



**Is maith an scáthán súil charad
A (true) friend's eye is a good mirror**



Saint's preserve us! Ya don't mean ta say t'is bin a whole year already do ya? Where have we been?

Well that's exactly what I'm goin' to tell all of you, now isn't it? So, get yerself a nice cup a tea with a wee bit of Irish laughter in it (Bushmills or Jameson's depending on your stripe) and settle in with us for this our Annual Wee Epistle (AWE04). But before I get started, I would be remiss if I wasn't t'ankin' all of you our beloved friends and family for your very kind words at Christmas time. They were certainly the best gifts we unwrapped this year bar none! Now that the Ryan Historical Year (RY03) [or should I say hysterical year] has come to a close, we'd like to bring you up to date on the comings and goings, mostly goings, of the wee band of little folk known farther and wider each year (Wider? I prefer to think of it as aging gracefully) as the Ryans. The wind continues to carry us back toward the Emerald Isle; this year we've inched closer unsettling, for the time being, in Brussels, Belgium, sprouting, as it were, roots. We left Paris on the 4th of July – I just couldn't resist the symbolism – declaring our independence with a touch of sadness at leaving yet another major tourist destination to which we had been assigned. But, I'm getting ahead of myself already. I finished soaking the French taxpayers at Ecole Militaire by flying a Jaguar, setting sail on the French Navy frigate Cassard for three days of wine, live fire exercises and Mediterranean cruising and then, if that weren't enough, going on a "voyage d'études" to Morocco! Marakesh snake charmers, Fez with its caps, and Casablanca (What? No Ricks!). Amidst all that hard work, the AF made me go to Edinburgh,



Scotland, so as a good Celt I just had to play the Old Course at St. Andrews in the driving April rain—it was glorious! Continuing the spree with two chums (numbers one and three at right) also playing hookie from school, we



three went to a Chelsea-Fulham match in London and caught the "Lion King" in the West End! The whole family spent the Easter break back in our other tourist destination, Oberammergau, and even got to ski! Tallyho! Spending our anniversary (17th for those with programs) at the Moulin Rouge was icing on the gâteau! All good things must end (for the time being...stay tuned for the surprise ending) and so when the Air Force flipped me the full bird I had to find a real job or so I thought! With options like the Pentagon and the Pentagon, I cast about for an island where I could work national security issues for food...and lo and behold, a beacon shone in the five-sided puzzling darkness and it was NATO and it was good. Then, they said unto me go forth into Euroland and search out the EU. And I did. And it was good. Now, I'm the Defense Advisor at the US Mission to the European Union, which means figuring out what EUphoria really means for US—so, it's more like Defense Against the Dark Arts Advisor. In reality, it means more meals at taxpayer expense so more expanse and a few more trips to tourist destinations, like the NATO meeting in Colorado Springs (read golf at the Broadmoor). Fortunately, in this job I get to talk a lot, which means *inter alia* (NATO-speak) teaching in Oberammergau! which means *inter alia* more skiing with *inter alia* more friends.

Gloria, the Purrfectly Presented Princess of Paris, made more than a few heads turn her way sauntering down the Parisian boulevards, while I was out "working". Suffice to say, like Belle in Beauty and the Beast (hey, what does that make me?), the provincial life in Brussels "Is not Paris" and you can quote her on that! But she keeps busy managing the vast Ryan empire while single-handedly trying to revive the dot-com boom by e-shopping. Her tremendous talents are as yet unrecognized by the Brussels bureaucrats—a woman who speaks four languages fluently is sought after in an international city? Except here you have to speak English to survive! What's the world coming to when you can't speak French in a French-speaking country? I ask you...Most importantly, Gloria is our kids Mom. And as we found a house 108 steps from the Brussels American School, she's here when the kids go to and come from school—she hugs them and makes them snacks and helps them with their homework and...wait a minute, I should come home early from work to get such treatment!! (I know, dream on)



