

The Little Boy With The Black Eye

We took the kids to the county fair on Saturday, and we had lots of fun. It may have rained most of the day, but we stayed comfortable using an umbrella and our stroller awnings for the little ones. There was only one or two major downpours, and we spent those in the animal barns, looking over the fair kids' 4-H projects.

It's always amazing to us how much our 6-year-old loves going on all the most extreme carnival rides, and my husband and I took turns with her on this:

and this:

To her disappointment, she is not yet tall enough for this, but maybe next year:



My little guy took his nap at the fair, and when he woke up, we stopped for a snack. He began to cry; at first we thought he was just crabby from his nap and that his sister had taken his cookies. But then his cheek up near his eye began to swell up and turn black and blue. When he said, "Bug hurt me", we knew that he must have gotten stung. We made a precautionary visit to the fair's EMS squad, and they were excellent with him, even though he wanted no part of it. He soon got over his ow-ie with the help of some fair rides, but if you look at his right eye, you can see that he was sporting a minor shiner:



I know, the clowns are scary enough, but our son loved this ride despite how upset he looks – it was just his swollen eye. When the ride stopped, he got off the clown and immediately climbed into another one. Hey, you can't expect a 2-year-old to understand the concept of fair tickets being \$.75 each!!

I'm happy to say today that the swelling on his face is down a little bit, and good thing too – I got tired of the scrutinizing looks from people who were wondering, "How did that cute little boy get that black eye?!?"

In Remembrance

9/11/2001

September 11, 2001 was day we won't forget, a defining time in our nation's history, and the first of its kind for the generations who hadn't been exposed to such feelings of terror nor national vulnerability before that day. This blog post is a day late, but I spent some time yesterday reflecting on the sacrifices made and the lives forever changed on that September day in 2001. Alan Jackson wrote a poignant song about September 11, 2001 that asks, "Where were you when the world stopped turning that September day?", and I think that everyone remembers where they were and what they were doing when they learned that the United States was attacked nine years ago. I remember receiving emails from my friend who was serving in the Air Force at the time:

To All My Friends and Family:

I just wanted everyone to know that I'm okay. We are not going anywhere. Our jets are on standby, but that's it. Also, Jerry made it home okay, for those of you that were worried. I love you all, and I miss you.

Love,

Kel

Hi Everyone,

Things are still going as well as can be expected. We are currently

working 12 hour shifts, 7 days a week. Please, I'm asking everyone,

do not call me during the day, because most of you know that's when

I sleep. I'm working 7:00pm to 7:00am. If you absolutely need to get in touch with me,

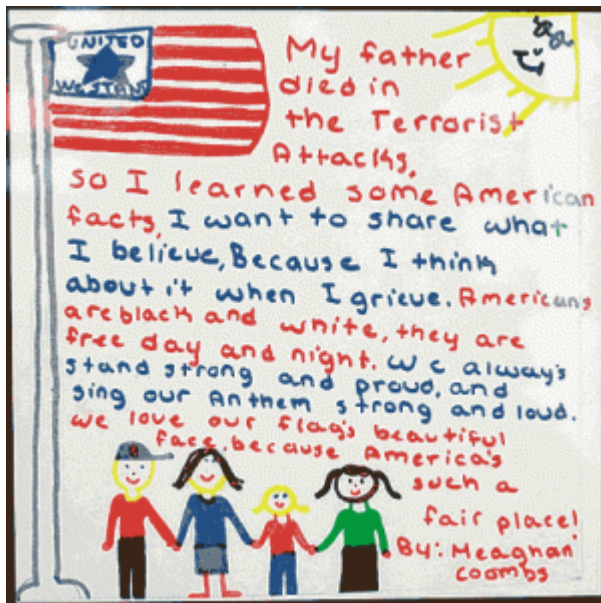
you can call me at home between 5:30pm and 6:00pm, or in an emergency I can be reached at work. (Mom and Dad you

can call me anytime, even at work if you want) Also I check my e-mail a few times a night, so I will respond to everyone as quickly as possible. If you have any questions, feel free to ask, but I only have limited info at this time. For everyone wondering, we currently have 1/3 of our jets standing by with a full load of fuel and equiped with armed missles. If anything else happens, the jets will take off and patrol from South Carolina to the Southern tip of Florida (the Keys) They will shoot down anything that comes within that area. They will give the planes one warning and if they don't turn back, our jets will shoot them down without hesitation. We are very tired and will be even more worn down by the time this is all over. Working 12 hours a day, 7 days a week will do that to you. Again, if anyone has any questions, please e-mail me. I love you and miss you all.
Love, Kel

Her emails illustrate the widespread uncertainty coursing throughout the nation at that time as well as the need to keep close contact with friends and family.

One of the most moving experiences I've had was visiting the 9/11 museum in New York city a few years ago. It was a somber experience, and there was scarcely a dry eye left amongst those who came to learn, reflect, and pay tribute to the

victims of 9/11. The victims, their families, and those who were affected in other ways by the infamous September 11, 2001 were in my thoughts and prayers yesterday, as well as they are today, and I've included the following video if you'd like to reflect as well. God bless America.



