



Merry Christmas! We hope you have been doing well this year despite these uncertain times. We have had our share of challenges this year. Mike started out the year as a casualty of the economic crisis. His company, Progress Software, shut down the research and development group he worked in, but his boss asked him to stay on for another couple months to help with a software release. Then Mike had the enviable task of looking for a new job when very few companies were hiring. He focused his energies on the big software companies in Seattle (we did not want to move back to California). He talked to Google, Amazon, Disney, and a small company called Tableau Software (he declined to send his resume to Microsoft). The companies had him running the technical gauntlet for the interviews, but he aced them all. In the middle of May, he started work for Disney in downtown Seattle as a Solutions Architect and is helping them improve the scalability and performance of the servers that run their web sites (which include ABC and ESPN).

Meanwhile, on the home front, Emma and I continued to live on Orcas so Emma could finish the school year and we could get our Orcas home ready for selling. We looked for a new house in the Seattle area, found a home in Magnolia, and put an offer on the property at the beginning of June. Then began the painful process of escrow. The inspections uncovered issues with the brickwork that had to be fixed by the sellers. It was a challenging time to get financing on a second home. Our loan had to be manually underwritten by the bank so the escrow period took 60 days instead of 45. We managed to close in the middle August in time for us to do some interior work before moving in and before Emma started school in September.

It has been a tough transition for Emma. Although she is happy to see her Dad everyday again after 3 ½ months of him working in Seattle while we lived on Orcas (he did fly his plane home on weekends), she misses everything she had on Orcas. It took a couple months for her to adapt to the new school. Fortunately, she has an awesome teacher who is very understanding. The extracurricular activities have helped too. She enjoys her piano lessons with one of the teachers at the school and French lessons with someone who teaches at the school in the morning before classes start. The big turning point, though, was Halloween. Emma thought it was so exciting to trick-or-treat in our neighborhood, which seems to be very popular (had ~100 kids show up).

My transition to city life has been a little easier. I love having the independence and convenience of shopping at the malls and discount stores whenever I want to instead having to plan an off-island trip. I love the fact that our neighborhood is extremely quiet because it's off the beaten path and that it's conveniently located near good grocery shopping (i.e., Whole Foods and Trader Joe's). I also love that the local Magnolia library, while small, has a good selection of children's books for Emma. However, just when life was getting easier for me (after finishing all the unpacking), we had a couple of big storms in November and had water intrusion in the basement bedroom (we saved the new carpet, but not some baseboards or trim). So far, we have discovered a poorly sealed window, failing brickwork (the part of the wall the sellers should have fixed, but did not), completely clogged downspouts, and a possible crack in the foundation or footing drain.

If that's not enough to keep us busy, we continue to travel to Orcas every couple weeks to maintain our property there (thank goodness Mike has his plane). Although real estate is very slow on Orcas, we have had lots of interest in our home. Unfortunately, no one is in a position to buy right now. At least all the realtors on the island know about our place and are motivated to sell it. Here's to a happier and easier New Year! Love, Michelle, Mike and Emma