



John “Jack” Connell 1919 - 2006
So fill me to the parting glass, goodnight and joy be with you all



Well, would you look at the time... It's time to say: "Happy Ryan New Year to one and all and all!"

Thanks be to God (TBTG) for this is the first day of the fifteenth year of our children (Ah, No! Don't 'no' me) who find themselves in the full blossom of adolescence and quite a sense 'tis...but before I'm off epistleizing the everlasting, nay perennial, European vacation of that wee band of Amer(Hispan)Irish known as the Ryans, let me just say, as it is our custom, Thanks and Blessings to all and all who sent Christmas wishes warmly received and deeply felt! All and all of you are indeed our most treasured gifts (but traditional gifts are welcome!). Alert and long-time readers of the Ryan Hysterical Chronicles, will no doubt recall our tradition of sending St. Patrick's day greetings each year in this our Annual Wee Epistle (AWE). As RY07 promises to be one very exciting and potentially tumultuous year (you'll recall we have 2, count'em 2, teenagers) we'd best get on reviewing the bidding in this 15th epistle, AWE07.

 Picking up the threads (which no longer fit anyone) from last year, let me confirm that Michael was Confirmed (photo at right), by an Irish bishop no less, (TBTG!) and Carissa was his sponsor (obviously, she didn't read the fine print in the job description!) Thus, Easter passed happily at home in wet, gray, dark and damp Brussels... so, you guessed it, we were then off and running, Track that is...both our sprinters filled our weekends with the pitter patter of a thundering herd of high school (and 8th grade) hormones. They made great strides.

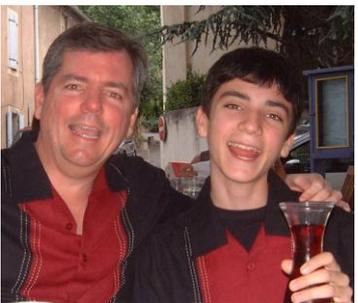


As we live a mere 103 paces from the Brussels American School, the herd often descends for post-practice partying (and Gloria's snacks) which now includes Fellowship of Christian Athletes meetings (TBTG!) in the "bar" no less!

 Having crossed the finish line of the season in good form, we were then free to explore heretofore mostly unRyaned destinations! First stop, Lavenham, England to toast our 20th Anniversary "at the scene of the crime" and since we had no kids "on the day" we took none this trip as well. We did celebrate the wedding night in the same Swan Hotel (in a much nicer room this time thanks to a few promotions – theirs and mine) but without the short-sheeted bed – a four-poster this time! The trip included a reunion with veterans of the elder Ryan's WWII 398th Bomb Group at Nuthampstead and visits with the UK chapter of "Our Friends with Houses" including the Rundles, who attended the 398th ceremony, and the Eltringham's on whom we so gracelessly imposed ourselves. After a few weeks of work, Ryan Air (no, really Ryan Air...

Europe's SouthWest Airlines) carried us to Carcassonne the medieval jewel of the south of France. An apartment in a one-street spa town was our base for climbing Cathar castles (very high "on the rocks"), exploring pre-historic caves to see the 15,000 year-old graffiti, beaching ourselves with Henna tattoos, eating Nutella and banana pizza, navigating the Midi canal and "bathing with biker chicks" in the hot springs (which Michael missed because he insisted on watching a DVD – he won't make that mistake again!). A few weeks of work then off yet again to...

 Bella Italia as the guests of Carissa's girl friend Giorgia "on the beach" of Tuscany (with a visit to Sienna) was a dream. Our hosts the Bardinis define Italian hospitality (e.g. I didn't have to eat sea food) and the shopping (Gloria made me write that!) Now I know what a "YAP" is as in keep your yap shut – Yet, Another Purse (see photo at left). Carissa drives a hard bargain with the beach vendors – make an offer, show'em the cash, then walk away – you go girl! All 'n all, friends, beach, sun, water, wine, pasta, friends, beach, sun, water, wine, pasta...you get it!



 Summer would not be complete without a pilgrimage to Oberammergau and so we did (after a few weeks of work that is). Bavarian breakfasts, spaghetti eis lunches and beer dinners were the norm. Hiking to the top for the guys, shopping for the girls (yap is also a Bavarian word) and sumptuous dinners with numerous good friends like the Coslows and

Frau Fussy (foosee), Michael's 1st grade teacher (crush?), brought many a happy memory.

 Sadly, September arrives each year which means only one thing...back to Oktoberfest! So, while the kids did their kid school thing, which included the fall Tennis team for both, Gloria and visiting friends Linda and Cynthia did the energizer bunny thing European style – Paris, Dublin, Rome (following me on "my" TDY) and then, the one-two punch: In a single weekend Mike & 3 "girls" conquered both the Bad Durkheim wine fest (Oktoberfest with wine – caution: same size glasses) and then Oktoberfest in Munich (Mein Gott in Himmel!) Well my dear, those are some really big...uh...um...glasses you're holding...I'm told Linda and Cynthia are bringing their husbands next year to try it again! Applications are now being accepted for drivers and nurses for next year's expedition. Book your place early!