Not THAT MGM Lion...

Have you seen that MGM lion video? When I asked a friend about this the other day, he apparently thought I was referring to the lion that roars at you from the screen in the beginning of some movies – not THAT MGM lion! I'm talking about the shocking video of the lion turning on his trainer at the lion exhibit in the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas. Notice I didn't use the word "attack". Animal experts (including Jack Hanna, my favorite animal expert) who have reviewed the footage have agreed that it wasn't an attack, but rather retribution or perhaps rough play from one grumpy lion. The fact is, had the lion been attacking, it would have been over in a matter of seconds with a tragic outcome for the trainer. The trainer escaped uninjured, and watch how the lion follows him out of the enclosure, giving him "yeah, you'd BETTER run" looks all the way out:

Personally, I do think the lion was playing rough. He might have gotten a bit irritated at the trainer, but if he had truly wanted to hurt him, he could have killed him in seconds flat, which is why extreme caution should always be used when handling exotic animals. I wish the video showed what was occurring between the lion and his trainer just before the incident. Seconds before, the lion seems relaxed, but then the camera pans away until the lion lunges for the trainer's leg. What I find truly amazing about the video is the female lion's reaction. She follows the male lion around the enclosure throughout the incident, seemingly trying to get him to stop stalking the trainer. Just after the male lion's first lunge, the female even jumps on his back and gives him a little nip. A penny for... scratch that – I think I'd pay a lot of money for the thoughts of these lions!

Scary as these incidents are, I'm happy to report that this one had a positive outcome – the trainers are fine. I wonder if that trainer will be working with that male lion again?

Disney's First Day Of School!

My almost 4-year-old daughter Disney joined her sisters in the profession of "student" the other day- it was her first day of prechool, and she LOVES it!!

Here is the cutie on her first day:



BLACK Raspberry – A New Meaning

Labor day weekend was a busy one, but it was packed with lots of fun family time. On Saturday, we packed up the kids and drove out to South Bend Indiana which is kind of a hike but worth it as you'll see in a minute. They have a nice little zoo there, the Potawatomi Zoo, and our Toledo Zoo membership gets us in free in South Bend also. There is also [Megaplay](#), a fun place for the kids (and adults!) to play. But this is the

first time we've been to Megaplay when my son is old enough to play there, and he thought the ball pit (perhaps one of the last remaining in the world?) was just about the best thing he's ever seen! After Megaplay, we were all starving, and some research on the internet before we left told us that a favorite place of ours on the way back from South Bend (Dakota's in Elkhart Indiana) had closed. So we were left to find something new, and that we did – there is an excellent BBQ place right across the street from Megaplay. They had the best dessert I think I've ever had: pig ears, which is some kind of fried dough with butter and brown sugar or something else yummy sprinkled on top. I'm not normally a dessert person, but I probably would have taken on all 4 of my kids for a pig ear. It wasn't necessary though, since I ate theirs while they were in the bathroom ☐

Last time I blogged about Megaplay, I think I mentioned how the strip mall where it's located looks like it's from the 80's. I don't know how else to describe it, but every time I'm there, I feel like I've been in a time warp. It's difficult to explain, so I tried to take a video, but it didn't turn out. Next time...

Sunday was kind of a restful day, and each of our two oldest daughters had friends over. They were well behaved friends, and we had fun.

On Monday, my husband had to work unfortunately, and rather than try to pass all day with all 4 of my kids at home, we took off for the Toledo Zoo. I know, 2 zoos in 1 weekend? But what can I say, I am a zoo addict. The only problem was that the zoo was MOBBED – probably the most crowded I've ever seen it. Good for the zoo, but not for the mom there by herself with 4 kids trying to navigate a large double-stroller through the crowds. We couldn't get near the great apes to see them, and the rest of the animals weren't doing much of anything except for the hippos. Toledo has an underwater viewing glass on the hippo exhibit, and their two extremely

