

C(hair)ity

I've had really long hair ever since I was a little girl. I wasn't particularly attached to it, but I'm just a busy person, so I always liked the idea of hopping out of bed and simply running a brush through my hair if I needed to be quick and put off the shower until later in the day. About a month ago, I took my kids to the South Bend zoo to meet my mom so she could take the girls for their week with Grandma, but it was one of those 100⁰+ days, and I could not get my long hair off of my neck. Since I had a fun trip planned days later to another zoo and an amusement park (2 long days outside!), I decided to chop off my hair.

The hairdresser made a big deal of it, asking me if my husband was going to be shocked, but I told her not really since he knew I planned to get it cut and isn't really concerned with what I do with my hair. I told her I wanted my hair cut all one length since I'm not a big fan of the reverse mullet look that seems so popular these days. But when I looked in the mirror after she was finished, she had kind of left the sides longer than the back, giving me an involuntary reverse mullet. Sure, the hairstyle looks great on most people, but I just don't see it for me. Besides, I don't want to be just another I'm-in-my-30's-I-have-4-kids-and-a-reverse-mullet-type housewife. So I told her to please even the sides out, and she (begrudgingly? did so. Is it this woman's mission to spread the reverse mullet around the world like a virus?)

But that brings me to an interesting conundrum – if you have someone really bad doing your hair, would you tell them? Probably you would – it's your hair and you are stuck with your new hairstyle every day, 24/7! What about when the hairdresser asks you, 'How does it look?' You would say, 'not so good'. So she would even it out. 'How about now?', she would ask. 'Still not really very even', you say – and still she would attempt to even out your hair, finally sticking you

with that reverse mullet look that's oh-so-popular these days, even though it's a reverse mullet against your will – a reluctant reverse mullet. Worse, an untalented hairdresser could keep attempting to even out your hair until you have nothing left! Maybe you could keep quiet during the incident if you were getting a bad haircut. You could return days later for a refund and try to endure another stylist's attempt on your hair. You could also try to fix it yourself at home. Well anyway, by the time she was through with me, my hair was just a little shorter than I had intended, but in that heat, I really didn't care. Besides, I was given a super long ponytail that I could donate to Locks of Love, a charity group that collects hair to make hairpieces for kids who lose their hair because of cancer and other medical conditions.

Better yet, when my oldest daughter returned home from her trip to Grandma's, she wanted to cut off her long hair too. Luckily for our family, my husband has gotten quite good at cutting the kids' hair, which saves us tons of money. I'm not brave enough to let him tackle my hair yet (though he might have been better in this case, but if he didn't do well, it's much better to be mad at a stranger hairstylist than my husband), but he cut off our daughter's long ponytail, giving us another donation for Locks of Love.

My daughter and I walked over to the post office one day to send our donation, and I decided to send our picture in to the local newspaper since I've seen them print pictures of Locks of Love donations before. Yesterday they printed our picture! I can't link to the actual newspaper since you have to be a subscriber to see it anyway, but here is the picture I sent:



That reminds of a question I had regarding hair donations – what would happen if someone left hair DNA evidence at a crime scene, and you became a suspect because the DNA evidence hair was somehow taken or dropped from a Locks of Love hairpiece made from your hair donation? If written well, it could be a stage play or movie... or maybe just a far-fetched CSI episode.

What Are The 3 Largest Cities In Nebraska?

A few weeks ago at a family birthday party, a friend posed an interesting trivia question which I thought I had a fair chance at since it involved a state where I once lived: the great state of Nebraska. Do you know what the 3 largest cities in Nebraska are?

Answer: Omaha, Lincoln (everyone knows those two) and... Bellevue. I've heard of Bellevue, but it wasn't my guess for third place. I was thinking of the western city of Scottsbluff, which is actually on the western side of Nebraska near Cheyenne Wyoming. I guessed Scottsbluff since it has a zoo that I always wanted to visit when we resided there, but we never made it there since Scottsbluff was almost as far

away from our home in Lincoln as was our family 2 states over in Illinois! But anyway, my point is that Scottsbluff didn't even make the top 10 of Nebraska's largest cities. The city of Kearney (pronounced Carnie) crossed my mind since it was always advertised as a nearby tourist attraction when we lived in Lincoln, but it was #5 on the list. And by the way, #5-10 of the largest cities in Nebraska only have between 20-30,000 people!!

