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You can view this letter, with larger pictures and links, at our web site: http://www.beinlich.org.

Hey, it's December again! Where did the year go? We're not sure we know, which is one of the reasons we sit down at this time of year and write this holiday letter. Of course the other, more important, reason is that it gives us a chance to let you know what's been up with the Beinlichs.

First off, we finally realized that since we always have to send out our letter before Christmas, we never get to include any Christmas pictures. So here's a fun one of Mason and Dylan Mueller from 2003.







January started out quietly, thanks to Mother Nature. An unusually heavy snow storm for our area (we got about 3½ inches, and we're at 250' elevation) was immediately followed by a major ice storm, which put about 3⁄4 inch of ice on top of all the snow! *That* kept us (and

pretty much everyone else) in the house for about 4 days, enjoying the fire and landscape, making snow people, and trying to slide in the not-quite-deep-enough snow. It was not all fun, though. Several of our farmer friends lost



greenhouses and crops. It was an event we'll remember for a long time.

Things didn't stay quiet for long, especially for Sharon, who spent a lot of time this year helping her grandparents. After she made trips to St.

George, Utah in February and March, her grandfather ("Papa") was put on hospice and they moved up here to Hillsboro. With lots of help from her brother Michael, she found them a house, fixed it up, hired movers, got them moved in and settled, and hired a caregiver team for Papa. This pretty much consumed Sharon until about July, when things settled down a bit and she rejoined the rest of her life (already in progress). But most importantly, we are pleased to report that Papa is doing far better than he was earlier in the year. He celebrated his 83rd birthday in July and was recently released from hospice.

It was a challenging year for us on our farm, which we have named "Dos Sequoias." All of Sharon's effort helping her grandparents meant that we were unable to focus much attention on the farm during that time. We managed to get seeds ordered and started, but weren't really able to give much attention to marketing our tomato, pepper, and eggplant starts. We did sell a few to friends, neighbors, and pre-school parents, so it worked out okay.

Our fruit and berries did well, giving us grapes, plums, strawberries, peaches, pears, apples, and cherries. It was a particularly great year for cherries. Not only were they plentiful, but in June we were astonished to discover that a grove of trees to the south included 27 pie cherry trees! So we ate and stored all the cherries we could, and shared plenty more with friends and neighbors. Yum!



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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.



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As if we didn't have enough going on last August, we took a trip to Florida to see Brian's family. The occasion was a visit from Brian's brother Bruce, who lives in Panama. The timing was a bit off, though, because we attempted to fly into Tampa just as hurricane Charlie was passing through. Four cancelled flights later, we finally arrived in Miami at about 1:00am. It turned out that Bruce was also stuck in

Miami, so the next morning we all drove in the wind and rain to

Tampa (by way of Orlando, which had had its share of devastation, too). The week-long visit was memorable in many ways, but we'll always fondly remember the drive up to Tampa because of the quality time we had catching up with Bruce. Mason provided the entertainment by telling riddle after silly riddle to his Uncle Bruce!



During October, Brian invested a lot of time canvassing with MoveOn.org in support of John Kerry. Mason went along too, and had a great time meeting and greeting our neighbors. Even though the election didn't turn out the way we'd have liked (to say the least), it provided a great opportunity to meet like-minded neighbors. We've even started a new discussion group as a result of hosting a house party following the election, so we will continue to be active in the political arena.

We continued a lot of our previous activities this year. Brian's growing consulting business continues to compete for his time on the farm. His several clients have kept him hopping most of the year. Projects include database design, software development, and web sites. He is still doing sound for Fez Fatale. The Fez even played at North Plains' annual Elephant Garlic Festival this summer! Look for a new CD from them next year. In the fall he also worked on a live CD for The City Lights Project. He continues to be active in our local CPO, and is still treasurer of OCVA. Unfortunately, Alternatives to Growth Oregon (AGO) was forced to cease operations due to lack of funding. It's a tough time for non-profits out there.



Sharon continued her volunteer activities for the Northwest Earth Institute (NWEI), and is now a discussion course mentor. The Earth Institute now has chapters in all 50 states. Their discussion courses are very good, and are worth looking in to. Sharon was the Hillsboro Saturday Market coordinator for the Master Gardeners again this year. She also started belly dancing classes, and is having a blast. It's a lot harder than it looks!

Summer brought weddings for two couples we know: Toni Arnone,

who sings in Fez Fatale, married Andrew Plato in a beautiful ceremony in the Columbia Gorge. And our dear friend Thor Hinckley married Alison Wiley in a very environmentally-conscious wedding near Hood River (also in the Columbia Gorge).



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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.

Brian Sharon Mason

Happy holidays!

Love,

Brian, Sharon, Mason,

Mingus, Mike, and Murray