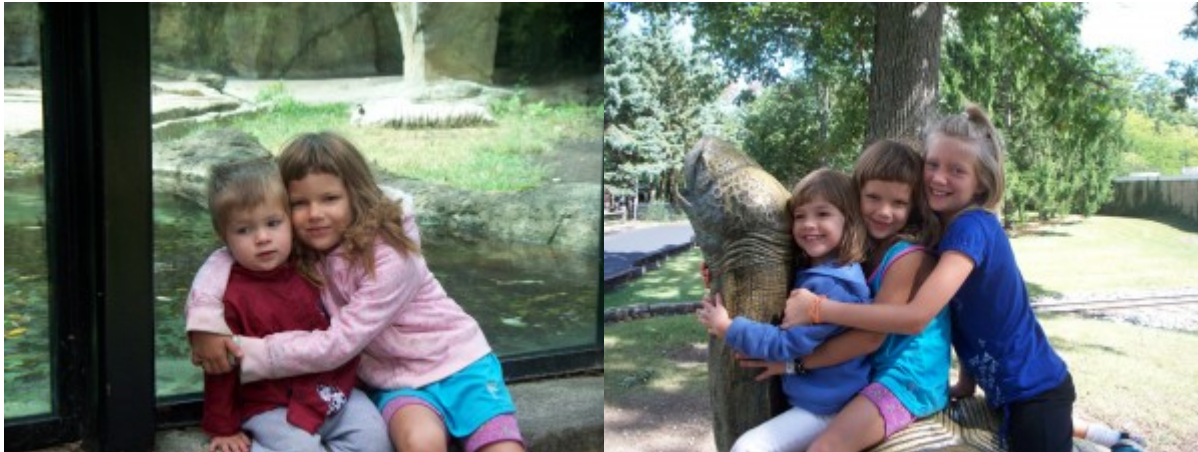
large hippos kept swimming past. One opened his mouth underwater, and the other one rose out of the water, opened his mouth REALLY wide and shook his head back and forth; it was great. The hippos made the entire trip worthwhile. Not that a trip to any zoo could ever be a waste of time for me. Even if I can't see that many animals, there is just something about zoos that make me feel happy and peaceful. Besides, the kids got to play on the playgrounds for a long time, so they were happy too. The only problem was we had such a big day that all of the kids fell asleep on the way home. And the 4:00 nap did not set them up to go to bed at a decent hour to get enough sleep for school on Tuesday after their long weekend. Oops...

We got back home only 10 minutes late (there was traffic! Labor Day, who'd a thunk?) for our dinner date with Dad. Last week we discovered that Friendly's restaurant has kids' nights, which means that kids eat free with purchase of adult meals. That means for our family of 6, we leave with a bill of just over \$20 to eat out, and that includes all we can drink (kids too, and they don't have to get water – they love this!) AND dessert for all of us. But while we were eating, the lights kept flickering; they went out but came back on again. But then they flickered again and went out for good (we still don't know why, there was no storm or anything). But luckily we had already eaten, so we didn't really have anything to worry about. The kids were a little frightened, and of course all of a sudden the 3 girls had to use the bathroom, which had the employees scrambling for a flashlight for us to use. As I held the flashlight for my kids in the bathroom, we had a little talk about Amish people and how they live and how maybe the rest of us are too dependent on electricity. I made a bad joke about my black raspberry sundae since I was eating it in the dark, and that's where I got the title for this post.

So overall, a great weekend, though I should add one thing.

At Friendly's, my husband overheard a college-age kid at the next table mutter something rude after our family prayed before our meal – "Jesus freaks". I feel badly for him that he has to think that about people who appreciate taking time to thank God for their blessings throughout their days. We were quietly minding our own business, so his comment was completely unnecessary. We do our thing, he can do his. I didn't even say anything when he and his friends were casually tossing around the f-word during their meal, even though my kids were sitting right next door. But people are people, and as I said, I feel badly for him. Besides, God gave us an opportunity to really help someone before we left the restaurant, and I hope that maybe our kindness can show the light of God to others. Maybe the mutterer was still there to witness God at work.

Hope your Labor Day, your "last hurrah of summer", was safe and happy. Here are some pictures from our wonderful weekend:



Ok, and I have to include the following pictures for the Star Wars fans. Megaplay has all these life-size cardboard cut-outs of Star Wars characters hanging up. Sorry the pictures aren't better, but I took them from far away since I was trying to fit as many into the pictures as possible. Look for them high on the walls, near the ceiling:



And my favorite of the cut-outs – I've always liked Marvin the Martian:



Exporting Fun

Here in 2010, everyone knows that it's becoming more and more common for the United States to export jobs to countries where the labor is cheaper in cost.

Locally, my area used to be well known for producing no less than three types of goods: automotive products, toys, and candy. Because of the free-falling economy and other things, the demand in the automotive industry has plummeted, and I don't have a desire to go into further detail about that in

