

December 2004

Autistic Family Update for 2004 and Stirring Holiday Greetings

Mom and Dad Redux

The canine Josie and Rush are no more. The arthritis got to be too much for them. And after years of doing so for Luke and Kate, Cathy and I had little patience for cleaning up canine bodily emanations.

Still, for five years Cimmy and Fawn were like living with dog versions of my parents. They'd spend 95% of their time ignoring each other and most of the other 5% grumbling at each other over the most idiotic things. Then three minutes later, they'd look at us like we were loony for thinking they were fighting.

In August, Cathy moved her classroom from the school it was in temporarily (all of last school year) to it's permanent location at the K-4 school in Kodak, Tennessee. The move was made primarily so that she would have room to add a student a month during this school year, apparently. And the school system laughed at me when I suggested bunk-desks. Maybe I should have said "modular desks" and added \$500 per.

Meanwhile, Luke has become the 12th grader he'll be until the 2008-2009 school year (the one during which he'll turn 22). Kate is in seventh grade again, sort of, on paper. She'll have one more year at the middle school before spending the rest of her adolescent years in high school.

Not to be outdone by the incremental progress of my

Mark Time, March

beloved family, for the first time in my life I've actually had the same supervisor more than three years. Of course, special education changes so much I don't have time to feel antsy.

Behind these toothy smiles are a couple swimming in a select sea, telling everyone that the water is as great as we think it is. Water falls are powerful and beautiful.

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Why does a Luke wear red suspenders? 'Cuz dad took the blue ones. Oak Ridge, Tennessee, July 4, 2004.

Greetings from the Sunshine State



Cathy and Kate on the ship to Grand Bahama Island, August 4.

That was the theme of this year's Autistic Family Summer Vacation. Fortunately, it was prehurricane Florida and I guess the Romanczuks contrib-

uted enough to the local economies from Daytona to Fort Lauderdale to assist the rebuilding efforts.

Two days at Daytona Beach, three in Orlando, and three in Freeport (including the 6 hour cruise to and 10 hour cruise home).

The waves weren't happening, so we had mostly pool activities and a little sightseeing.

We did Universal rather than Disney this time, but Grand Bahama was the real Island of Adventure. If you go there, take plenty of cash because half the places don't accept credit cards, but they all accept plenty of cash.

The moral of the story is beware of friends bearing \$1000 family vacations because it takes a heap of money to save a lot of money.

Handmaiden of God Kate Elizabeth Rottenhead

Um, correction to last year's news. Looking at the old one now, I realized I said Kate was chrismated in October, 2003. That's when she became a catechumen. Thankfully, the Orthodox don't do the "Who made me?"/"Why did God make me?" cat-echism that I grew up on. Of course, like her brother, Kate knows all that but isn't telling.

Despite the headline, Fr. Stephen nixed the "Rottenhead" part. But she isn't named for Catherine, either, but for Elizabeth (mother of John the Forerunner).

We had the "Kate" in mind since the 1985 K hurricane that was heading for Biloxi and caused these young lovers to say our good-

byes a few days early (but that's another story). The "Elizabeth" didn't come to us until Cathy was in the recovery room, and then only because it sounded right with "Kate" (and for a few crazy aunts). Since, though, the spirit of St Elizabeth has been moving me to be right for Kate.

Kate has been doing better and better in a church I guess best known for long services (and men in beards and dresses, but that's another story). The parishioners are an extremely tolerant and supportive bunch. Of course, they'd all be lost without Luke to do their doors and chairs and put out the trash.



"It's just oil, Kate, really." Father Stephen and Kate's sponsor on Holy Saturday, April 10, 2004

School and Work and SSI and Draftability

I'm not quite done with the course work, but it's close. Then I go into dissertation mode and Cathy gets her turn.

I continue toiling away as the invisible man in Sevier County Special Ed (the Lone SpEd Ranger?). Cathy's sticking with the young ones as long as her knees hold up. (Have you ever wondered why you don't see many older teachers in elementary schools? Floor time's a killer.)

We registered Luke with the Selective

Service, but God help us if it ever comes to that. We tried to sign him up for Supplemental Security Income, too, but the Social Security Office wants more proof that he has a disability. If the same caliber of people running the SSA work the Selective Service System, all the Chicken Littles fretting about the return of the draft have little to worry about. Osama will die of old age first.

Cathy and I thought about registering Luke to vote, too. He likely would give it as much attention as

47% of the voters out there.

Our other baby became a teenager this year while Cathy and I continue to feel (as Garth Brooks sings) too young to be this old.

"You are pursuing a doctoral degree—you should be prepared to respond to whatever is asked—without the benefit of prior preparation!"

- Comment on my comprehensive exam, which I passed (despite the sound of it).

Adventures in Home Repair (Another Series of Unfortunate Events)

The dishwasher died in January. When we picked out a new one, the delivery guys told us it wouldn't fit because the floor had warped and expanded. (Apparently, it was leaking under the linoleum for a while; not just in it's dying months. "When you get a new floor put in, call back." *Easy for you to say*, Cathy and I thought.

However, since Cimmy and Fawn had been doing there business on the living room carpet as frequently as they

used the backyard, we decided we could get new vinyl for that room, too. (Despite my front page story, we didn't yet know the dogs were in their dying months, but just assumed they were being stupid. It's hard to tell with greyhounds.)

Fortunately, we had a few snow days in January, which Luke, Cathy, and I used to tear up the flooring and replace all the areas that needed new

wood. Kate didn't try to help, but stayed highly amused by the whole ordeal.

Many hours (and back pain pills later), we had the new floors down and promptly tore a "V"-shaped gash in the kitchen vinyl while putting back the refrigerator. Then for equal measure, ripped open the living room vinyl putting back the TV cabinet.

"Autism is a life-long developmental disability for which there is no known cure." - Autism Society of America

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I'm Cathy J. Romanczuk and I approved this newsletter.

<http://www.geocities.com/autisticfamily/>

May your own adventures in home repair, child rearing, aging, or whatever occupies your time, become your joy and continue to be a blessing for you and yours in 2005. You are ever in our thoughts and prayers. The water is great! Jeff and Cathy, Luke and Kate

League Commissioners?

If you had to choose the least athletic person in the Romanczuk and Webb families (my and Cathy's generation of each, not the detritus crowding the globe now), Cathy and Jeff would be at or near the top of such a list. Even so, you are reading a letter from the newest commissioners of the Eagleton Little League Challenger Division.

So much for my promise to Cathy that she could watch from the stands for a change, and join the other parents in complaining about the coaching. Now she'll be calling outs from the infield with me doing the same behind the plate for every game. We'll have to treat those stinkin' Tigers, A's, and Reds the same as the Knights and Rockies!

How could such a thing happen, you might ask. It isn't that we don't know how to say "no" (or that we are too slow to run). Although I'm reminded of the Flintstones episode when Fred and Barney became their lodge's newest officers because their names were the only ones in the water buffalo hat, it wasn't that way at all.

The couple who have done it for the past 10 years—since the softball for special needs kids started in Blount County—is getting serious about retirement planning now and asked us if we'd take it on.

Luke also did the Upward (aka "Holy Roller") Basketball last winter and we intend to have Kate endure it again soon, too. As you can probably tell,

we have no bigger roles in Holy Hoops than parent and chauffeur.

The kids also did area-wide Special Olympics bowling (Luke first place, Kate fourth for a change), and basketball. Luke went to the state-wide games back in May with me attending to coach the bocce ball team to a hard-earned bronze.

Play ball!



"Hush, Dad. I'm not going to look at the camera no matter what you and mom try."