I found this info while I was looking up the answer to my friend's trivia question, and I found it interesting, so I decided to pass it on. Then again, it was probably only interesting to me because I used to call Lincoln Nebraska home. Well anyway, if you come across the '3 largest cities in Nebraska' trivia question, you can now impress your friends by correctly saying Omaha, Lincoln, and Bellevue!

Disney's Driving Lesson

My daughter Disney is 3 years old and full of questions. Today was her first dentist visit, and she had questions about every aspect of going to the dentist. On the way home, she had more questions: Can I still sneeze? Can I still drink? Can I still eat? She had no idea what life would be like with clean teeth. Before the appointment, she was a bit scared, but in the end she found getting her teeth cleaned fun and tickle-y.

After the dentist, something happened that will have me laughing for a long time. A stoplight turned yellow, and it was one of those with the pedestrian's crosswalk really far in front of the light, so I had to hard-brake, which for some reason prompted little Disney to pipe up from the back seat

and ask me, “What the h*** are you doing?” I turned around and asked her where she learned that word, and her sisters looked terrified that they were going to somehow get blamed for this – the looks on their faces were priceless. “From Kirsten”, said Disney, referring to her little friend at the babysitters. I was relieved to know that it wasn’t something she had picked up from home, and we had a little chat about some words not being appropriate to say.

Kids will be kids, and I’m not worried in the slightest about my sweet little 3-year-old becoming as foul-mouthed as a trucker’s reputation. Actually, I will think of this little episode every time I need a smile – it was so funny how she just blurted it out that way, it makes me laugh out loud just thinking about it!



my sweet little Disney

Best Way To Spend 88 Cents

According to JJ my parakeet, the best way to spend 88 cents is on this little number:



I saw this little bird toy at Walmart the other day, and even though I knew it would scare the heck out of my scaredy-cat parakeet, I bought it anyway. It's a piece of plastic in the shape of an upside-down T – a perch for the bird to sit on, while the part that sticks up hold millet sprays – a favorite treat for parakeets.

I adopted my little guy JJ (short for Jungle Jack Hanna named after my favorite celeb) back in January, and he hasn't ever been interested in playing with any of the toys in his cage. My 2-year-old son used to bang on JJ's cage, and so the little bird became afraid of people, and I haven't been able to pet him in months – he flies away from me. I was so afraid that he led a miserable existence locked away safely in my bedroom – until about a month ago, when I moved him from our bedroom (where he was by himself most of the time) to the living room (the centerpiece of most of our large family's traffic patterns). JJ has been SO happy to be a part of the action! I've been happy to see him happy, but he still wasn't playing with toys – until I bought this 88 cent Walmart Wonder on a whim. At first, JJ kept his distance, and I feared I was right – he WAS afraid of everything! I had to leave the house for awhile, and when I returned, the millet was gone from the toy – I was ecstatic!

The next day, I snapped the above picture of JJ perched on his new toy, and ever since, he's been in love with his 88 cent Walmart toy! He sits next to it and preens himself, and he even gazes at it lovingly.

I reiterate – BEST 88 cents spent (on a pet) EVER!!

Playing Tourist In Toledo

It began with terrible news – my husband's uncle had a massive heart attack and was in a coma. His uncle was in Youngstown Ohio, on his way from Illinois to Washington DC where he was going to take his two sons for a vacation. A week ago Sunday, we packed up our family and were ready to head to Youngstown to be with the boys since they didn't have any other family in the area, but at the last minute, we found out that their mom was on her way.

We were all packed and ready to go, plus the summer almost got by without us taking a family vacation. Sure, we had some fun excursions with extended family and friends, but nothing with all 6 of us, just the 6 of us. So we changed our destination from Youngstown to Toledo, cut out a bunch of that driving, and were able to utilize a hotel gift certificate that had been burning a hole in our pockets. Although Toledo is not our home town, we live only an hour away so we visit often, which is why I used the term 'playing tourist'.

We went to the zoo (for the umpteenth time, but I could never get sick of the zoo, NEVER!), ate some delicious food, and swam in the hotel pool a bunch. We visited a mall; something I haven't done in probably over a decade (I don't count our local mall – it's more than half vacant, and its food court has only one restaurant left!), and I was disappointed to learn that the mall's Dippin' Dots store (which is the only one anywhere nearby) DOES NOT carry my favorite flavor – Root Beer Float! But the Dippin' Dots were still delicious, and besides, that's just one more thing that makes Orlando that

much more special – plenty of Root Beer Float Dippin' Dots in the store near Disney World, how I miss that place. We couldn't believe how crowded the Toledo mall was on a Wednesday afternoon, and because I hadn't been in one in years, there were all these new gadgets, gizmos, and what-nots that our family had to check out and play around with, probably making us look like total hicks. But that's ok, we had fun! And not only do I love living in a rural area because we have no crime, crowds, or traffic, but it makes things like visiting malls or big movie theaters rare treats and fun vacations!



