

Well, another year is gone and a new one beginning. The one just ending has given us quite a ride. It's truly been one of those years we'd like to forget, while at the same time has had its memorable moments. Bruce and Eileen celebrated their 20th wedding anniversary on October 15.

Having spent Oct-Dec 2002 in Arizona for Orbital, I was home for the month of January, mainly to assist with the au pair switch. Willy was leaving and Bettina (from Germany) was arriving toward the end of the month. There was a week gap in between. I returned to Chandler at the first of February, secure that Bettina was the best au pair we had ever selected. During that time, the DC area received record snowfalls, several times. This kept our kids out of school quite a bit. So, kid duty was doubled and snow shoveling got tiresome in Virginia while I enjoyed the warmth of the desert.

Almost immediately upon returning home March 1, we met with Bettina and her counselor in our home. Long story short, she couldn't handle it and left pretty much on the spot. Worse yet, EurAupair said we could not continue to make their girls care for Rachel; it was just too demanding. So we checked a number of other au pair agencies and interviewed about 8 other candidates. None of them seemed interested in taking on such great responsibility. We were stuck. I was supposed to return to Arizona, but couldn't.

We investigated other types of in-home care for Rachel, but couldn't find any that we felt would be any more reliable than what Medicaid had been providing. We really needed a live-in nanny, but we were short on time. Eileen called St. Mary's Home for Disabled Children (in Norfolk) where Rachel had undergone seizure therapy back in 1994 at age 3. They had one vacancy, so she rushed an application through for Rachel. Since she had been there before, it took only a few weeks for the application to be accepted and for her to be admitted.



time. We would all like to see Rachel come home.

Rachel moved to Norfolk on April 12. We visit her about once a month and call her twice a week (they have a speakerphone there). It's about a 3.5-hour drive each way. Life just isn't the same around here without Rachel, and it's also weird not having an au pair living with us anymore. We don't know how long this situation will last, but it may last quite some

As a result of the ordeal with Rachel, Eileen decided to quit her job as community counselor with EurAupair. She also finished the second year of her term as PTA co-president at Sunrise Valley Elem. School. It's a good thing, too, because her job at National Confectioners Association has really picked up some steam. She now coordinates and/or attends several out-of-state workshops each year. She's still on a part-time basis with NCA, but it's starting to seem as if she should be full-time. She went to Madison, WI, in July for a two-week conference she worked months to plan and coordinate. She also attended the All Candy Expo in Chicago. Her return from such events is always highly anticipated as it always means lots of sweet treats for everyone.



I was offered and accepted a direct position with Orbital while I was there in February and became an employee on March 10. I worked for the Launch Systems Group (LSG) on the National Missile Defense program from Oct'02 through Oct'03, at which time I transferred back to the Space Systems Group (as planned). Orbital is doing very well now, so it feels like the right move.

This year we finally got high-speed cable Internet (note the new email addresses). Somewhat as a result, I have spent a great deal of time upgrading our homeowner association website and email system. It's very time-consuming, but also very rewarding.

In October, my doctor warned me that my weight, blood pressure, and blood sugar were approaching critical points. So I decided to go on a low-carb diet and start exercising again. So far I have lost almost 30 pounds, my goal being 50 by mid-year 2004. My blood pressure and sugar are now normal, so for the moment I am out of the woods. I can't remember my blood pressure EVER being normal in the past. I bought a new bicycle and just got it upon returning from vacation. The plan is for me to start commuting by bicycle to work (22 miles RT), weather and daylight permitting.

David is now 6 feet tall and a sophomore at Thomas Jefferson HS. Though he is not playing



violin avidly, he still plays recreationally. He plans to resume orchestra at school once his schedule permits. So far, David appears to have a knack for math and engineering. His heritage came to light this summer when he aced his first computer science course (and loved it). This strangely seemed to increase his popularity with the ladies (you know, helping with homework, etc). He's shown here in a photo taken on a skipjack cruise in St. Michael's, MD, where we went for his birthday.

Andrew is now playing saxophone and basketball. We're not certain why he gave up violin to play the sax, but he really seems to like it and is doing quite well. He joined a winter basketball league, which has not yet gotten into full swing.

In September, Hurricane Isabel took its toll on the mid-Atlantic and certainly didn't spare anyone. Our house lost numerous sections of shingles, which is a continuing problem with this house and all the high wind we seem to get here. We drove down to Norfolk the day after Isabel came through to visit Rachel and be sure everything was okay there. What a mess! Thousands of trees were down all along the highways, and there was no electricity for nearly the entire 200-mile trip. That made finding fuel for our gas-guzzling van quite an adventure. In Norfolk, billboards were twisted like pretzels, 100-year-old oak trees crushed homes and downed power lines, and debris was everywhere. St. Mary's is in a small section of downtown Norfolk that never lost power, and the building suffered only minor damage. That's amazing considering Norfolk is right on the north edge of where the eye came ashore.

In early December, right after Thanksgiving, we got our first snow (about 8 inches), a stark reminder of winter 2002. We started planning a trip to Florida to see Eileen's family and maybe go to Disneyworld. And it occurred to us that we had never gone on a real vacation with our boys. David is 15 and Andrew is 10, and they had never traveled anywhere other than where family lived. On a whim, we started looking into a winter vacation to Cancun. Before we knew it, we had the whole thing planned and our reservations made. It was only a 5-day vacation, but it was a vacation nonetheless. We stayed at the Royal Solaris Caribe all-inclusive resort. The food and service were fantastic, and the people in Cancun were about the friendliest we'd ever met. While there, we toured the ancient ruins of Chichen Itza and climbed the great pyramid. We also shopped in the Coral Negro flea market. Unfortunately, I sprained one of my toes when I slipped at the hotel pool and Eileen and I spent nearly an entire day dealing with that. Oh well...we will visit Cancun again in the future and will do all those things we didn't get to do this time.

We hope you all had a great year and wish you another great one. There is an online photo slide show of our Cancun visit at <http://members.cox.net/scherzinger> if you care to visit.

Happy New Year!

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