

Autistic Family Update for 2005



Meanwhile, the Eternal Students. . .

In October, I moved offices and got a new supervisor shortly after that. Job stability felt odd, anyway. Back to normal now. What I don't like is that no little kids are around anymore. Granted the 3 to 5 year old SpEd kids could be noisy at times, but it's no different from kids being noisy at church. They are what we're here for, after all.

Luke is in the third of his six or seven 12th grade years. I didn't realize he officially counted as a senior until one of the general ed students told me Luke's name was on her senior shirt. Should have suspected since I've spoken with every recruiter about Luke not joining the military. I guess he'll be on everybody's senior shirt until his last one, the 08-09 school year. Here is his first yearbook picture.

Kate is in her last year of middle school; she'll be moving up to Pigeon Forge High in August, but not in the same room as Luke. Unless Jeff gets canned, in which case Luke and Kate are likely to join Cathy at the litigation leader.

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Cathy Joins "the Leader"

Cathy and Sevier County parted at the end of the school year over irreconcilable differences. With gas over \$3 a gallon, she couldn't reconcile her checkbook. So she cut the commute in half, joining what the East Tennessee chapter of the Autism Society of America calls "the leader" in special education. Cathy has six high school students, two TAs, and enough good stories to make me miss "real" special education.



Can Luke help it if he has the most comfortable lap in the US? July 2005

Greetings from the Other Side of the "Iron Curtain"



MiG 23, NATO code name "Flogger,"
Bulgarian National History Museum

With five East TN teachers, a UTK instructor and a Borgas U professor, I visited Bulgaria and Russia in July. The five of us were presenting how it

Why spend your own money going to New Jersey when you can spend the government's money going to Eastern Europe?

went when we taught the same lesson set as several Bulgarian teachers did. Got to visit several schools in the Black Sea port of Borgas and

many great sites and restaurants there and in Sofia, the capital. Moscow and St Petersburg were just for fun, if you define "fun" as being accosted on the subway, escorted out of a church, and detained at the airport. In between all that, Mother Russia has a lot to show and teach that is worth seeing and knowing.

While there, I got to spread some of my dad's ashes in the Black Sea and even remembered my prayer book when giving some of Rush to the Moscow River. That took care of north and south of where his actual roots began and some unfinished business for me.

I visited Montreal in April to present my dissertation in progress. In 2006, I'm not traveling anywhere!

Let's Hear It for Grandmom!

My mom—the Irish half of the that 55-year duo, Josie & Rush—visited East Tennessee the end of July/early August. It was fun to have her here instead of us doing our typical summer visit to her house.

Actually, that was the ulterior motive. Part of the reason she visited was to give my sisters a chance to get rid of some of the 55 years of clutter. She moved into an assisted living place outside Philly in November, but clearing the shore house continues.

My mom took the picture below while we visited Ripley's Aquarium of the Smokies. (Cathy's school year had already started.) We also took Josie to Oak Ridge's Museum

of Science and Energy, and to an Orthodox Vespers, which she really didn't want to do. (Catholics are funny.)

It was good payback for the woman who used to drag me all over that God-forsaken city as I hung onto my baby brother's stroller. It took forty years, but she's finally slowed down to my pace.

We'll have to have her back next summer, since we didn't do Dollywood or even the Smoky Mountains National Park itself. But another thing Josie did get to do was visit with my in-laws for the first time since 1993.



"It's just a bunch of fish." Grandmom wasn't impressed by the Aquarium of the Smokies, but at least she had good company. August 2005

Phartgatorio

Cathy had cause to receive a colonoscopy this year. (Sorry, no pictures.) She also has a breast lump that is not only benign but peripatetic. (I didn't know they could move around freely in there.)

She's had chronic heartburn so she went to the Dr Brown, the gastro guy (I'm tempted to add a pun about his name, but I'll just let it pass).

Thankfully, those in the recovery room had empty entrails. Still, it was a surreal scene.

Also thankfully, in Cathy's case it was nothing more than a hiatal hernia (some stomach poking through her diaphragm); no ulcers or other signs of trouble. So much for my parents' theory that kids cause ulcers.

"A bunch of people in hospital smocks laying around on gurneys and farting. This must be one of Dante's levels of Hell."