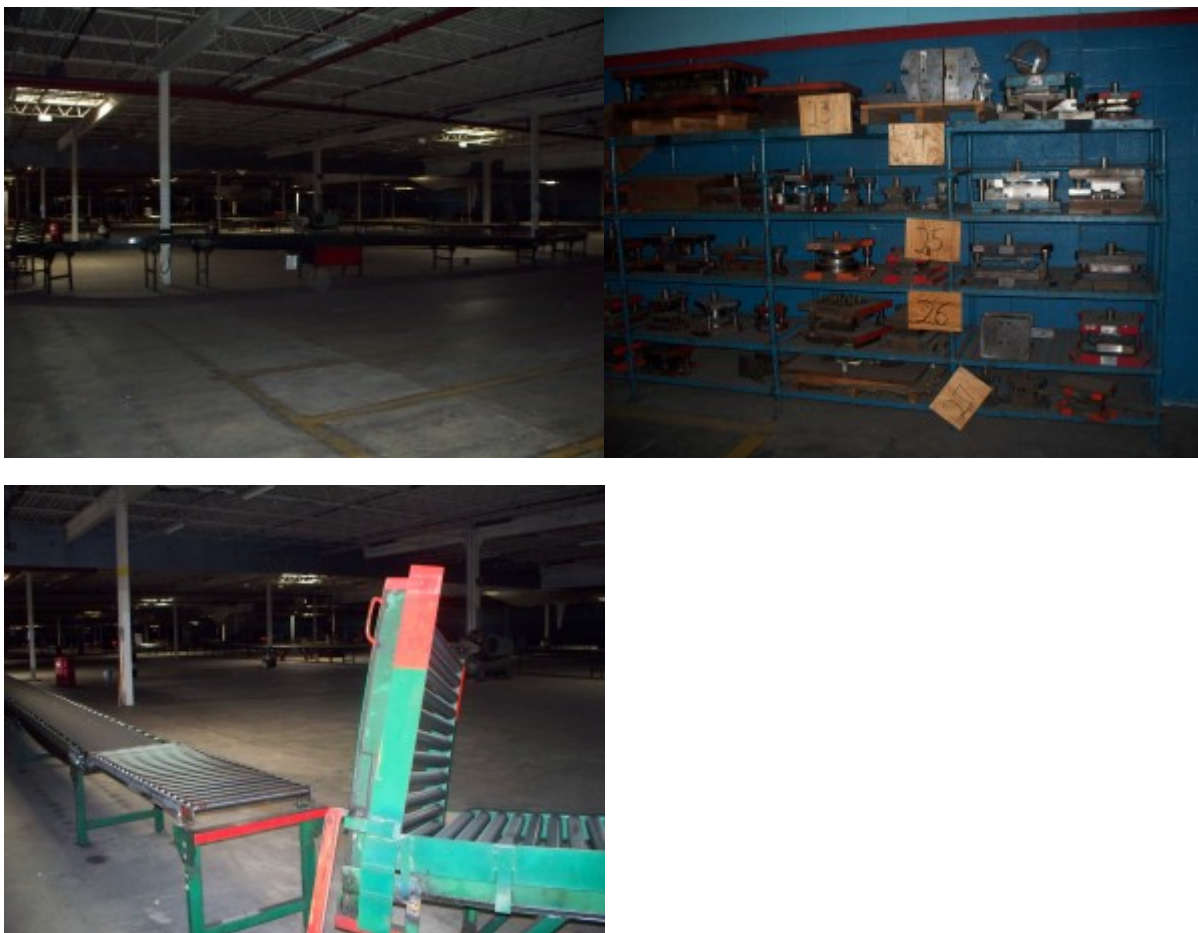
this blog post. Fortunately, all seems to be well in our local candy factory, and the sugary sweet aromas still float upon our breezes every day. But much like many of our automotive-oriented factories, business at the local toy factory is not going so well. What once was a thriving complex of bustling office buildings, manufacturing facilities, and distribution warehouses crisscrossed with train tracks and semi trailers for shipping has become an almost ghostly graveyard of quiet emptiness.

Recently, I had the opportunity to glimpse the inside of one of the old manufacturing facilities for a company called Ohio Art, who is probably best known for creating the timeless toy (or so it was once thought to be) – the Etch-A-Sketch.



Who can blame a struggling company for trying to cut costs just to stay above water, and Ohio Art cut its costs (and almost a hundred jobs) about 10 years ago when they moved their production lines to China. Now the sprawling complex, split down the middle by the aptly named "Toy Street", sits mostly empty with the company leasing some of the large space to other companies while other areas are used by local organizations. I couldn't resist the opportunity to snap a few pictures, especially for those of you who are ghost hunters. I'm not really inclined to believe in paranormal phenomena, but for the two days I worked in the abandoned Ohio Art warehouse, I could have convinced myself that we humans were not alone. Beyond the creepiness that comes from being in a humongous (and I mean HUMONGOUS) abandoned manufacturing

facility, there were plenty of strange noises: creaking, clanking, dripping, whooshing, you name it. There were random tickles on my arm, brushes on my back, and taps on my shoulders (many of which were later attributed to rogue cobwebs and the like, but those explanations ruin my ghost story don't they). Not only that, but when production was moved across the globe to China, many old machines, mechanical parts, and things like employee safety signs were left behind, seemingly testaments to the millions of toys that were birthed here and long forgotten.



The emptiness of Ohio Art is a sad thing; not only for the surrounding community who lost all those jobs and for the executives who had to make those tough decisions, but also as a sign of our country's fledgling economy. If you'd like to read more about how Ohio Art's production line was moved to China (and about how conditions aren't always what they seem for Chinese workers), I found [the following article](#) pretty interesting, and you might also:

Ruse in Toyland: Chinese Workers' Hidden Woe

By JOSEPH KAHN

Published: December 7, 2003

SHENZHEN, China— Workers at Kin Ki Industrial, a leading Chinese toy maker, make a decent salary, rarely work nights or weekends and often "hang out along the street, play Ping-Pong and watch TV."

