

Well, 2004 has been a scary year. I'm unemployed, I almost died and the kids are still the kids, which might be the scariest thing of all. So, with that said, let's get to the news.

Unemployment hit when I sold the dry cleaning business. I was fine with that, but Chris was a little worried when about a week before the sale I broke a shoe lace and commented that it'll sure be nice when I don't have to wear shoes anymore. She just gave me "the Look." Later, when I pointed out that I could go three years without earning a dime and still be in fine shape financially, she was unimpressed. Instead, there was "the Look" again, along with the question, "You don't plan on doing that, do you?" Um, I guess not. So much for a life of cutoff shorts, Cheetohs and Family Fued.

And death hovered while doing what I do best - talk. Unfortunately, I was also engaged in another activity I'm quite good at - eating. Not a good combination. After three shots with the Heimlich maneuver, a lovely hunk of - well, we don't need to go there. Suffice it to say that it was not exactly the most glamorous way to get a standing ovation at the most expensive restaurant in town. It gives new meaning to the phrase "food to die for." And Dick, I think you will always be Chris's hero.

And now for the really scary stuff. Our kids are six and seven going on thirty-seven and thirty-eight. After talking to Jefferson's kindergarten class about writing (I now write a column for the local paper), his classmates were giving me hugs and kisses (Some kids are really sweet. Some, as you are about to see, not so much). When I asked Jefferson if his class liked having me there, he said no. Well, what about those hugs and kisses? Without missing a beat, "Oh, those were kisses like the guy who killed Jesus." That's it, son. No more church for you.



Jefferson finds one more way to show up dad by catching the biggest fish of the year

And maybe no more school. Jefferson was asking Chris what compound words were. She said it's when you take two smaller words and combine them into one bigger one. He asked (and as Dave Barry would say, I AM NOT MAKING THIS UP), "You mean like 'polymerization'?" Huh? No, that's not a compound word. But wait - polymerization is the process of taking small molecules and combining them to make larger *compounds*. It's hard to convince our kids that we know best when clearly, we don't.

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Still, I love being a dad because I get to impart such wisdom. While shopping for crafts with the kids at *Michael's*, Jefferson wanted to know why Hannah has to examine every single item in the store. I told him it goes back to Adam and Eve. When God decided that woman would bear the pain of childbirth, woman decided to get her revenge by making shopping just as long and unbearable. Meanwhile, when Hannah asked why Jefferson always wants to leave one minute after we get to a store, I got to teach her that if she wants to enjoy shopping, she must never involve the man in her life. That night I went to bed comforted by the thought that I had given the children spiritual and relationship guidance that will serve them a lifetime.



Hannah is now bigger than all her friends, but she still loves them just the same - at least for now.

You know, it's been said that the age of innocence ends when a dandelion becomes a weed instead of a flower for mommy. I can't comment on the dandelion's status, but we may have witnessed such a turning point when we took the kids to Disney World this past spring. Instead of the wide-eyed excitement we had anticipated, we were greeted almost immediately with requests to go back to the hotel and swim. I must admit that leaving the cash vacuum that is Disney World, to go sip umbrella drinks poolside had more than a little appeal to me.

Yet at the same time, it was apparent that we had crossed a threshold. They no longer yell in excitement at the sight of a fire engine, no longer point out the moon every time they catch a glimpse of it and trains are simply something that keep us from getting where we're going. But that's neither sad nor bad. Their passions are more purposeful, less instinctive. Hannah has her reading and arts & crafts. Jefferson lives for fishing, sports and Yu-gi-oh cards. They're both wonderful conversationalists quite willing and able to discuss just about anything.

As much as I enjoyed their goofy little baby-days antics, I enjoy the little people they're becoming even more. And one day, they'll join Chris and me poolside with their own umbrella drinks. Yep, it's all good.