

Dear family and friends,

It has been a big year for our little family. Especially notable was the addition of our beautiful new tractor. We'll come back to that later, though, as we had an even more significant addition several months prior to that. On February 18th, 2007 we were blessed by the arrival of Cora Marie, our first child.

We've really enjoyed getting to know Cora and the opportunity to avoid making all the mistakes our parents made. Since our parents made **no** mistakes with us, avoiding them hasn't been very difficult. (What? They might be reading this...) Cora is a very good baby: easy going, loves people and kids, and sleeps well. She likes to read books, pulls herself up and cruises around furniture and of course plays constantly with the dog (though Katie might wish she wouldn't.) There's been slight interest in crawling but she gets around well enough by rolling and shows a clear preference for bipedal transport. However, her balance has a ways to go before that can become a reality.

We put a few pictures of Cora on our Christmas card and have an endless supply of Cora action shots on our gallery at: www.hempel.cx. So far Crystal has been good about updating the gallery at least once a month. Shawn also started a personal blog (short for "web log") this year at: www.shawnhempel.com. It's a great example of what happens when you pay someone too much to do too little.

For those who know us well, it may seem like Shawn is constantly changing companies. It's somewhat accurate – his job history has been three years with his first employer, two years at the next, and one year at the last. However, he is very excited about this new company so we're hoping that pattern can end here. Around the middle of August he accepted the job of Senior Software Engineer for a small software development company in Beaverton called Tranxition. Ironically, the company is going through a transition of their own as they have recently turned over the entire development staff and are starting fresh to reestablish their business. It means a lot of great opportunities for Shawn to improve both as a developer and as a leader.

Crystal continues to enjoy her work with Legacy Health Systems as a Registered Nurse in Pediatrics. She moved to the "Resource Pool" two years ago so she never knows until that morning if she'll be working at Emanuel Children's Hospital in NE Portland, Good Samaritan Hospital in NW Portland, or the newly opened Salmon Creek Hospital in Vancouver, Washington. The variety keeps her on her toes and gives her experience with different people, problems and processes. Prior to Cora's birth, Crystal switched from full-time (three 12-hour shifts) to part-time (two 12-hour shifts.) She went back to work when Cora was about three months old and is glad for the chance to get an occasional break from her Mommy duties. Crystal loves her job and the population she works with as kids and their families are always very appreciative of the care she provides.

We found a wonderful babysitter for Cora through a friend Crystal made at a women's bible study at our church. Michelle, our babysitter, is a stay-at-home Mom with twin 11 year old girls and a four year old foster boy. It also was discovered that Shawn's Dad and Michelle's husband occasionally work together. It is a small world. Michelle watches Cora when Crystal works on weekdays, but when work falls on a weekend it's Daddy's turn to keep Cora fed, diapered and content. We feel pretty blessed to have such a great arrangement.

Shawn has spent some of his (rare) free time working around the farm and on the house. Born and raised in the suburbs, this is often a lot more entertaining than it should be. The burn pile has grown so large that it is nearly visible from space. We've even considered having it added to Yamhill County's list of visitor attractions. That, or we may just finally burn the thing, but that becomes more difficult as its sentimental value grows steadily. Truth be told, he has tried to burn several times; that darn pile just refuses to die.

As mentioned at the beginning of the letter we did purchase a new tractor this fall; a four wheel drive TYM 233 HST to be exact. We like to think of her as our second daughter, mostly because she cost more than our first. She is quite the helper, digging holes with her backhoe and pulling up posts and moving dirt with her front loader. On one occasion she made good use of borrowed attachments to deal with an area of our yard previously overrun with weeds and unproductive fruit trees. Measuring in at 23 horsepower, she's a little too small to handle some of the bigger jobs around the farm. Fortunately we've built a good relationship with the local rental yard. We're expecting a Christmas card from them this year.

One thing neither the tractor nor the rental yards have helped with much is installing our new bathroom. We appreciate our house, but the five bed, one bath floor plan just isn't ideal. So while we managed to settle on a layout and acquire a double-vanity and toilet, we have yet to actually begin converting our spare bedroom into a bathroom. Hopefully by this time next year it will be a different story.

There are many other events we could recount, but this is probably as good a place as any to conclude. That said, one of our goals for the coming year is to stay better in touch with the people closest to us so that, hopefully, when it comes time to write this letter next year we will have nothing new to report.

Here's wishing a very Merry Christmas to you and yours.

With love,

Shawn, Crystal, and Cora Hempel