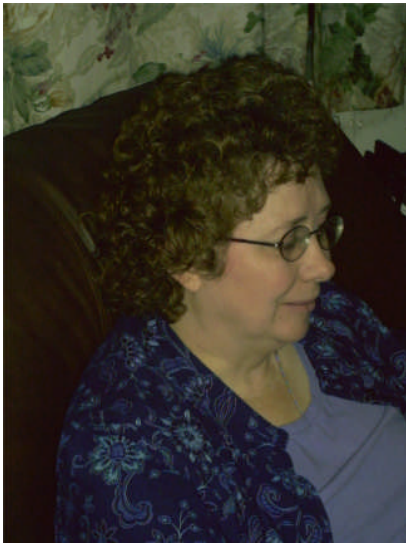


## 2008 UPDATE FROM AUTISM HILL, VOL 17

# HERE ON AUTISM ISLE

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## THE PROFESSOR AND CATHY JEAN

They just don't know you very well." Although it is true that Cathy has seen me unmellow more often than anybody other than me, I think the main reason guys get married is so they never have any trouble getting their heads through doorways.

For her part, Cathy is mulling going over to the new dark side of education with me: adult ed. We both discovered simultaneously—though independently of each other—that the main problem with preK to 12 education is that you have to spend 35 hours a week among teens and preteens. I've cast my lot with Strayer fulltime while Cathy moves into adjunctville. More on this next year.

This is Luke's last year of preK

to 12 schooling. (The federal rule for SpEd is 3 through 21, with most states making the school year during which SpEd students turn 22 their last. Luke turned 22 back in September.) We don't know what he'll be doing after the May "graduation," but it will no doubt be in the hospitality industry. We're thinking restaurant or motel clean up, because he's a cleaning machine.

Kate, who will be 18 this May, has four more years to find her place in the world. And good thing, too, because all she wants to do now is eat, sleep, shop, and watch TV. No wait: that's Cathy. Sometimes even I can't tell them apart.

We had to switch them back to Blount County Schools this month, when I quit my high school inclusion math teaching job at Clinton (TN) High School to go after the Campus Dean position with Strayer University. (I left Sevier County in July, to go back to being "just a teacher.") Luke and Kate moved with me, from Pigeon Forge High to Anderson County High; now to Heritage High. They haven't been in Blount County since 2002. Fortunately they handle their dad's vagabond ways well, because we aren't done moving yet.



One of the Tusculum students in my Intro to Special Ed course described me as "mellow." I took it as one of the coolest professor evaluation comments, until Cathy got wind of it.

"Mellow? You're not mellow!"

## ... AND THE REST

Her extreme (oops, I mean "serene") royal highness, Kate Elizabeth the first (and only) wishes her three loyal subjects would let the world know that she just wants to be left the #\$\$%^ alone. It's always astonishing to her how hard the world finds this. What part of "autism" are they not getting? Leo didn't name it gregarianism!

- School, for pete's sake,

every frippin' day since I was three and still more than four years to go.

- Road trips among the commoners: a few of which aren't even to get some new bauble for me
- Basketball: got to humor Dad sometimes
- Summer camp: well, at least there's a kitchen

and a bed. What else does anyone need?

I was trying to explain to my mom—who is the only other person I know who favors housecoats—that her granddaughter is in them so much we've taken to calling her "Josie Jr." Granted it isn't the full effect without the bobby pins and turban, but this is as close as Kate gets.

## CLEANEST TRASH IN THE LAND OF THE FREE



I realize this isn't a good picture of Luke. But it was the best of four bad pictures and, with autism, another sitting would make the odds worse, not better. Cathy couldn't believe it when I told her I was buying it anyway. "Why?" Because he's been going to school since 1989 and this is his graduation picture. If we don't buy it now, there won't ever be another chance. It is what it is. Life is like that. Geez, a whole paragraph of being not only serious, but philosophical! Back to normal now.

Do you remember the M\*A\*S\*H TV series episode in which Frank Burns volunteers to work trash detail, to stop the Koreans from taking the unit's good, American garbage? Well, we're living it. Mr. Compulsive not only stops me and Cathy from throwing out things willy-nilly, he spends hours

a week breaking down and reorganizing our trash.

There is a real job skill in there, but I don't think most sanitation departments would go for an employee taking a week at each house.

He has gotten out for a few other job training possibilities: laundry work, which he liked even before he got so compulsive, and tagging/hanging clothing at Good-Will. He excelled at the latter from the start, which wouldn't surprise anyone at our church. With winter in the air again, Luke spends about the first half hour of every service hanging coats (and re-hanging the coats of those who didn't do it to his specifications).

I joke, but we did try to medicate the OCD with generic Zoloft, stopping it about a month later when it seemed to do nothing but make him *more* compulsive.

*"Always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." 2 Tim 3:7*

## DR. J AT THE HALF CENTURY MARK

Okay, I'm trying this again. As you may remember from the 2005 letter, I promised a pool party in the summer of 2006 for my graduation. As it happened, I didn't graduate until December of 2006, so the

pool party was iced. Now, however, I'm trying again. At the prospect of turning 50 in October (older than the U.S. President, the OCA Metropolitan, and UT's head football coach), I'm extending an open invitation to a Mimosa Estates pool party on July 4, 2009.

*"It's all well and good to be unique, unless you're a sock."* - me, frustrated yet again on laundry day

I'd make it for October 26, but it can be a bit chilly then, even in "the greenest state in the land of the free."

My dissertation chair scuttled the previous party, but I'm a little more comfortable promising that this one will actually happen. It depends on nobody but me and God. (Inhale, exhale, repeat.) Directions to Mimosa Estates to follow.

## PUTTING ON THE RITZ

2A The Daily Times | TheDailyTimes.com BLOUNT C

### Have a ball: Spring Fling set for Thursday

By Linda Braden Albert of The Daily Times Staff

It's that time of year a group of Blount County residents have been anticipating since December: the annual Maryville-Alcoa Civitan Club's Spring Fling Dance for folks with physical and mental developmental disabilities.

Genny Kidd, secretary/treasurer of the club, said, "We're trying to reach all the special-needs people and let them know we're having this for them. It's going to be at the First United Methodist Church in the Wesley Hall. A DJ plays music con-



Photo courtesy of Howard Yarnell  
Dancers enjoy themselves at the 2007 Spring Fling Dance hosted by the Maryville-Alcoa Civitan Club.

In September, Luke and I attended the marriage of my second oldest brother's only daughter. Matching tuxes, like Gene Wilder and Peter Boyle in *Young Frankenstein*. I tried to get him out on the dance floor but Luke wasn't having it.

Kate is the dancer in the family, as evidenced by the picture on the left, from the 5/13/08 Maryville-Alcoa *Daily Times* (front and center, in brown). Albert's full article is on the Autistic Family website.

