

December 2003

Autistic Family Update for 2003 and Holiday Greetings for 2004

The picture of the four of us on the next page, and this one with my Mom included, were taken the weekend of what would have been my Dad's 77th birthday. He died suddenly in August and my Mom is still adjusting to it, as are we all.

Of course, its different when you're older. I haven't lived at home in more than 20 years. Except for two brief visits a year, we've been in touch by phone and letter since then.

That's the only good in it, that I don't have to call to talk to him anymore. Just start. He's as near as God, and near to God I'd

like to think.

My Mom's talks with him are of the "Why didn't you see a doctor?" "Why did you leave me like this?" variety. But after walking (then laying) around with a burst appendix for two weeks before I saw a doctor, it's tough for me to fault him.

Even so, with a check for my share in one hand and my share of his ashes in the other, I had to admit it didn't seem like a fair trade off for not having the mortal Dad around.

Of course, he's very alive in my head. The

Driving Lessons

driving lessons were nearly 30 years ago and his bits of advice still come back to me as I drive. If I buck while shifting, "Don't jerk off the clutch" still makes me grin even now.

I wish he had taken his own advice about not hurrying up to red lights.

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With Jeff's Mom in Rio Grande, New Jersey, September 2003.

Living the Integrated Life

With this school year, I've gone fully over to Special Education Administration. Except for testing those referred for possible SpEd services, the only direct interaction I have with kids is incidentally, as I visit around county classrooms. (Except for Luke and Kate, of course.)

But it's the right role for the lone wolf of SpEd. Even my UT course work ties in so well that most of the time I don't know what day or time it is.

This SpEd life all day, all night, all summer is what Cathy was guarding against, even as those SpEd sirens called to her. (They

sounded a lot like me, oddly enough.)

So now she's working a consolidated developmental class (CDC) of 5 to 9 year olds. She's such a natural, with interventions nobody teaches because they can't be taught. I like to think I'm God's gift to SpEd, but have to settle for being related to it by marriage.



"Every girl's crazy 'bout a sharp-dressed man." ZZ Top

Luke at cousin Paul and Kelly's wedding, July 5th.

What Would Luke Do?

Our compulsive boy loves to put away stuff. Most of the time, this is good and helpful. Sometimes though, he has his own ideas about where things go. It cost him a job as altar server, didn't even get a tryout because the church is still recovering from Luke's "help" in the parish hall.

As I say, most of the time things are where Cathy or I would have put them, but when you try one place, then another, then another, you are left with only asking yourself "If I were Luke, where would I

have. . .?" WWLD. Can't ask Luke. Well, you can, but it doesn't do any good. Trust me. Cathy and I have tried, sometimes in full voice, so to say.

Telling him he doesn't have to do certain things takes a lot of convincing. Like fully buttoning up shirts on the hanger. I thought I left that lunacy at Officer Training School. Try to tell him there's a reason OTS lasts only three months.

He's very helpful at school too,

not just in the classroom, but in the cafeteria, gym, wherever. With such a messy world, there's no end to the straightening up to be done.



Wildwood, New Jersey, September 2003

Cathy Steals Jeff's Dream Job

It's enjoyable now, but I have this fantasy that I'll chuck SpEd Admin and get back to a CDC, where school systems keep the best kids there are. For now, though, I'm having to live it through Cathy.

It isn't all rosy, of course: She has more than her share of parents from hell. The SpEd laws and paperwork change with the political currents. How good the assis-

ants you get are is never definite. Then you have to put up with those clueless administrators. Of course, that's why they pay her the teacher bucks! The kids are the salt of the earth. Working with them is really just playing. Aside from a few athletes, who gets paid for playing?

I said salt, not sugar. Some of them bite and kick and they pro-

gress so slowly that you can't ever tell how you're doing.

What a minute. This is my dream job?

"...then you have to put up with those knuckleheaded Special Ed administrators..."

While Luke and Cathy drove to Seymour High last year, Kate and I commuted to Pigeon Forge and Sevierville each day. Driving Miss Kate was generally uneventful. It kind of reminded me of drives with my Dad when what little talk there was came from him.