4 party animals in the hotel

Probably the most fun I had on this vacation was when we rented a pontoon boat and took it into Lake Erie. Now, don't be fooled by stats – You wouldn't know that Lake Erie is the second smallest of the Great Lakes in surface area when you're out there on a boat – you go out far enough, and you can't see shore, like all of the Great Lakes. When we looked at a map when we got home, we found that we had barely even gotten into the lake, yet it took us about 30 minutes to get there and there was water as far as the eye can see. Setting Lake Erie apart from the others is its relatively shallow depths, at least on the west side of the lake where we were visiting – the water averaged 1-3 feet in depth! It looked really strange to see people *standing* in the lake, really far from shore, with water only up to their knees!

There were some interesting and fun islands to explore; we anchored our boat near the Woodtick Peninsula and waded onto the beach for some sea shell hunting and sand playing.



My kids were well behaved on the boat, and they enjoyed themselves, with the little guy even finding time for his afternoon nap.



(Note the can of precious Coke Zero clutched in his hand. He stole it from his dad, but apparently it didn't help keep him awake!)

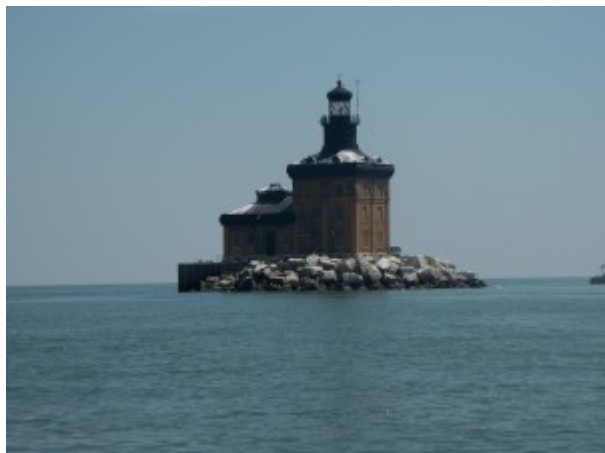
We wanted to dock at a cool looking place called Turtle Island, but it didn't seem very kid-friendly – maybe next time if Hubby and I can get back for date night. [Turtle Island](#) (click the link for more history) was once destined to be a great resort island, but plans fell through, and it remains abandoned. There are some abandoned structures that remain on the island, including an old lighthouse and an old-

fashioned crane (on the right of the island in this picture).



Since Turtle Island is way out in the lake, you wouldn't expect there to be wildlife, but we saw this fox looking for fish on the beach – so cool to see!! Perhaps because of the shallow nature of this part of Lake Erie, animals can just walk out to the islands, or maybe the fox was a stowaway. Pardon the bumpiness of the video – taking pictures and video was something I struggled with the entire time on the bobbing boat!

There is also a “haunted lighthouse” (in reality it’s called the [Toledo Harbor Light](#)) that looks very cool and emits a ghostly warning horn every few minutes.



As we were floating nearby gaping at it, a Coast Guard boat came speeding up to us, lights flashing and all. What the...? There were four Coast Guard officers on the boat, all armed, and the one in charge informed us that they “had the authority of the US government” and were going to board our boat and search it.

As serious as it seemed, they must have liked what they saw because we were awarded a “good as gold” form, which means that we had been following all the maritime laws and regulations. But it was kind of a strange experience to be all alone floating in the middle of Lake Erie one minute, only to have a boat full of gun-wielding government agents on your case the next... They were nice enough, I suppose, but sheesh, why our boat? Later when we returned to shore, the owner of the boat rental place said that in all their years of renting out their boats, none of their clients had ever undergone a boarding inspection by the Coast Guard. Lucky us. Perhaps with all my kids on board, they were suspicious of some illegal Canadian smuggling, eh?

Despite all the high-seas adventure, the vacation was fun and so refreshing to be able to spend time together as a family without distraction, not having to worry about household

chores, responsibilities, or Dad's work for a few days. Just what I needed to get out of my kids-are-fighting-constantly-rut at home, and hey – I even lost track of that back-to-school countdown I had been swearing by before the vacation!

