



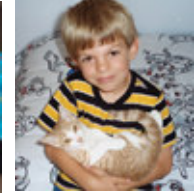
Happy Holidays from the Beinlichs!

December, 2004



We grew the usual vegetables and herbs (tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, corn, cucumbers, squash, pumpkins, basil, pole and bush beans) as well as some things new for us: onions, kale, leeks, carrots, dill, turnips, and peas. From September until November we're almost completely consumed with harvesting, roasting, pickling, canning, drying, and freezing. Three maddening attempts to grow beets nearly turned Sharon into a hunter! Deer, mice, pheasants, mice, gophers, and mice were a big problem this year. Oh, did we mention the mice?

So... to deal with that, we expanded our pet collection this year by acquiring not one, but *two* kittens! In August we got Murray (an orange tabby), and three weeks later we got Mike (a black Manx). We're hoping they'll eventually grow into their intended roles as rodent controllers, but for now we all think they're pretty adorable and entertaining pets. Mingus has even learned to put up with them!



Speaking of pets, Mingus, who turned 14 in September, had a difficult year, but is still going fairly strong. In June, she suddenly lost the use of her rear legs, a mysterious (and expensive!) episode that lasted over two months. She recovered, but this month came down with "geriatric vestibular syndrome," which has temporarily affected her balance. She's on the mend though, and on her way back to her usual barking self.



As you can imagine, this was a year of tremendous growth for Mason, who turned 5 last February. It's hard to believe that last year at this time he was in pre-school! Mason joined a T-ball team in April, which was entertaining for all three of us. It was a kick to watch the team improve as the season progressed! Unfortunately, during an early May game Mason learned the hard way about following instructions. He got a little too close to his teammate, who was warming up as the next batter. The bat and Mason's head

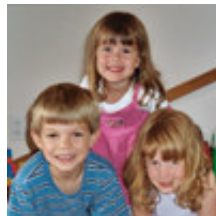
connected. The resulting black eye was quite something to behold! It gave us a scare, but Mason has his Dad's hard head, so he recovered just fine.



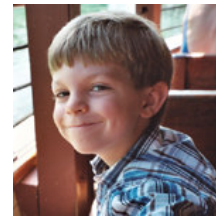
Mason started kindergarten at Mayflower Montessori in September. The Montessori environment definitely suits him: he's reading everything in sight, doing "carry-over additions" and "borrow-over subtractions" (as he calls them), and even multiplication tables! We often say he's like a sponge, absorbing everything around him. He has discovered some special friends and is learning the importance of being a role model. He also likes learning music and sign language. Mason's spare time is spent exploring the farm and playing with his cousin Sean and friends Abby, Turner, Dylan, Rhys, and Sammy.



Mason with Sean



Mason, Lindsey, and Abby



Handsome young man



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Somehow we found time for house and yard projects. In May, we had ceramic tile installed in our entryway, kitchen, and dining area. We only mention this because we also added a radiant floor heating system under the tile. Now that winter is here, we are really appreciating it. If you haven't experienced radiant floor heating, try it sometime. It's extremely comfortable, and it's very energy-efficient! Speaking of energy-efficient things, this June we became the proud owners of a new Toyota Prius, which is a hybrid gas-electric vehicle. It's very well-designed, and we especially like the gas mileage!

Also in early summer, our electric company agreed to remove several trees in our front yard that were directly below the overhead power lines. These trees were unhealthy from having been "topped" many times over the years. This provided us with lots of firewood and mulch, but left us feeling rather exposed to the street. Time to design a hedgerow! Well, as such projects have a way of doing, our hedgerow has evolved into an underground utility conversion, and we are in the thick of that as we write this. How do you get from a hedgerow to a utility project? Don't ask...!

Well, that brings us around to the present. And speaking of the present, have you finished your obligatory seasonal consumption yet? Well we haven't, so we'd better get this letter wrapped up so we can head to the malls! There's hardly time to remember to slow down and enjoy Nature's slow season, as we always like to remind everyone else to do. But we're looking forward to spending time with family and friends, and hope that you and your loved ones are all happy and healthy. We wish you all the joys of the season. Let us all take care of each other, and work for peace in the New Year.

Happy holidays!

Love,

Brian, Sharon, Mason,

Mingus, Mike, and Murray

Brian Sharon MASON

