December 2009

Greetings,

 What a year 2009 was--great trips, great accomplishments, great adventures, even great pets, if being a great pet means your dog nearly eats your cat every single day. It’s fun for me to go back and reminisce about the past year. For you, it’s just another holiday task you have to complete before you can cross 2009 off the calendar, so stick it out and slog through it, or just scan quickly to the bottom then wonder why Erin’s laughing like that in the picture, and call it a year.

 Let’s start with Rory. What did Rory do this year, you ask? What did Rory NOT do? After finishing elementary school, he appeared in the summer CAST production “Metamorphoses” which was staged in and around an outdoor pool (he learned that the show must go on, even when he’s dripping wet and his teeth are chattering like castanets), started going to the great big scary middle school (but the third child is never scared of anything, is he?), and ran cross country for a whole season without complaining (much). His best idea this year was one for a Spring Break destination. Based solely on the fact that one of his classmates gave her state report on Tennessee, he suggested that we go to Smoky Mountain National Park. That was enough for us, so we drove nine hours to hike in the Smokies and see black bears (twice), and so Mal and Erin and I could go for a painful run/stumble on the Appalachian Trail. Rory also kept his cat Simone away from the vet for a whole year. Hurray.

 Erin ran a lot this year. She was all-state in 7th grade for track in the 1600M in the spring, then all-state again in cross country in the fall. She ran all summer, works out at school in the morning over the winter, plays travel soccer, made the 8th grade volleyball team, and swims with Kathleen when she can. In her free time, she works on her British accent (favorite phrase: “you’re barking mad”--think Hermione here), trains the gigantic mess of a hair-ball that is her cat Bramlet NOT to get eaten by the dog when they’re playing, plays bass in her band “Wandering Up”, and grows taller.

 Malachy attended a 10-day program at UIC in Chicago this summer, the National Youth Leadership Forum for Medicine, where he stayed on campus with kids from all over the country, learned to suture a pig’s foot, and watched a live knee replacement surgery. The pig did NOT survive, but the knee patient did. Mal made it to the state track meet as a freshman in the 3200M last spring, and in the fall he was all-state in cross country. Oh, and he’s learning to drive. This should scare me more than it does, but I’m very calm about it. I sit calmly in the passenger seat, my fingers calmly dug deeply into the dashboard, my feet calmly dangling through the holes they made in the floorboards after the last intersection watch that car WATCH THAT CAR SLOW DOWN MERGE MERGE MERGE!!!! So you see, very calm.

 Kathleen’s biggest adventure this year was moving her mom to an apartment in Oak Park, which boosts the village’s Republican population by 33-50%, depending on who’s in town. She has a great place not far from us, and since it’s above a fabulous restaurant, we have plenty of reasons to stop by and visit—breakfast, lunch, dinner… Kathleen continues to swim a lot at the Y, and work at the Y, and find volunteer opportunities for her family at the Y. She visits us on weekends. She did NOT complete her second triathlon this year as predicted, but not because she wasn’t physically prepared. The problem was more the mental preparation necessary for being so cold so early in the morning. If she can find a noontime triathlon in Jamaica, we’ll have more triathlon news in 2010. She continues to patiently train the family dog, Lolly. When she (Lolly, not Kathleen) is not nearly eating the cat, her (Lolly’s) latest trick is jumping up on the ping pong table, mid-game, and making off with the ball. Nice job, trainer.

 My job took me to New Jersey for a 3-night stay to do some work in a cold, dark data center out there somewhere. It made me shudder to think what Spring Break would’ve been like if Rory had heard the New Jersey report rather than the Tennessee one. Speaking of New Jersey, a big thrill for me was back in May when I took the whole family to see Bruce Springsteen in concert at the United Center. It meant staying up late on a school night (and my kids didn’t get to touch Bruce’s boot like my brother Dan’s daughter Grace did in Houston), but it was about time the kids got to see their Uncle Bruce.

 Quick Imal and Katie update. To keep us all on our toes, they changed Elijah’s name to Adani. Agali’s name is still Agali but we’re trying to keep ourselves from getting attached to it. To top that, we’ve decided to change Rory’s name to Pookie. Changing your kid’s name before he turns one is a hard decision, but these are the people who also decided to travel ten days with two small boys to see Imal’s family in Niger, so you can see they aren’t afraid to make the tough calls They’re back in Milwaukee, close enough for us to see them often. Last time we went up for the day Mal drove WATCH THAT TRUCK but I stayed calm.

 Stay calm yourselves,

 Greg, Kathleen, Malachy, Erin, and Pookie