

# Autistic Family Update for 2006 and Holiday Greetings for 2007

On the way to Luke and Kate's camp week, we struck up a conversation with a homeless man at a fast food stop. When he noticed that both Luke and Kate weren't quite right, he asked if Cathy and I were kin. Not fully understanding his question, I just said we were married. Cathy, who did understand the question, added, "We're related only by marriage."

We didn't know whether to laugh or feel slighted. As my boss pointed out, others probably think the same thing, but have the sense not ask. What seemingly rational peo-

## ... And a Homeless Man Shall Explain Autism to Us All

ple do ask us often is if we adopted them, to which my answer is usually, "I may be crazy, but I'm not insane! No, we did this autism thing the easy way."

Cathy pointed out to him that I was from Pennsylvania and she was from Tennessee, so he'd understand the great lengths we went to in stirring the gene pool. Still, I'm not sure he believed her.

If only autism's etiology were that easy! Here we are volunteering for all of these genetic studies of autism and it takes a bum to point out the obvious. And I'm not sure what's worse, being insulted by a bum or having it be one of the highlights of the year.

Luke voting, my mom visiting the autistic family again, and Kate starting high school were other big events.

That Cathy and I keep refinding if not reinventing ourselves was another highlight of 2006.

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## Luke at the Polls

Luke has voted three times already, in May, August, and November. At the first one, he did the best at signing in. At the second he did better at making choices, even though it took us about the whole 15 minutes they give. They let me work the voting machine with Luke and he gave the choices as much thought as most do. As long as he didn't go blue on me, I didn't feel the need to steer him.

## Living the Integrated Life

It was my #1 niece at an October 2005 dinner date who pointed out that my work, school, and home life seemed all about the same things. I'm not sure it occurred to me before that, but I am sure it wasn't intentional. What was intentional was my steering away from both training undiagnosed adults and teaching neurologically typical kids. For example, I'm maintaining 3 websites that share the same site search engine. Users may

think they are getting odd results, but it's all SpEd to me.

Back in February, we finally got around to creating a special needs trust for Luke and Kate. When I said I wanted to title it "The Autistic Family Trust," the lawyer said, "Are you sure?" So I asked Cathy: "Are we sure?" "Sure." Choosing it wasn't intentional, but Cathy has always been big on calling things what they are.

15th Holiday Newsletter Anniversary Retrospective, the Autistic Family, November 1991



## He Wasn't a "Real" Doctor, Either

Julius Erving isn't the only Dr. J now. I defended the dissertation (<http://www.geocities.com/autisticfamily/disjbr06.pdf>) on August 8 and heard "Dr. Romanczuk" in reference to me for the first time. So now I can diagnose what's wrong with K-12 education, but I still can't write it a prescription to make it get better.

What I liked about the first Dr. J, though, was that he was always so articulate. Of course, anybody would sound articulate by contrast with Moses Malone, but even two

seconds after the final buzzer, the original Dr. J could say something that showed thorough analysis and insight. I always thought that's what writing was for and that spoken words were just social piffle.

Which reminds me: if you haven't checked out the Aut-Fam website recently, I scanned in a lot of pre-digital pictures and added to both the work and autism writings (post-doc time on my hands, I guess).

I found the name of this mobile phone store in Bulgaria very appealing. (July, 2005; didn't make last year's newsletter)



## Josie and Cathy as the Best of Friends

If my mom can make the trip next summer, it'll be after Cathy's started back to work and I'm home with Luke and Kate for a couple weeks.

You have to take your Josie in small doses, and I think she overdosed being home with my mom all day while the kids and I were at summer school and work.

That said, Josie was here for most of July and it was a joy. She got to attend the Challenger softball league's awards night and (a few weeks later) the pool party. We also brought her to our subdivision's and Sevier County Special Ed's annual cookouts.

Of course we went to Dollywood several times, and even ventured

over the mountains once to visit her niece and nephew in Hendersonville, NC. On the way back from Larry and Carole's, we hit the Cherokee Casino, or it hit us.

**"Don't you think you'd be better off without seeing all of those doctors?"** - Josie Romanczuk, after hearing how a dissertation defense works

Kate has become a head-banger, and (bless God) I don't mean literally. Her tastes in music have taken a hard turn to the raucous, especially 1980s heavies. On the drives home from Sevier County, if I try to play some of the more cerebral rockers I like, a hand with a Motley Crue, Poison, Twisted Sister, or Van Halen CD will appear between the front seats as if to say, "Enough clever word play, Dad. I've had a hard day."

## Kate and Friends

However, she is building her own fan base at church and at school, and this is a marvel to me and Cathy. A classmate told me Kate was her best friend. And I guess she'd be a good best friend to have since you know she won't go blabbing your secrets around the school. However, Kate's best friend is probably Luke, who never tires of

taking care of her and is never cross about it (which is more than I can say for me or Cathy).



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Being autistic is like **being Irish**.  
Everybody is some part; some people are  
just more autistic than others. -Jeff

“Education is a progressive discovery of  
our own ignorance.”  
- Will Durant



## Luke the Enabler and Her Serene Royal Highness, Kate Elizabeth I

Luke and Kate are back in the same school again, which hasn't been the case since Luke started middle school in 1998. Now she's a room away again, as they were at Mark Twain Elementary in Albuquerque.

Our goal one for Kate was to keep Luke away from her. She doesn't have to buckle her own seat belt or even carry her schoolbag with helpful Luke around.

Well, maybe "serene" is an exaggeration. I used to call Kate "the good one" in the years Luke was running away and smearing his bedroom. Cathy always warned me to be careful about that, because the situation could change. Even Kate used to call herself "good girl," which she very tellingly doesn't anymore.

One extreme reality for Queen Kate is chronic knee problems. I was overly optimistic last newsletter. The left knee has popped out of joint about once every other month since she first dislocated it in September of 2005. Arthroscopic surgery is in her near future, next summer if not this Christmas week.

Fortunately for the new good one, a switch in anti-convulsant meds has not only resulted in no seizures since May of 2005 (knock particle board), but also helped slow down his food intake. He isn't losing weight, but at least Luke is maintaining instead of steadily gaining, as he had been for years.

“Dad, this doesn't look canonical to me.”