They all have work contracts, pensions and medical benefits. The factory canteen offers tasty food. The dormitories are comfortable.

These are the official working conditions at Kin Ki as they are described on paper – crib sheets – handed to workers just before inspections.

Those occur when big American clients, like the Ohio company that uses Kin Ki to produce the iconic toy Etch A Sketch, visit to make sure that the factory has good labor standards.

Real-world Kin Ki employees, mostly teenage migrants from internal provinces, say they work many more hours and earn about 40 percent less than the company claims. They sleep head-to-toe in tiny rooms. They staged two strikes recently demanding they get paid closer to the legal minimum wage.

Most do not have pensions, medical insurance or work contracts. The company's crib sheet recommends if inspectors press to see such documents, workers should "intentionally waste time and then say they can't find them," according to company memos provided to The New York Times by employees.

After first saying that Kin Ki strictly abides by all Chinese labor laws, Johnson Tao, a senior executive with the privately owned company, acknowledged that Kin Ki's wages and benefits fell short of legal levels and vowed to address the issue soon.

He said that the memos might have reflected attempts by factory managers to deceive inspectors, but that such behavior "did not have the support of senior management."

William C. Killgallon, the chief executive of Ohio Art Company, the owner of Etch A Sketch, said that he considered Kin Ki executives honest and that he had no knowledge of labor problems there. But he said he intended to visit China soon to "make sure they understand what we expect."

Etch A Sketch is the same child's drawing toy today that it was in 1960, when Ohio Art first produced it in Bryan, Ohio. But efforts to keep its selling price below \$10 on shelves at Wal-Mart and Toys "R" Us forced the company to move production to China three years ago.

Today the same toy is made not just for lower wages, but also under significantly harsher working conditions. Kin Ki's workers, in fact, are struggling to obtain rights that their American predecessors at Ohio Art won early in the last century, though the workers are without the aid of independent unions, which remain illegal in China.

China now makes 80 percent of the toys sold in America, according to United States government figures, and no industry here has come under greater pressure to adhere to global labor codes. Kin Ki and most other big producers open their doors to foreign inspectors to assuage concerns that products used to entertain children in rich countries are not made under oppressive conditions in poor ones.

But that goal conflicts with price pressures in commodity industries like toys, where manufacturers command no premium for good labor practices. China alone has 8,000 toy makers competing fiercely for contracts by shaving pennies off production costs.

Kin Ki stays competitive, workers say, by paying them 24 cents an hour in Shenzhen, where the legal minimum wage is 33

cents. When the Etch A Sketch line shut down in Ohio just after the Christmas rush in 2000, wages for the unionized work force there had reached \$9 an hour.

Chinese workers say the company also denies them legally required nonsalary benefits and compels them to work 84 hours a week, far more than the legal maximum, without required overtime pay.

"I keep this job because my parents and my daughter depend on the money I earn," said one migrant worker, who if named could lose her position for talking about the company. "No one likes to work in these conditions, but I have no choice."

Etch A Sketch has had rare longevity in the toy world. Baby Boomers used them as children and now buy them for their own families by the millions.

The toy survived into the electronic age because of nostalgia and clever promotions. But its appeal has continued, in part, because it keeps getting cheaper to own. It sold for \$3.99 when it was introduced. If it had kept pace with the consumer price index over its 43 years, it would retail for \$23.69 today instead of \$9.99.

Mr. Killgallon and his brother, Larry, who is president of Ohio Art, said in an interview that their efforts to reduce costs ran out of steam by the late 1990's, in part because of soaring health care expenses.

The logic of overseas production grew irresistible, as wage rates and shipping costs fell and quality improved, they said. An Etch A Sketch made in China and delivered to the company's warehouse in Bryan was found to cost 20 percent to 30 percent less than making it in Bryan. Moving the full line to China meant laying off about 100 people.

"We tried hard to make this work in Bryan," Larry Killgallon said. "But we looked at the numbers and we realized that we

had to move.”

Since early 2001, Etch A Sketches have been made in the village of Da Kang, a dusty enclave on the outskirts of Shenzhen, near Hong Kong. Once a farm region, the area has been overtaken by white-tiled factories and itinerant laborers. Landlords scrawl their phone numbers on the walls of old farm homes, like commercial graffiti, for workers who want to rent rooms. The village planted roses and marigolds to beautify the roadside, but the fallout from factories and construction sites has colored them gray.

High walls surround Kin Ki's production lines and warehouses. Dormitory windows are covered in chicken wire. Workers must enter and leave through the guarded front gate.

The factory, workers say, operates with the intensity of a military campaign. Production starts at 7:30 a.m., and, breaking only for lunch and dinner, continues until 10 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays are treated as normal workdays, so a work week consists of seven 12-hour days.