- Jeff arriving in the gastro recovery room to take home Cathy



Let's Not Hear It for the Big "E" or the Dislocated Knee

One would think autism were enough of a cross to take up, but Luke has always been an over achiever spiritually. On March 21, he had his first epileptic seizure. This one happened at school, so we missed all but the aftermath. However, Pascha afternoon, May 1, he had the second seizure at home. Luke hitting the bathroom floor was so loud, I thought he'd knocked over a cabinet. The only comedy in this was Cathy and me trying to move him in advance of

the ambulance. Much later, when I was trying to remove the trunk of one of our dead trees, I commented, "It weighs more than Luke." If Rhode Island can be a comparative unit of area, Luke ought to be the same for weights. There hasn't been a third seizure, but tinkering with the antiseizure med doses has become a new family hobby.

September 15 Kate slipped in her bedroom and hit the floor left knee first.

The upper and lower leg bones were about a centimeter away from the kneecap, on either side of it. Her immediate reaction was to put Cathy's hand on it, like "Dang, mom, this hurts. Fix it." So Cathy and I tried to massage it into place, but it didn't hold. She's been wearing a knee brace since spending that night at the emergency room, but hopefully this will end with the next visit to the doctor on December 1.

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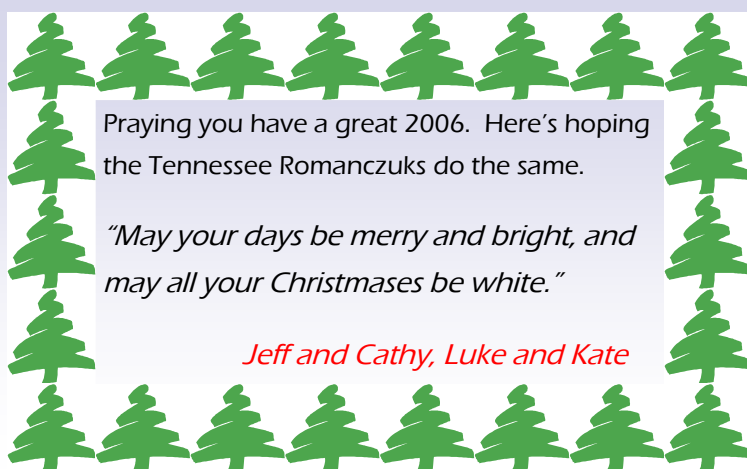
"This better not end up in the Christmas letter."

- Cathy, after living through several of the life-events not detailed herein

"Owning a house is like having another kid with autism: it doesn't talk and you just have to keep taking care of it forever."

- Jeff getting exasperated by the home repairs

"Autism is a spectrum disorder and it affects each individual differently and at varying degrees." Autism Society of America



Open Invitation to a Pool Party June 30, 2006

It could still fall apart any minute, but it looks like I'm going to graduate (for the last time) this summer. So those waiting for a good excuse to visit the Tennessee Romanczucs (and, frankly, who isn't?), this is it.

Father Justin puts a new altar server through the paces, November 2005.

In honor of my 40 years of wandering the formal education desert, we're holding a pool party at our subdivision's recreation center the last of June. I wish someone had told me before I started that education is a journey, not a destination.

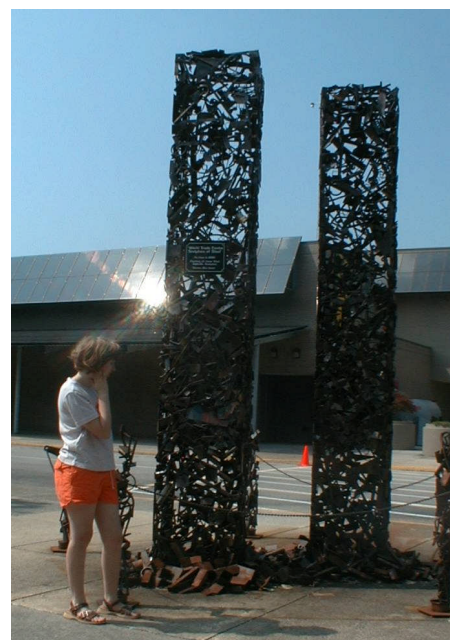
an elective course for GenEd kids. It isn't just an in-classroom requirement, either. But when the autistic family went to family night at a local honkytonk with Cathy's students, the only one on the dance floor the whole time was Kate.

Closing Comments

The kids are still in summer camp a week in June, holy hoopsters basketball in the winter, softball in the spring, and Special Olympics events all year. Luke will have to help us coach softball next season, since he's now too old for little league play.

He just recently became an altar server at church and is showing more deference to priests' vision of how it should go than I thought he would.

I pick on Cathy's school system, but one thing they do right is have peer tutoring of the SpEd kids as



Kate at the Twin Towers monument, Oak Ridge Museum of Science and Energy, August 2005.