing at her table in her room. Sometimes I wish she were not quite so productive. I had to get a couple of storage boxes so she could save her work -- she insists on saving everything. Emma continues playing piano and seems to be a natural. I sit down with her every morning after breakfast to help her practice. It is my way of continuing my piano education since I had to quit my own lessons for lack of time.

We didn't have many visitors this year, but it was just as well since we had to have the house painted. It was more effort than the two painters realized; they did a good job but took the entire summer (they were working other jobs as well). During the painting, my cat, the same one that got stuck in the fir tree last year, was mysteriously poisoned and paralyzed. Mike saved her by assisting the local vet to pump her stomach and inject liquid charcoal. She left a gift of charcoal in the mudroom, disappeared for two days, and thankfully returned to start her 4th life on Orcas. I'm glad it's 10 more years before we go through that again.

At the end of the summer we had a visit from one of my high school classmates, Carla Simi, with whom I reconnected at the class reunion. It turns out that she has a daughter, Chloe, the same age as Emma. Before the reunion, Carla had planned a family vacation to Seattle, Olympic Peninsula, Vancouver Island, and San Juan Island. I convinced her to stay with us on Orcas at least one night. I've never met a girl more like Emma than Chloe! They read the same books, have similar interests, and both talk non-stop (especially Chloe). We hope that one day we will be able to visit them in Southern California when we take our mandatory trip to Disney Land.

We wish you all a Happy New Year!

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