That far exceeds Shenzhen's regulations. The authorities have set a 40-hour, five-day work week, like the United States. Local rules allow no more than 32 hours of overtime per month, which must be compensated by paying time and a half on weekdays and double time on weekends.

Kin Ki set a much lower pay scale, workers said. It pays just 1.3 times pay base for any overtime, weekday or weekend. Workers say their monthly paychecks would more than double, to about \$200 from around \$85, if the company paid legal wages.

The work itself can be draining and tedious. Unlike Ohio Art's factory, Kin Ki uses few machines to offset manual labor, and it needs three or four times the number of workers casting plastic molds, painting parts, and attaching the strings and rods that operate the drawing mechanism of the

Etch A Sketch. But Kin Ki workers say it is the pay, not the task, that upsets them.

"Most of us would work long hours willingly if we were paid according to the law," said one employee. "The way things are now, we can shut up or leave."

Some workers took action against the factory last June and July, refusing to work unless the company raised wages. They also demanded that the daily diet of boiled vegetables, beans and rice be improved and supplemented more often with pork, fish or some other meat, which they say is served just twice a month.

The company responded by raising wages by a few cents a day, workers said. The canteen allotted each worker an extra dish each day, though no more meat.

But managers made "fried squid" of two workers they singled out as strike leaders, workers said, using a popular term for dismissals.

The company acknowledged having significant labor problems. "I know that I need to increase wages and to comply with the law," Mr. Tao said. "I have the intention of doing this and will raise all wages in 2004."

He also acknowledged that workers had gone on strike. But he denied that Kin Ki had dismissed the two ringleaders. He said they "were well known troublemakers" who left the factory of their own accord.

Whatever Kin Ki's intentions are now, company documents show that it has been paying below-regulation wages – and seeking to fool foreign clients – for years.

One memo preparing workers and supervisors for an inspection in September 2001, urged workers to help the factory "cope with clients."

"Foreign clients made unattainable demands during previous inspections, including on limiting overtime," the memo said. "But when you think about it, you come from all over the country to make money, not to rest."

A more recent memo, issued to prepare for an inspection that took place on Nov. 26, urged workers to memorize false numbers for wages and working hours to reflect Shenzhen's regulations. The memo promised bonuses to workers who responded as directed when approached by inspectors.

Workers said the elaborate ruse had one happy result. Because few of the employees have legal work contracts on file, the factory must pretend that its work force is smaller than it is when inspectors visit. On such days most of the factory's 850 workers get a rare treat: a day off.

On Nov. 26, with an inspection under way inside the plant, workers congregated in their rented homes or food stalls to eat, chat, smoke and gossip.

"I thank the inspectors for one thing," said a Kin Ki worker from rural Sichuan. She was crouching over a bucket of cold water in the warm afternoon sun, washing her hair. "I needed a rest," she said.

Could This Be... Boredom?

The word "bored" has not been in my vocabulary for years – I always have too much to do with not enough time to do it. Such is still the case, but with the kids (half of them anyway) back in school, I'm finding myself with 45 minutes to an hour of time on the weekdays when I am alone, by myself and

without kids. Problem is, I don't FEEL like doing any of the things I once thought I would do if I had spare time. I could put aside the lack of motivation, except that the household projects I want to tackle can't be completed in an hour, so I'm reluctant to begin big projects just to have to pack up after 45 minutes so I can pick up kids at school or have one awaken from a nap. Other things I might feel like doing seem pointless or not productive enough for me to waste my time doing them.

I always thought boredom meant lack of things to do, which I don't think will ever happen to me. But if boredom can also mean having a ton of things to do and not feeling like doing any of it, then I am actually bored!

It's My First Day

Today marked an important day at church for our family – transition day, when the kids move up to their next classroom! My son, who is also our youngest, moved from the Toddler Room to the 2-year-old room. He seemed to really like the new toys: the wide array of trucks, the bubble window, and the slide. His next sister moved from the 3-year-old room to the 4-year-old room, and she really liked her new digs also. Our 6-year-old moved buildings all together, and she is now with the big kids on the north campus for a more school-like vs. a nursery / playroom setting. She really seemed to enjoy herself in the new building.

Today also marked a first for my husband and I – it was our first day trying our new positions at church. I am the first grade teacher during our 2nd service, and my husband is the large group storyteller. For me, things went quite well. I had 5 little girls and 4 little boys in my group today, and

unlike when I substitute taught over the summer, there was no clinging to the parents' legs or fights to referee in this age group – at least not yet. My daughter was in my class, and she was one of the best behaved kids, for which I was thankful because when I substitute- taught her 5-6 year old class over the summer (before she transferred to the first grade class), she was one of my trouble makers as she had trouble listening to mom. But today things went smoothly, and one of the activities went so well that we actually ran out of time to do it again! The activity was for each kid to take a word from Luke 6:31 (Do to others as you want them to do to you) and say it on their turn so that the verse is completed. I altered the game a little bit, giving each kid a slip of paper with the word on it as a reminder and also walking around the room and touching their heads when it was their turn. This way, there was less freezing on the kids' part, and more control on my part since anyone who has worked with kids will tell you that any sort of down time will lead to chaos in a matter of seconds.

