

NEW TRICKS FOR AN OLD DOG

My wife's death a year ago immediately plunged me into many new behaviors, almost all exceedingly difficult to embrace. But the extreme distress and displacement I once felt is virtually gone, and I'm now developing a workable routine--of sorts. And in the process I've had to learn (or at least have been working on learning) some "new tricks" for this old dog. Let me share some of them with you so you'll know where I am.

In July I rejoined the fitness center and try to go every day except Sunday. The exercise has been therapeutic, and my overall health has certainly improved. But upon wise counsel from friend Rod Gilbreath, I engaged the services of a personal trainer to help me with a program for strengthening my injured knee. Plus, the trainer has developed a well-rounded exercise plan that I can follow from week to week.

Those who have suffered the death of a loved one know how distressing holidays can be. I was part of a couple, with my wife being the energetic and lively half. I, on the other hand, was the token "stick in the mud" who got to enjoy the good times she helped engender.

But when confronted with facing my first Thanksgiving without her, I determined to do more than just show up to gatherings. So with Connie Bolton's recipe in hand, I determined to make some chocolate pies.

Those first two were more like pudding than pie, but I've since learned what "stir until stiff" means. Though I'm not exactly known as the Pie Man, I have made quite a few since and have been told that they are tasty. My trainer, of course, would frown on my sampling them personally.

Before Mary commenced cancer treatments in March 2006, we had begun a video course in Spanish. We had to set all that aside, however, and never got back to it. But in January I started anew. Furthermore, I've purchased an audio course and installed it on a tiny mp3 player I bought just for that purpose.

So whenever I'm in the car or at the fitness center, "yo practico." I wear earphones at the fitness center, of course, and am certain that those who see my mouth twitching mutter epithets like this: "Would you look at that old man talking to himself!"

And just to stretch myself a bit, I occasionally listen to FM 99.3, a Spanish-speaking station, just to see if I can pick out any words or phrases that I've been working on. Sometimes I can! I've renewed my passport and may even go to Costa Rica this summer on a mission project.

For those who might be interested in what material I'm using, there's a Spanish link near the top of my internet homepage (www.james-mc.com).

While my ability to write and concentrate hasn't exactly returned, I see now that it will. When coupled with the grace of God, time has effected changes I'd never have thought possible a year ago.