

Autistic Family Update: The Smashing Details!

Maintenance and Rebuilding Year on Autism Hill

At a rest stop on the way home from my Mom's 80th birthday bash, Kate got into the van of some fellow motorists. That's autism's way of saying "Enough of the sedan, already." So I made a promise I expected to keep a few years later: "Okay, Kate, we'll get a bigger car next time."

Less than two weeks later, there I was, staring at the deflated air bag and thinking, "Dang, Kate, you're good!" As we car shopped, Kate got to sit in what has to be the quintessential autism-mobile: one seat!

The Invisible Man

I've been in a couple bizarre accidents, but Kate pulling for a new car is

the only explanation I have for the one back in March. Sunny day and me driving the speed limit in the right lane. If it weren't Kate's doing, I'd have to believe the other driver didn't see me because I'm not here.

His Too Visible Wife

As surreal as the accident was, it didn't compare to seeing "*Cathy Romanczuk, 46, . . .*" in the local news section of the paper. *Is she 46 already? Well, I'm coming up on 48, so she must be.* Then the follow up article told her salary and my only reaction was "*How come I ain't seeing any of it?*" That was about as far as my reaction went, be-

cause the whole story was ridiculously blown out of proportion.

Worse was the online commentary, which I stopped reading after day one. As if being SpEd teachers and SpEd parents weren't enough of a glass house to live in. On the bright side, friends were not willing to believe that just because it's in the paper, it must be true. If you have no idea what I'm writing about, you can still Google her name and figure it out. But do us all a favor and don't bother.

Challenger League

With Luke too old for softball and Kate's knee still questionable, we dropped back to basketball only.



Kate in the Rusty Wallace #2 car while we shop for a replacement for Kit, March, 2007.

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If you're thinking—"shouldn't basketball be harder on the knees than softball is?"—then you're too normal to be reading this newsletter. And I mean that in a good way. Read on!

Man of the House



Luke's trading card for Upward Challenger League Basketball, January-March 2007. On the right, Luke on the Cape May/Lewes Ferry, July 4th.

Luke turned 21 this year. We tried to buy him a drink with his birthday dinner, but in true autistic style, he turned down the margarita untried.

There was only one seizure this year, when we ran out of topamax because we stupidly trusted Kmart to give us the

amount indicated on the vial. At least we found out the stuff really works.

Other than this, my main travel companion has been healthy and as even tempered as an obsessive-compulsive young man can be.



Autism Epidemic in Some Parts of East Tennessee

The autism rate has reached 50 in every 100 people in an area of Blount County about 10 miles south of Knoxville.

The rate, reported at 4 in 10,000 back in autism's dark ages (1990, when Luke was diagnosed), has been climbing steadily ever since. Now some sources are saying 1 in every 166 births. However, in some

foothill areas of Tennessee, it's a mind-shattering 1 in 2, maybe 4 in 4!

Maybe 5 for 5. Even our newest family member shows signs of autism: Nonverbal. Avoids social situations. Doesn't mix well with peers. Irregular eating and sleeping patterns. At least D.C. is house-broken and doesn't destroy the furniture, which is more than we can say for Kate.



New Jobs for the Autistic Parents

Second Anniversary, belated Honey-moon trip to Hawaii, 20 years ago.



I jumped into the adjunct world. My first course for Tusculum College was an undergrad level intro to computers/MS Office course, which I did twice during the summer semester. Now I'm doing an ed evaluation course for Tusculum, precollege composition at Walters State Community College, and a masters level research methods/

Cathy moved to the private sector, an autism class at Camelot in Roane County. Until the autism caseload fills up, she is doing a lot of emotional disturbance diagnosed students. "Miss Cathy" again, but these students just call her a Witch (spelled with an uppercase "B").

Cathy is also the newly installed Secretary/Treasurer of our subdivision's homeowners' association. But I have to say, that lazy guy she hired to tend to the main entrance is doing an awful job. Nepotism of the worst kind.



"I'm glad, and everything. But how the h* were you not hurt in this?"**
- Cathy's comment on seeing the extent of Kit's damage

A Doctorate and a \$1.86 Will Get You a Venti at Starbucks

communication course at a newly-opened campus of Strayer University. Yes, simultaneously. In the spring I have three more lined up, but more sanely laid out in tandem. It feels odd to be motivated by money instead of grades, but I it's been a fun mental challenge so far.



Autistic Family Follies

"The letter kills, but the spirit gives life."
2 Cor 3:6

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"I never saw him. It was like he came from nowhere." —The driver of the other vehicle, explaining to the cop how the accident happened. March 21, 2007

[http://
www.geocities.com/
autisticfamily/](http://www.geocities.com/autisticfamily/)

"Cats! I told my wife not to have any." - me paraphrasing my dad after being snagged by DC yet again.



Twenty-five Years in Philly Should Be Enough for Anybody

I didn't come from nowhere, of course, but a place almost as bad. A view not widely shared, or shared at all, by the family I grew up with is that we weren't supposed to be living in Philadelphia. I can remember at seven years old—when it finally dawned on me that Dad worked for the Post Office and they have those all over the place—I tried to get him to move us to Hawaii, or California, or even New Jersey, just anywhere but Philly. "But all our friends and family are here." "So?" It was then I knew I'd have to plot my escape alone.

But the longer I'm away from Philly (and the more I forget about it), the more I'm willing to kid myself that it has its own kind of beauty, especially in a rain storm. Here's my re-

cently penned

Homage to Philadelphia:

*Rain drops pound
the street and bounce
into tiara crowns
before disappearing into the flow
where the street
and curb meet
they evanesce again though
as the sewer gargles them down*

Many in the Air Force (whose main reason for joining was to escape that place called "home") had an expression that always fits the feeling: "it's a good place to be from." In truth, I'd like to believe that it doesn't matter where on earth I am, that I'm living this life with one foot in Paradise and the other in a rainy oil slick. That's how Luke and Kate are, but they're a lot further along in their thesis than I might ever be.

We made three trips up there in 2007, which I tend to consider two too many. However, oldest niece getting married and Mom turning four score were reasons too great to ignore.

All this to say maybe the guy who hit me wasn't completely wrong, that there are worse hells to come from than Philadelphia.



Class of 1977, NECHS. Thirty years and 30² wrinkles ago. *Tenui nec dimittam! V+J*