Shortly after the kids arrived, we made our way to the Wherehouse, a fun gathering room for the kids. This is where we got to hear the storyteller (my husband, who did a great job even if he had to adlib when the "boss" forgot the charades cards) and where we got to "get our wiggles out" by dancing to some fun Christian music.

My favorite part of the class was the snack prayer – I kept it short and sweet because the kids were really hyper, and I didn't want them to be disrespectful during the prayer. After we prayed, a little boy said, "Are you an angel?" I chuckled and asked him what he meant. "The prayer was really short," he said, smiling. I guess he was hungry ☺

All in all, it was a great first day, and I'm looking forward to not only the rest of this year, but also to moving from grade to grade with these wonderful children and watching them grow!

And by the way, saying "it's my first day" reminds me of an

hilarious scene from a Simpsons episode. I tried to find the clip so that I could embed it on my blog, but I could not find it without having to post the entire episode, so you can read the transcript and visualize it if you're a fan – I guarantee at least a chuckle! If you want to try to find the clip yourself, it's from the episode called "Simpson Tide", which is the 19th episode of the 9th season.

Mr. Burns: You did this? How could you be so irresponsible?

Homer: Eh... it's my first day!

Mr. Burns: Since I've never seen you before, maybe it is your first day. Very well, carry on!

[Mr. Burns begins to walk off, when Smithers catches up with him.]

Smithers: Sir, that's Homer Simpson. He's been working here for ten years!

Mr. Burns: Ohh, really? Why did you think you could lie to me?

Homer: It's my first day!

Mr. Burns: Well, why didn't you say that be...[realizes] Yawoo! You're fired!

Kidstuf!!

Four times per year, our church puts on a family program called Kidstuf. This time around, my two oldest daughters were chosen to be Kidstuf dancers, and they did a GREAT job!

Kidstuf is energetic and fun for adults and kids alike, so my husband and I were pleased to be offered the opportunity to direct the skit portion of the show. We accepted the position, and we enjoyed preparing and rehearsing over the past month or so. I can't say the actual show went off without a hitch since the tech crew missed a few cues and sound effects. But then again, we had only one rehearsal with

the tech crew before the actual production. I'm not really sure if anyone noticed the technical gaffes, and I made sure to keep a big smile on my face for the nervous cast to see as a sign of encouragement throughout the show. And I should mention that this edition of Kidstuf was unprecedented in that families sat together in the audience. Normally we have kids up front, and parents with wee little ones sit in the back. But this time, there was a family activity to be done – each family was given poster board, colored note cards, and glue sticks. Throughout the skit, families were directed to write different words on their note cards pertaining to either God or their loved ones. At the end, they were to paste their note cards to the poster boards in the shape of a flower. Being the first time we've attempted a family craft during Kidstuf, we didn't know what to expect... But the jubilant feeling I felt when I looked around and saw that the families had done the craft was indescribable. Not only did their flowers look great, but they had also together created something to take home that will remind them about how important familial and Godly relationships are in life. It was probably the most accomplished feeling a director can have, and that made the distraction of the tech problems disappear from my mind!

As I mentioned before, my kids were excellent Kidstuf dancers! They had rehearsed together every day before the production, had fun at their rehearsals, and then when performance time came, they were naturals on the stage! Here is a clip (my lovelies are the two on the left – my oldest is in green, and her little sis is in yellow behind her):

Kidstuf had something for everyone: a great Bible lesson (Philippians 4:8 complete with “not borin’” tips on how to memorize it), dancing, singing, a fun skit, comedy, and audience participation – Hubby was one of the adults that was called up to participate to be a “cow”. From the show: “you know that cows are known to bounce around on the range...” We had six adults on the stage bouncing around on (child size) hippity-hops, 3 of whom got roped by the ‘magic lasso’ – it was classic! Here’s a clip:

Actually never mind... while it was fun at the time, those adults might not appreciate being on the internet on their hippity hops, getting roped by the ‘magic lasso’, so I will just save that one for memory – hilarious, and the kids LOVED it!!

And I must add that our other audience participation scene went quite well also, but this one involved kids acting like a fire brigade. Things got crazy, and before the audience knew it, a real bucket of water was thrown upon a cast member. Before the production, much discussion was held on how not to mess up the stage (Kidstuf is performed in our Worship Center, so keeping things clean was of utmost importance), and thankfully we decided to remove one of the Worship Band’s monitors from the stage before “Scottie’s” dousing. Because we had never used actual water during rehearsal, the physics of the soaking was as much of a surprise to us directors and to the cast (especially poor “Scottie”) as it was to the audience – “Tyler” got “Scottie” right down the front of her bib overalls, and the look on the actress’ face was priceless!

