

Life in Minnesota

I know you're dying to hear from us and it is the end of our 4th week in Minnesota, so I'm taking a break from emptying boxes to get you up to speed. It's been a dizzying pace of activity. Makes me wish I were 20 years old again, energy wise that is.

The weather has been cold, but not unbearable, if you consider being in the high 20's unbearable. Little or no snow lately. Today, there is the threat of a possible wind chill factor of 60 below in some parts of the state...that's bad! This January was the warmest on record, apparently –in 185 years of recording the weather. To Minnesotans, it has been positively balmy, which they are pissed about because there is so little snow to play in (no kidding) and guess what? That's all they talk about...the weather. They are very serious about their snowmobiles, ice hockey, skiing, snow sledding, and ice fishing in these little boxed houses they temporarily build after they've driven out on to a lake. What the allure is about ice fishing, I have no clue. There seems to be a bit of a psychological gamesmanship they play amongst themselves to outsmart the weather and tempt fate to see if their car falls into the ice. That happens a lot, we hear.

Howard is very happy at work. He's sort of the big fish in a little pond here and they have bestowed upon him a wonder lust about having worked in Silicon Valley, especially at Sun Microsystems and Apple. He's been given management responsibilities, which he wasn't exactly hired to do. He finds himself automatically invited to and included in very high-level meetings. That means How has had to switch gears and function on a much higher level than he's used to. It's kind of nice to have a reputation that precedes you. He worries about being a disappointment, but as far as I'm concerned, it's recognition of his abilities long overdue. He's more than capable, and my job, as I see it, is to remind him of that. You can see that I'm slightly prejudiced, of course. In short, this was a sound move professionally for How. The people here are incredibly friendly and helpful, and they look you in the eye when they talk to you –in other words, they're fully engaged and interested in what you have to say. It's amazing the small lapses in social graces we put up with in California. It's a bit of a culture shock too, but very pleasantly so. He says the pace is brisk, but not insane. It is a small company that has been around for 20+ years (www.heii.com), but it is reinventing itself under new management and Howard, it seems, appears to be integral to that reincarnation, i.e., he's THE MAN without the cape and phone booth.

To give you an idea, but not get too technical, the company makes itty-bitty circuit board assemblies for the medical and communication industries. Their specialty is micro-electronic assembly. They do a lot of assembly onto flex and rigid-flex and also onto ceramic boards. The flex is a cool invention, which looks like cassette tape and to conserve space, they flex it into "s" shaped curves to stack on top of each other, circuits and capacitors. It's ingenious. Some of their customers buy board assemblies like that to go into hearing aids, defibrillators, pacemakers, and little opto circuits that go into routers and switches. Basically mounting a chip onto a board, then wire-bonding it, soldering passive components, and then encapsulating it with epoxy. Not the sexiest products Howard's worked on, but he's learning a lot about medical equipment qualification processes and that will help him get solidly entrenched in the medical device industry. He brought home one of those teenie tiny boards –the size of an eraser on a pencil...I'm not kidding. Size, and how small they can produce these boards, drives the medical device industry.

Howard's 35-minute commute to a town called Victoria (southwest of Minneapolis) is down country roads that wind past picturesque farms. The terrain is very flat, and at the moment, very white. It's kind of breathtaking, actually, seeing a house, a very large red colored barn with tall silos, and then nothing else as far as the eye can see in between. These farms are really spread out; they encompass a lot of land. He doesn't have to take city freeways at all. One of the best aspects of his new work experience is that people go home at 5pm, including the bosses. In 30 years of working in Silicon Valley, How has never, ever, been able to go home at 5pm. I still can't

believe it! He's home and eats dinner at a reasonable hour. That's also a strange, but welcome twist in our new life here.

When we began house-hunting 4 months ago, the main criterion was to find a house to fit the dining room furniture, of all things. A minimum of 12' x 20' was required, and that would be a tight squeeze. It's massive mahogany that I inherited from my grandmother, and I didn't want to part with it. Also, it's always been the center of family gatherings and when we have guests, so it was very important. In addition, we wanted enough room so when our kids visit, they can have their own room and another for the grandkid(s) with access to a bathroom.

Our house is gorgeous, over 3000 sq. ft. and it is new, huge and very open interior wise. We didn't plan on buying such a large house –it just turned out that way. Plus, how can you ignore the peculiar coincidence of finding a house in Howard Lake, of all places? Is SOMEBODY UP THERE trying to say something? Anyway, it cost us a quarter of what our house sold for. As you enter the front door, you're in an expansive kitchen (the largest I've ever seen) with a kitchen nook/breakfast room area (very good size). Then the ceiling vaults to a second level, where we've put our formal dining room furniture. It's a 3-car garage, 5-bedroom, 2-bathroom house with hardwood floors, solid oak cabinets with rollout shelves & pantry, staircase, 6-panel doors and a full finished basement. That's where our office and my drafting table are. It's all golden oak, which I love –very rich looking. The house sits on a little hill overlooking Howard Lake, which is about 100 yards away. That's the view we have out of our large picturesque breakfast room window. What's also extraordinary is that our house is at the crest of a cul-de-sac, which borders on a golf course, hence, the name of our street, Greens Circle. Sounds too good to be true, doesn't it? I keep pinching myself to wake myself from this incredible dream. Do we deserve this? It's all too real and very nice indeed.