Which brings me to our favorite subject, the kids! "Carissa is hot" which I used to think meant she needed a breath of fresh air, come to find out—yikes!...she's 12...and she's taller than Gloria and wears Gloria's clothes and what happened to Daddy's "little" girl? Alert readers of our AWE will recall that Carissa's "Sacred Family" gained new members each year. Unfortunately, this year saw the unceremonious retiring of the little ones ("Jacky Paper came no more") in favor of her new collection of friends – Boys!! (send Dad some valium now!) [She didn't want me to say that – she prefers to highlight her

collection of my CDs] Stripes the cat, however, continues as Carissa's play pal (note the clever attachment to the cat's hind legs in the picture that enables Carissa to spend time with Stripes) Carissa is still dancing, playing the piano, and wizzing on MSN Messenger with friends all over. She's off to Germany soon for a Junior Leadership Program—we're so proud. Speaking of proud, we're so proud of our kids in their first American school in five years, because they can read English!!! Yeah...we thought they could but we weren't sure...now, that they're in a "foreign school" they're learning all about their "foreign" culture and heritage...dances, proms, basketball, baseball, football, cheerleading etc.—all those things we take for granted, which they didn't have for the last five years, and they like it!

Michael, seen at right with a French presidential candidate, is, like his sister, rapidly developing into a very fine young person. They're both on the honor roll, both speak German, French and Spanish, both love Star Trek (can't be wrong!) and both love to engage in all sorts of sibling sniping! Yes, life is normal in the Ryan household.



Michael has just finished his first basketball season and we've started playing catch in advance of his first ever baseball season. After all, one can only play so much Playstation...Michael's a Boy Scout (108 steps to school remember – they can do everything without being driven!) and loves to go camping. They just had a campout at Spangdahlem airbase for the "Merit-badge-oree" and "Stump" was Michael's aviation merit badge counselor – an old friend from the glorious A-10 days of the Cold War.



Well now, betwixt and between all our comings and goings and after a "long" PCS move from Paris to Brussels (3 hours total) a little recovery was in order so the family packed off for points west. Gloria, always wanting to go where it's warm, took the kids straight to New Mexico to be with family, while I stayed to get the house contracts finished. Passing through London on my way west I took in a show. Wandering past the stage door on my way back to the hotel, the star came out and didn't I get an autograph from Patrick Stewart—aka Jean-Luc Picard--a really nice man! So, while Gloria and the kids ate Mexican food and frolicked in the desert heat, I played golf in PA with old chums from the days when I played golf as a miscreant teenager (So what's changed?). We rejoined the four-ship out west for a road-trip via Four-Corners and the Grand Canyon to Lost Wages where we took advantage of our time-share holdings and Las Vegas took advantage of us!! Actually, we left the city 0.25 cents to the good and with a lot of stuffed animals due to the kids' skill in the Excalibur arcades. While there we beamed over to the Star Trek museum at the Hilton (AWESOME!), strolled in Venice, saw the White tigers (don't go in there) and spent a night at Caesar's Palace where Carissa and her Daddy saw her absolutely favorite singer, Celine Dion live! It's amazing how Daddy's peanut gallery tickets ;-) got us in the front row!!! Carissa was stunned—what a show—she's so much better in person, if that were possible. Afterward, Carissa hit up the chief of Ms Dion's security detail who got her a personalized autograph! You go girl!! Next, we wound our way back east, way back east, to see more family in PA before heading to New York city to board the QE II for our return to Europe.

Five-star luxury on the last Transatlantic season for the old girl. We figured that before the kids get to the point where they don't want to spend time with their parents, we'd take this lifelong dream of a trip to spend real quality time together. But, on the first morning at sea, Mommy and Daddy wanted to treat themselves to a sumptuous lunch for two so we dragged the kids kicking and screaming to the "Young People's Room" and then never saw them again for a week! They loved it. So much for family planning! We arrived back in Belgium via the Chunnel from the UK to settle in to life Chez les Belges which is an interesting experience. Now we're back to Volvo+4 holidays with a new XC70, so we went where? Oberammergau of course! Well, as the Irish say "Don't say everything you want to say lest you hear something you would not like to hear" So, in closing this our AWE for 2003-2004, we'd just like to say we did enjoy the visits of all our friends like Joe Deon who changed his airline route to come to Paris often and the many others too numerous to mention.



All of you are a real blessing! May you have the hindsight to know where you've been, the foresight to know where you're going and the insight to know when you're going too far.

Well, I've learned a lot in the last year as an official representative of our United States. Probably the most important lesson is an old one that's oft forgot: No one cheers for Goliath. So when you're safe at home raise a glass to absent friends and remember our fallen comrades who died in the cause of freedom and especially, their families and their children. [Surprise ending: Next assignment-back to Paris starting in summer 2005] Godspeed. Mike, Gloria, Carissa and Michael...Phone Belgium 27.82.05.35...email ryan.michael@skynet.be



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