All in all, we experienced an extremely fun and successful Kidstuf; we couldn’t have asked for a better show! Afterward, there was a carnival with games, activities, and carnival food, and it was all free, which was great for many community families – hope we got a lot of new people to come check out our great church! I know many families had a fun-packed day, and I was very excited to be part of such a wonderful event.

I'm really glad that my Illinois family (most of them anyway) were able to join us, and I know it meant the world to my kids to have some fans in the audience, so thank you!!

For those who were not fortunate enough to be able to see the show, Philippians 4:8 reads:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Disney World Fairy Tales (Not Quite)

I came across a really fun article awhile ago called: Confessions Of A Disney Cast Member. The article was written by a guy who spent 5 summers working at the Walt Disney World resort as a Disney cast member. If you're like me and a frequent visitor to the Magic Kingdom, then you will appreciate the following not-so-tall-tales. Even if you've never been to WDW, the following stories are fun to read. Among the entertaining stories he has to share:

Excuse me man, are you pregnant?

What's more terrifying than the 38-foot drop on Disney's Big Thunder Mountain Railroad? Having to ask women in line if they're pregnant. It's for their own safety, but forget a woman scorned—hell hath no fury like a woman who's been mistaken for being pregnant. Once, when I was in training, I watched a coworker approach a larger female park visitor and ask, "Excuse me, ma'am, but are you pregnant?" "Pregnant!?!!" the woman screamed, her voice turning heads at the happiest

place on earth. "No! What are you saying? Do I look fat to you?!" She turned to her friend and screamed some more: "They think I look fat. Let's get out of here!" I was so traumatized by that incident I crafted a plan to avoid offending anyone. Whenever I spotted a "suspect," I asked everybody in the vicinity—including teenage boys and women in their 70s—if they were with child. If the woman I suspected was actually pregnant, she left the ride quickly. If she wasn't, she just thought I was working a gag.

I sure am Randy today.

Disney made the "first name" name tag famous, but the tag doesn't always match the person wearing it. One day, as I was steering the raft to Tom Sawyer Island, my name tag dropped into the river, forcing me to get a new one. There wasn't a single "Robert" left, so until a replacement could be made, I pretended to be "Randy," a name that amused visitors from the U.K. to no end. Elderly English ladies lined up to have their picture taken with me. One screamed when she saw me, grabbed her friend, and yelled, "Is that really your name?" Being a good Disney cast member, I lied and said yes. The friend said, "You know, we love a good randy man back home." But lady, even I'm not that good a cast member.

To get onstage, dress the part.

A few attractions choose audience volunteers to be part of the show, but the selection process is far from random. Typically, you need to be a certain gender, size, and age for each of the different roles. You might even need to be wearing a specific item of clothing. On my off days from work, I used to go over to Universal Studios, and I would get picked all the time to play "Mother" in the old Alfred Hitchcock show. They needed a guy my height and weight who happened to be wearing the same type of plain white tennis shoes I always wore. Also helpful for getting picked: cuteness and enthusiasm. Curious kids who ask nicely and look

excited often get extra attention, along with thrilling perks like riding up front and introducing shows.

Stroller relocation program

Disney's a family place, but the people who work there come to loathe strollers. It's part of a cast member's job to keep strollers in nice, orderly lines and to make sure they're only left in designated areas. But park visitors keep their strollers in an appalling condition, loaded up with dirty diapers, rotting bottles of milk, and half-eaten PB&J sandwiches. Others see no problem with parking their strollers right in front of an attraction's exit or entrance. Sometimes thoughtless individuals like this incur the wrath of the stroller police, and their precious Bugaboos and Maclarens are intentionally relocated to a place "far, far away"—at the very back of the area cordoned off for strollers.



Yo, ho, ho and a bottle of (confiscated) rum

On special Grad Nites, when Disney hosts loads of freshly graduated high school kids, the park puts extra staffers inside Pirates of the Caribbean and other rides as lookouts to monitor less-than-legal activities. Our focus was mostly on what the kids were consuming. Booze, cigarettes—you name it, and a Disney cast member has confiscated it from a 17-year-old at one time or another. One clever kid, forced to hand over his bottle, noted the irony of getting busted in the middle of a ride that celebrates a drunken pirate orgy.

"Hey, don't the pirates have enough?" he asked. "They need mine, too?"

Please keep your happiness to yourself.

This attraction has been camera monitored for your safety. That's the spiel Disney broadcasts over its loudspeakers for many rides. But the cameras are also meant to protect you from yourself. One night, while most parkgoers were watching the fireworks display, a couple strolled over to Pirates of the Caribbean, where I was working. They not only had a boat to themselves, but empty boats all around them. The real fireworks display, it turned out, was visible on the security cameras to all of us working that night. Let's just say the show the couple put on wasn't exactly G-rated.

If you enjoyed the above stories, you might want to [read the article in its entirety here](#), along with other theme park insider info.