

Oh the mysteries. Mysteries like how'd we end up with nine basketballs when I only bought four? Or how did five Razor Scooters spend the summer in our garage when we only have two kids. Why are there 23 hair care products in the shower at our cabin up north (but only five when my sister Kathy and her friend leave)? How can Jefferson have 19 shoes scattered around the family room, but never find a pair when we're going somewhere? And why do we buy the boy underwear at all? Seriously, I'll fold laundry (that's Chris guffawing in the background) and Hannah will have nine shirts, ten pairs of pants, assorted jackets, socks, pajamas and whatnot. Jefferson will have three shirts, a pair of sweatpants and no underwear. He tells us that "Tuesday is Underwear Day," but I don't know if that means that's the only day he wears it or if that's the day he changes it (which, of course, would mean that come Monday he should also be wearing a Biohazard sticker).

[Speaking of mysteries - why can't they engineer a toilet paper dispenser that can actually hold an entire roll of TP? But I digress]

The kids are getting older, with Hannah just weeks away from turning ten and entering that decade when ages start with a "1" and end in "teen". More mysteries to come, I'm quite sure. I was reminded of her advancing age when I took the kids out to eat one Friday and asked how school went. Hannah answered, "Great! I didn't have to go to Humanities so we could see the movie." What do you mean, "the" movie? Not "a" movie? Why "the"... Oh. Ooohh - THE movie. The "all the girls get to have a special assembly and watch the movie" movie. She said the most embarrassing part was when someone asked where babies come from. She didn't elaborate, but Jefferson did, saying they come from cholesterol. "You're arteries get more and more clogged until they explode. And there's your baby!" Clearly, he's been watching the wrong movie.

These meals out (Chris has CAbi parties and the rest of us hit TGI Friday's) give me lots of time to talk with the kids. Once, we were having an animated discussion when Hannah told me I was the coolest dad in the world. Not able to leave well-enough alone - and knowing those teen years are not far away - I decided to inoculate them against the change in perception I know is coming. So I told them, "You know, there's going to come a time when you think I'm the biggest dork in the world." They both got quiet and looked at me. Then Hannah said, "Dad, we already think you're the biggest dork in the world." Well, there you go. Remember where you heard it first, kids. (They also said they could still tell what color my hair "was." At least it's the color - and not the hair - that 's being discussed in the past tense. I'll take my victories where I can.)



For all the neighbors who wonder what the kids do all those hours at our house... Trust me, it looks better than it sounds.

We almost made it through this first decade of parenthood without a single soccer practice. Then Jefferson signed up. At his second practice, they asked me to help coach. Now, my complete knowledge of soccer can be summed up in one sentence - the object is to kick the ball in the goal and you can't use your hands unless you're the goalie. May as well ask me to teach ballet. If this is the state of youth soccer coaching in the U.S., I think it goes a long way in explaining our futility in the World Cup. But I made one damn fine assistant kid-herder (My big contributions: "Hey, hey! Over here boys," "Let's settle down, guys" and "You'll have to ask Coach Rob.") (continued...)

I told them not to feed the stray cat on our porch. He now lives there—and likes to have his friends over. He also likes to get stuck in the storm sewer - guess who gets to rescue him. Aarrgghh.

Cat feeding gone a-"stray"...



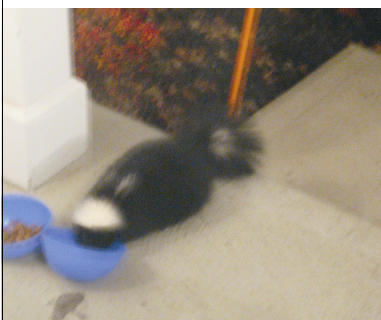
Our adopted stray, Charlie



Our neighbor's cat, Snickers



I don't know who this cat is



And finally - hey, that's not a cat! It's Pepe LePew!

Now here is where I would normally make some smart-aleck comment about being a glorified pack horse while accompanying Chris on Cabi trips to Dallas and Traverse City. But I can't. All because of one little missed connection. OK, so it was her connecting flight coming back from L.A. the day before our departure to Dallas. Her Wednesday morning flight out was delayed about five hours because of thunderstorms in Chicago. By the time they got to Chicago at 11:30 that evening, all flights were gone. All rental cars were gone. All hotels were booked. Chris had promised Hannah she'd be home Thursday morning to say goodbye before heading to Dallas. So she and her colleagues traveled the 315 miles from Chicago to Cincinnati in a cab. An old cab with a driver finishing a 24 hour shift. A cab that got a flat tire in Lafayette, IN. A flat they fixed with Fix-A-Flat. A fix that lasted until about 30 miles from home. They rode that flat the rest of the way into Cincinnati, where they had to pick up Chris's car at the airport. And where they learned that the valet service had locked her keys in the car. Chris finally got home around 7:30 Thursday morning, said goodbye to Hannah and immediately got in the car to catch our flight from Dayton to Dallas. A flight that was delayed when our incoming plane was diverted by thunderstorms - to Cincinnati. So I can't complain. But boy do I want to.

It's just my opinion, but the picture to the right is the photo of the year. I've read of grown men choking up while watching *Field of Dreams*. Heck, I wrote about shedding tears at the demise of old Tiger Stadium in the first of these newsletters in 1999. This picture explains why. There's something about baseball and fathers and sons that no other sport can match.



Thirty-eight years ago, I attended my first World Series game with my Dad. This year, Jefferson made it three generations of Szydlowski men at Game 1 of the Series. And if history repeats itself (just like Jefferson, I was 8 years old for that first Series game), he will remember it forever (and maybe even choke up some day when watching *Field of Dreams*). Ahh, baseball .

Merry Christmas
And a
Happy, Healthy New Year