



Oh Danny Boy...Daniel J. Connell 1922 - 2006
..and I shall hear though soft you tread above me...



Happy New Year! Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, to the Holy Spirit and to a certain Mr.

Guinness of Dublin whose elixir adds immeasurably to the expression of our Irish ancestry at this time of year. And while we're tanking, let's not forget all t'a good wishes received from all of you at Christmas time –Thanks be to God (TBTG). On this, the first day of the fourteenth year of our children, it's time once again to regale you with the latest and greatest comings and goings hither and yon of the wee band of Amer(Mexi)Irish who are still enjoying their ever-lengthening Ryan Hysterical Epoch, chronicled as it is at St. Patrick's day each year in this our Annual Wee Epistle (AWE). Here at the precipice of RY06 it's altogether fitting and proper to recount for our posterior (Bottoms Up!) those events that altered and illuminated our time (at least the ones we can remember – sometimes I forget I have Alzheimers) with this our 14th epistle, AWE06 (TBTG!). A busy year to be sure...but altogether a very happy one!



Alert readers will recall the clan commenced RY04 on the emerald isle. Well having endured Belgian weather ad nauseum (ad raindum, ad graydum too), we'd have no more of that on holiday in RY05 tank you very much, so we decided South is for the birds and dat was good enough for the likes of us! We sprung happily into Spain (don't worry, they're civilized...Irish pubs everywhere!) to the Costa del Sol! The weather



certainly obliged, encouraging day trips to Grenada to see the Al Hambra, Gibraltar to see the rock, and Tangiers to see more rocko. The tomb of Ferdinand and Isabella was a treat, the castle splendid, but monkeying around in the British colony was most memorable! The kids have a head for that sort of thing don't ya know...and they negotiated their way through the Moroccan souk like pros...now they get their way with me! Dad's highlight was "reluctantly" joining a local beauty dancing the flamenco in the hotel show (No photos TBTG!). And our neighbors, the Webbs, joined us for dinner (we see them more on holiday).



Retracing the steps of immigrants past, the Ryan's major excursion of RY05 was to hallowed ground – the land of the free (and cheap!) which, after 7 years in Europe, beckoned mightily! When we weren't in Wal-Mart, our friends entertained us: Lazer toured us through the Senate, Heather Wilson through the House...and on to the floor I might add (without the aid of drink this time), the Sankars for a Cadillac picnic along the Potomac and Bob Ranck plus the newest Lazer et

ux for dinner. Carissa really enjoyed the attention shown her by participants in the National Boy Scout Jamboree and both kids were amazed at how truly similar they are to their heretofore unknown cousins.



An extremely adequate visit with KZ in Pennsylvania (my BUTT that was good) preceded a splendiferous sojourn out West. While in PA a cook out with the Barbers in the stadium at a minor league Altoona Curve game, during which Michael and Grant Barber both grabbed foul balls, re-introduced us happily to an American pass time. In Colorado we discovered Chipotle (try it, you'll like it), rediscovered the Phillips and Stanko clans and introduced the kids to the US Air Force Academy (it's free!). Then, after earning free tickets on United for an extra night in Denver, off to Durango and Farmington, New Mexico. Shopping of all sorts bracketed the annual ice cream party at Gloria's sister's, dips in Pagosa Springs, climbing the cliff dwellings at Mesa Verde, golf at a top-rated course (the higher the rating the higher the score!)



Michael to his first demolition derby (thank God he's still too young to get a license!) and first and foremost a great deal of quality time with Abuelita Montoya, her dog, her bird Paco and her very frustrated cat. Cowboy boots and hat in hand, Mike slipped out to Luke AFB in Phoenix for a fighter pilot party with old friends only to find out that he had not trained sufficiently in advance. Meanwhile, the kids were getting back to the good earth on the family farm (see joyous reaction at left). A good time was had by all.

Carissa, age 14 – 14 not 24! – on your score cards – is a very talented and accomplished young woman (although she always seems to be sleeping? Teens!) Continuing her thespian ways (Chorus in Romeo & Juliet plus the Talent Show and attending Creative Connections), she's added guitar to piano, tennis and track to managing wrestling (I'm glad she doesn't manage to wrestle), more music via her iPod and her laptop, formal dances at school (she asked a senior and he said yes! Dad's on tranquilizers...) and now...gasp...rock concerts! To maintain control, Dad took her to see Alanis Morissette depositing Carissa and her friend Georgia in the then empty Mosh pit before retiring to an elevated observation position with his book. When the music started an hour later Daddy's little girl was lost in a sea of...gasp...rockers! Next time, we paid an adult to go with her...yikes!





Carissa, the happy occupant of a new larger room (it was clean before she moved in), is making full use of her Confirmed status to lector at mass and to serve as a Eucharistic Minister (so Dad can relax at times ;-)...and yes, long-time readers will be aching to know that the Sacred Family lives: Squirrely, the live cat Stripes, the iPod, and CDs compete with real boys and win! TBTG!