Gloria a des aventures! Which doesn't mean what the translation implies; however, she is still the Beautifullest Bellydancing Babe in Brussels and Beyond, bar none! Take last year's summary and repeat it, then add Bellydancing Instructor and public performer to her ever-lengthening resumé of reveling and now, she's even dancing to her own drum! Yes, the drum lessons started last Sunday – beat that why dontcha! Gloria's good cookin' makes family dinner time the center piece of our happy home life (TBTG!) and when we're exceptionally good, Sunday Burritos after mass, but we do let her rest on Sunday evenings when its pizza or nachos in front of the big TV! Gloria, the devoted daughter, visits Abuelita as often as possible, which means dinner roulette for the kids until Dad learns to read the Montoya Family Cookbook that Gloria has compiled from family recipes (beat that Taco Bell!). Gloria's new passions are crystals and angels (if you had to live with me you'd store up rocks for the sling and call forth the heavenly host on occasion too!) Happily for me both have healing powers that compensate for the other uses that come to mind...



Carissa has a wee bit of the bard in her as well for not only did she form exactly half of a two-girl "rocker babe" act in the school talent show, but she's been known to imitate a coffee-house guitarist/singer in front of classes as part of her "school work"—I guess lettin' her go to Dresden Dolls concerts, Rock Werchter (where something called a Red Hot Chili Pepper was on the menu) and the like has inspired her creative side, which she displayed in the Stars & Stripes newspaper during her 2nd trip to "Creative Connections." Her room is quite the creation too, as is her laptop, and her "MySpace" space! On the parental plus side she's taken to cooking Mexican (bueno!), Eucharistic ministering at mass (when she passes Dad's dress code inspection), AP German, putting on the dance, and Scholar-Athlete thanks to Track, Tennis and Wrestling Manager (and now she wants to wrestle – Saints preserve us!) Her newly acquired letter jacket is so full already she might need two more by graduation. She says Halloween is still her favorite holiday (I think it's Christmas) so on your score cards mark as members of the Sacred Family "The Nightmare Before Christmas," anything Johnny Depp, "Corpse Bride," Stripes the live cat, Squirelly (a long-serving veteran), and Dzuigas—that's a boyfriend (Lithuanian Senior—11 months already) which means:::gasp:::Prom!!!!!!



I pay Michael to watch her, but Gloria broke the code: the entire group of the kids' lunch-table (apparently the place to be) friends comes over to our house for a formal pre-dance dinner and we host the post-dance party (an excellent idea, but I still pay him to be sure).



Michael me lad; if he gets any faster on the computer we'll have to start calling him "Mr Data" don't ya know. Michael's equally amazing (you might expect I'd say that): a Scholar-Athlete as well (Track, Tennis and Wrestling: 7-14 during his first season with a pin!), he made Star in Scouts, is a fixture as an Altar server (Father just promoted him to Eucharistic Minister —now he gets to drink the leftover wine too—"it's not wine Dad, it's sacred" it always starts...those Irish;-) He too is plucking the strings on his amplified imitation Fender (no, not a car but a real bender sometimes) when he's not on the computer with his friends Paul, John, George (Michael) and Ringo (Scott) as I call them. Oblivion seems to be the game of choice and for his good works Michael earned the computer needed to play it (it's an oligarchic conspiracy to make games that always need a bigger computer not that the difference between men and boys has ANYTHING to do with it at all an'all). Michael has also taken a fancy to rock music my mother wouldn't love and is a wiz with a camera



The ever-larger but never older Mike is still awash in Euroland working with the EU (can you tell from the picture) which involves writing, traveling, teaching, and eating (all 'n all not too bad). It's a great team and loads of fun—really! His travel schedule looks like the advert on one of those jewelry shop windows (but on steroids) *Paris, London, Rome, Berlin, Munich, Stockholm, Riga* (and that was just the autumn). Biking, French (language/wine only), photography (not candid...nudge), piano, antique collecting (anyone need a couch?) which ties in negotiating for fun (the shooting birds on the ground sort), volleyball (league champs! + helping with the high school girls team who also won the championship!) and constructing a pub in the basement, which



the kids have dubbed "The Cat's Nickers" (say it fast;-) after our female feline's white hind quarters. We've upgraded the Volvo+4 holidays this year to the SUV class with a new XC90, which adds to the kids "drug" problem—they get drug everywhere you'll recall.



We must also mention other visitors to the Ryan kingdom: Bob Otto, Steve Webb, Karri Heikenheimo and Commodore Louise! Yes, as you should've guessed by now, the wee Ryans are a truly blessed tribe who revel daily in the grace of God and one another! 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*
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