

What's New in the Smokies

Cathy started a walking program. I kept the same job all year. Luke earned second honors a few times and first honors once. Kate increased her range of ability (and destruction). We lost two pets (more if tropical fish count), and gained two others. Cathy and I sold the albatross (that is, house in Texas) and finished our Air Force reserve time. For our tenth anniversary (coming in February), we're cruising the Bahamas the week before Christmas.

We have a new area code. East Tennessee is 423 now, not 615. [The first person narration for this annual letter is new, too. Third-person probably didn't fool anyone.]

Same Ol' Stuff

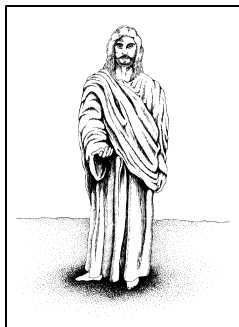
Cathy's still doing the image consulting and selling BeautiControl makeup. I'm in my "sophomore" year at UT (16 credits down and 27 to go) and still doing Department of Energy research/consulting. Luke and Kate have the same teachers they had last year. Both do a lot better at school than they do for us. (Everybody with kids is nodding "same here.")

Walking Shoes

Cathy began a walking program, ostensibly to get back in shape, but I can't help thinking it's to aid in her escape. My mom use to always say she was going to run away from home. I think Cathy's going to walk away. (You'll understand why as you read on.)

She's also looking to get back into the work force. Choices are limited to what fits into the autistic family's lifestyle, but the résumés are still flying, for her and for me.

One of the reasons I'm going to school is to get out of government work. I like being a public servant as much as the next bozo, but the rumors and realities of layoffs have gotten to be a constant distraction.



Luke's Shaking It

Not only is he an honor student, he earned 3 "happy grams" this year—two for cooperation and one for the best participation in reading. (We all believe he can read, though he doesn't talk. Imagine that.)

He's still puzzle crazy, putting together a few different ones at once now and tossing the pieces that aren't to one he's working on. His style is interesting to watch, and it works for him.

Luke had his own vacation in June, to Camp Easter Seal, which is outside Nashville. He had his own counselor; they swam, canoed (canoed?), and slept in an open bay barracks. It was a great break (for us), and we think Luke had a great time, too.

*Jeff, Cathy,
Luke, and Kate*

Kate's World

Kate has to settle for Camp Romanczuk for a couple more years. To see her play in the yard after a rainstorm always reminds me of e.e. cummings' poem about springtime from a kid's perspective—when the world is "mudluscious" and "puddlewonderful." Kate still tears the buds off flowers if unsupervised, a fact my parents didn't appreciate when we spent our August week in Wildwood, NJ.

Probably the best Kate news is that she's gotten more sociable with children her age, not just her classmates, either. The first time she met one of her step-cousins, she hugged him so tightly they both fell over.

She sleeps like an infant, still, with a nap that defies regulation and late-night wanderings. Kate says about a half dozen words, that many more than Luke. Two of them are her big lie, of course. "Good girl!"

Here Comes 1996

I left out so much. Luke driving Cathy's car (solo); Kate using the washing machine as a jacuzzi. As the late Jerry Garcia sang, "What a long, strange trip it's been."

Keep us in your prayers, mainly for breakthroughs for the kids and patience for their parents.

Have a great holiday season and pleasantly stressful new year. You know we will!