☘ Gloria, now the Bodacious Bellydancing Brunette Beauty of Brussels, operates in five languages having mastered Dutch to the point where she now takes Flemish cooking lessons in that local dialect while continuing to raise the mean in her advanced French grammar class. Her discovery of the magician dietician “Madame Pourtois” was a Godsend as we are all now healthier, happier and, especially in Mike’s case, much much leaner and with such a good

eating program, only occasionally meaner! The plan is tailored to each individual – Mike gets red wine, Gloria none! So that takes care of bodacious and beauty. For bellydancing, Gloria was forced by her slave-driving husband to spend a week studying in Egypt...magnificent results! Paris is still Gloria’s favorite destination. She continues leading shopping trips for the ladies and taking Mike to the semi-annual dégustation chez Maxims. Gloria’s newest pleasure is the Sunday morning flea market in Waterloo - site of Napoleon’s famous misadventure ...she’s bringing home the booty to be sure! Her next trick, cooking classes in Tuscany! Ats’a Yummy good!



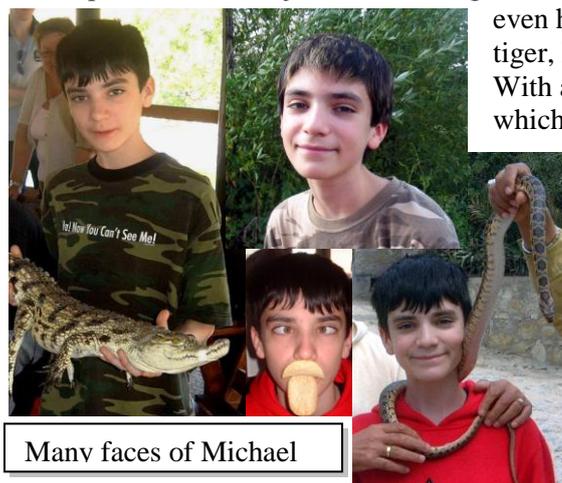
☘ The kids have a drug problem. They get drug to museums, drug to castles (Beersel and Gasbeek in Brussels) and drug to the free Toby Keith concert for the troops just down the road at SHAPE. He was great! The weather



was warm and the beer cold (evidence at left) and the music American...such a treat! Thanks Toby. Further a field, the Volvo+4 holidays continued in the Moselle river valley to Cochem Castle where we lucked into the last tour of the day...the only four tourists left – magnificent! We drug the kids to a musical chateau B&B in the Ardennes where we were all free to play any instrument we chose...the chef sang Misty to Mike’s accompaniment on the grand piano, Carissa played the guitar, Gloria the harpsichord, and Michael the piano...all in front of a roaring fire.

We drugged our friends, the Hurds and the Webbs, by leading them to Reims, capital of the champagne region of France for a day out at the famous Caves and a special lunch at the French Air Force Officers Club. Speaking of friends, we were graced by a visit from “the Rowdies” who drug us to a lambic brewery here in Brussels to taste the famous open-air-fermented “geuze” – Hint: if they have to put fruit juice in beer to get people to drink it, don’t! In addition to our Sunday pizza/nachos night at the home movie theater (Steelers football on AFN too, Superbowl too!– hooray!) we spent Memorial and Veterans days at US military cemeteries in our region tracking down all the Ryans. A noble and worthwhile venture. TBTG for all their sacrifices!

☘ Michael Daniel, in his 13th year, is rapidly approaching Gatesian levels in computer literacy (given the time he spends on the subject, I’m looking for a similar financial windfall!) He’s an animal enthusiast (at one castle, he



Many faces of Michael

even had a vulture land on his head). In addition to Gato, our Bavarian house tiger, Michael has added a Russian miniature hamster to his menagerie. Da! With a black stripe in his gray hair, he’s called Jay. Jay is an escape artist, which gives Dad ample opportunity to practice heroics for his son. When that doesn’t work, we bring in the secret weapon – Gato: which from time to time means that Jay gets to go for a ride in the cat – “spit it out, spit it out!” Michael’s non-electronic diversions include the guitar, Spanish, basketball, the aforementioned Jay & Gato, his friends (who are also electro-junkies) and Boy Scouts for which he was elected a patrol leader. Although talented at baseball and despite Dad’s enthusiasm it didn’t appeal—basketball, however, did. Unfortunately, as some of you may have seen in our Christmas photo, the season was cut short by a broken wrist (which was inexplicably encrusted in Dad’s absence in what could thankfully be called fuchsia). An intelligent teen, Michael happily indulges in age-

appropriate pursuits like bleaching his hair, wearing snakes, holding crocs, sleeping, Linkin Park, PS2, PSP, Nintendo DS and other adult-incomprehensible flights of fancy. One thing’s for certain, he’s 13 (more facial hair than Dad!)

☘ Michael Charles, in his 45th year (only a few days left) is still ensconced as the US DoD rep to the EU, which means that he continuously eats and drinks for America! At right, one can see the “before” picture taken at the entrance to a British reception held aboard a UK warship...oh the things with up which we must put...the after picture could not be found... Golf, wine, skiing, wine, biking, antique auctions, wine, flea markets (he goes for the negotiating practice), French lessons with Violette, and, did I say wine? The good Lord willing, he’ll be at it for a few more years an’all an’all Finally, join us in asking our Lord to watch over our coalition troops as they go into battle today! God bless and keep you -- Mike, Gloria, Carissa & Michael Ryan +32 (0)2 782 0535 ryan.michael@skynet.be