However, we did have a snow adventure and managed to drown a truck. In January we had to ditch the truck and walk the last mile in

Driving Miss Kate

the snow. Kate (in sneakers) got to watch Dad (in dress shoes) inexplicably throw himself on the ground about every 50 feet. In May, there was funny Dad again, wading through water to push the pick up back to the road. My father-in-law says I shouldn't give up on trucks. Let's just say the opposite already happened.

Kate was also chrismated this year, and will likely join Luke and me in Orthodoxy in 2004. I thought she'd take a lot longer to get used to being at church and going through the liturgy, but that part of the week really is a view of heaven. Unfortunately, we have to play out the rest of the week in this mundane world. Cathy, meanwhile, watches from the sidelines convinced we've gone nuts.

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

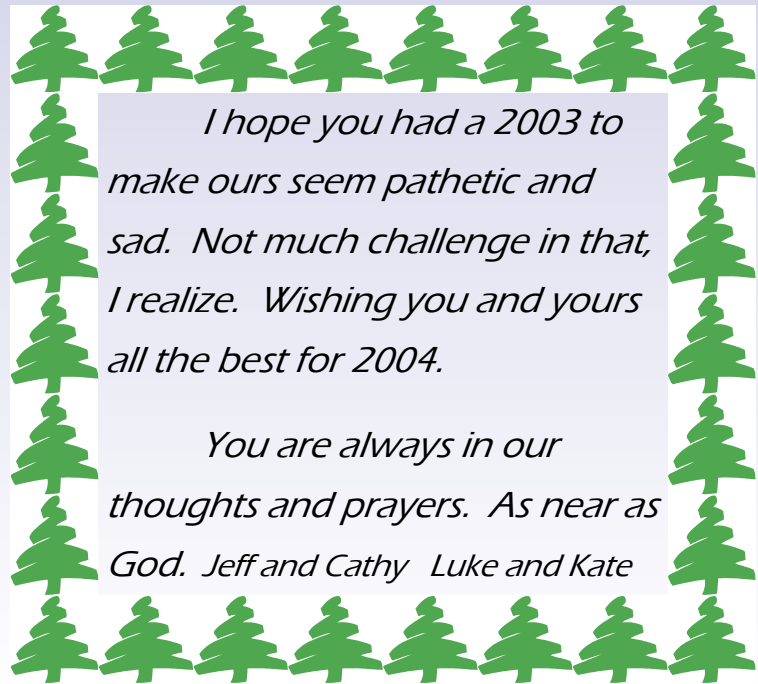
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Everybody's autistic. Some of us are just more autistic than others.

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



Bowling and Basketball and Softball, Oh My!

Kate earned her first 1st place ribbon at Special Olympics bowling. She about always breaks 100.

Luke, on the other hand, has to be reminded that the point is not to hit the pins on a fly.

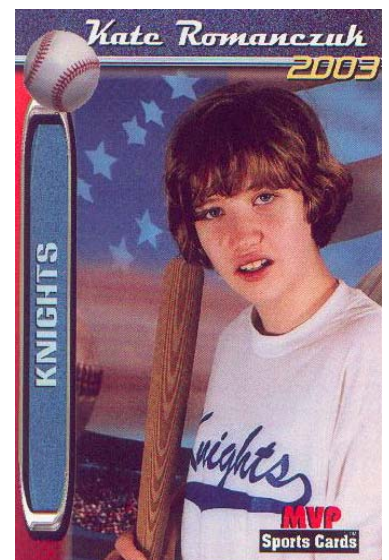
We didn't sign up for basketball last winter, but signed up Luke only for the season that has started practices already. Not much on D, but he has a flawless left of the key approach and lay up.

My Rockies went 5-1-3 with 3 rain outs. JoePa should have had it so good at in football at State. Of course, the main scorekeeper is the brother of one of the Rockies, which has probably helped us at the plate more than anything. The league commissioner asked me

about doing some Sevier County recruiting. (Blount County participation has dropped off in recent years. We aren't getting enough 7 year olds joining to replace the 19 year olds aging out.). If Sevier County ringers don't help, we're going to have to start corking bats (tough to do with aluminum).

Kate ages up to the Rockies next year. I had to promise the other managers three future first round draft picks to get her. She plays any position equally well, so we can barely wait for April.

I promised Cathy she could watch from the stands for a change, and join the other parents in complaining about the coaching.



Future Challenger League Hall of Famer Kate "Cloud of Dust" Romanczuk