We've never lived in the snow, but so far we are enjoying the beauty of it. There is a silent yet perceptible sense of peace and the slowing down of rhythm, time and space, which is a stark contrast to living in California. So far, it suits us. To be sure, there's mud and slush to worry about, tracking into the house, but we've decided that everyone has to take their shoes off at the door. That's going to be the house rule now, Japanese style. I found some dark green baking racks to match the green kitchen counters and that's where we store our shoes coming in from the snow. No more muddy floors and soiling the carpet, at least for now.

Sometimes when leaving for work, Howard will find that it snowed over night and the problem of getting out on a snow filled driveway can be troubling, although so far, it hasn't been. We have a lovely next-door neighbor who is from Pakistan and he has a small snow plow, which he says he's happy to let us borrow to clear our driveway with if we need to or, if he's removing snow from his driveway, and we haven't yet, he'll just do ours as well. Very sweet guy. Around 4pm, when I'm starting to prepare dinner, I notice outside my kitchen sink window, the children come out all bundled up except for slits of eyes exposed to the elements, and they play ice hockey in the cul-de-sac. Tiny kids play too, and they're very good. Then, coming around to the large breakfast room window, I watch them snow sled down the soft slopes that lead to the end of our property with a view of the Lake 100 yards away. It's a scene right out of Norman Rockwell and it brings a huge smile to my face. I can't help it.

We found a temple 37 miles away named Beth Shalom, in a town called Minnetonka; we think we may join. It's very much like our Temple Beth El. They've just built an 8-million dollar shul for 800 families and coincidentally, their long-time rabbi went to school with Rabbi Rick. They know each other very well. Before we bought the house, I went on line to find out about the Jewish community. Remember, originally we were going to move to Bemidji. Because I found out there are no Jews in Bemidji, I mean none, I threw a dart on the internet in areas near Minneapolis, and found the number of this couple, who happen to be membership chairpersons of this shul. During our 3 trips out for job interviews and house searches, these incredible, loving souls housed us, fed us, and guided our footsteps through different area suburbs to learn the culture of living in Minnesota as Jews, and that's how we found Howard Lake. We like them very much and I think

they like us. In fact, they are so extraordinary as people, that the weekend we moved in, they came on that Sunday bringing fresh baked challah, and helped us unpack the entire day. And they live 40 minutes away!

The only downside about this move (if you can call it that) is that our daughters are VERY unhappy about us leaving town and the fact that the house they grew up in, is now sold. Even though, strangely enough our eldest daughter is still up in San Francisco and planning to move to Seattle, home of Starbucks headquarters, and Asher is in Tennessee already with his family and our granddaughter, our move was just another extension of our family breaking up as a cohesive unit because over the last few years, independent of each other, we concluded that none of us could afford to live in California anymore, much less continue to live in Santa Cruz. Lily, on the other hand, is staying in Santa Cruz and wants to try to stick it out, although how she will, is something she's finding out already, will be next to impossible. There was no way, however, she would even consider coming out to live with us. Minnesota? Please, Siberia is far more inviting.

At present, I'm trying to find a doctor to replace our former physician, which will be no easy task. There are all these little incorporated towns around us with various levels of shopping malls, so I'm finding pretty much anything I need, but I have to drive a minimum of 5-10 miles. Minneapolis is 35 miles east of us and we haven't explored the twin cities yet, particularly the very famous "Mall of America," but we will eventually. There are Wal-Marts everywhere of course, but I refuse to step foot in one. It's my silent protest of the way they treat their employees and how they destroy small businesses in small towns – God, don't get me started on that one.

So now you have it...our little tome on life in Minnesota. At this point in our lives, *sans* children, we highly recommend it. I must say, however, that many times throughout the move, I've thought of you, our friends, relatives, and how much Howard and I will continue to miss the love and friendship we've shared throughout the years. It's obscene that we were forced to make this drastic change in our lives, but perhaps we can look forward to the irony of communicating more often by email, cards and letters than we did, when we lived minutes or miles from each other. Isn't it weird that that happens sometimes? But, because we all care for each other, that's what we will have to do, I guess, and as you can see, I love to write. Plus, you'll come to visit, OF COURSE! and we'll see you when the opportunity arises, and the bonds we have will never break. We miss you already. Just know that Howard and I are happy, finding our way in a strange and new adventure in our life. I thank God that we're still young enough to enjoy it as a second honeymoon. Maybe you're not too far behind as well...Love always, Howard & Maria

PS: Our new address is **2028 Greens Circle, Howard Lake, MN 55349, (320) 543-3693**, same email addresses. Our cell phones are the same too, How's **(831) 206-6025**; mine **(831) 331-7542**. It's always best to call on the landline before my cell. I don't always have it on my person.

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