And the best news of all this? Hubby's uncle has been released from the hospital and is now recovering at home. Time will tell us what he will need to make his heart healthier, but for now, he is out of immediate danger and for that, we are so thankful!

My Favorite Movie At The Drive-in

I was so excited to receive the newsletter from my local drive-in movie theater this week, and I'm so glad I checked it when I did – tonight there is a special showing of Wizard of Oz (which just happens to be my favorite movie of all time) at the drive-in! I can't wait to watch it under the stars! I am so glad that I didn't wait to open the newsletter; I can't imagine how disappointed I would have been if I had missed the email or had something else planned! I only checked it yesterday otherwise I would have put together a costume. But that's ok, I'm just happy to be going, and I will bring along my hard-cover coffee table book that just happens to have the full script printed inside it. Boy, will that drive my fellow drive-in friends nuts, but then again, it's not like I need the script in front of me to recite the movie. ☐

I am so excited!!

SURPRISE!!!

Last weekend, we had a birthday party for my “boys”. My little guy turned 2 at the beginning of the month, and his father turned 35 in June. Since my husband had mentioned that he would like a party, I decided to tell him that we were having my son’s birthday party, but I also made it a surprise party of sorts for my husband. Having the party a month and half after his actual birthday helped to add to the surprise, though it wasn’t entirely my choice. A friend had had a party at a local park’s shelter house in May, and it was a perfect place for a party, and the rental fee was quite reasonable. The only catch was that the last Saturday in July was the only Saturday that it was free. But I booked it anyway, and we ended up getting great weather, especially for this time of year. Lots of friends came, and many helped bring stuff and to set up the party which was necessary to keep Hubby in the dark about our real plans.

There were a few bumps in the road before the surprise was unveiled though; especially Saturday morning which had me vowing to not do another surprise party for a long time...

A few days before the party, I slipped and told my husband that he couldn’t plan anything for Saturday “because of your party”. He knew that it was our son’s birthday party, but I had said “YOUR party”. I agonized over that one for a few days – sure that he had caught on and didn’t ask me what I meant because he didn’t want to let on that he knew about the surprise because he didn’t want to ruin it. But after the party, we talked about it, and it turns out that he had no idea that the party was also for him! It went well, and it was a fun party, but I was frustrated Saturday morning – I awoke to the sound of the front door slamming, so I ran

downstairs and started waving like a lunatic at our car which was pulling out of the driveway. Turns out, my husband was going to let me sleep in, and he was going to take the kids to Walmart to pick up snacks for the party. I had been mulling this over Friday night – perhaps I planned the party TOO well, and maybe I was having my secret party preparer (thanks Jamiahsh) doing too much of the work. Turns out, I was right – Hubby was not suspicious, but he was thinking that we wouldn't have enough food (we did), so he figured he'd pick up some snacks and even pick up the cake while he was at it. In my half-asleep stupor, I thought about Hubby's helpful nature and realized that he just might be leaving the house to go get the cake – the cake with HIS name on it next to our son's! Luckily I caught my family in the driveway, and tired as I was, we enjoyed a morning out together – even though I had to tell Hubby that someone ELSE was picking up the cake, and I also had to start putting on the rush when I realized that we just might run into said secret party preparer / cake picker-upper. WHEW!!!

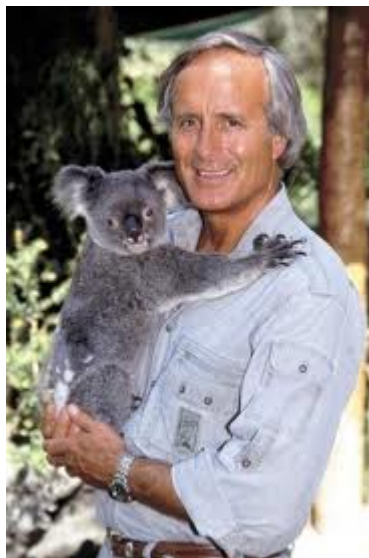
Oh, and then there was the party guest who calls my cell phone 10 minutes before we were supposed to be there and says simply, "Where are you guys?" I did not know how to answer that, and the call thoroughly confused my husband. He thought maybe I had told the guests the wrong time, which I guess I did, in a way – it really depends on what the "right" time was – when the party started or when the birthday boys arrived! So I kind of stammered at my friend on the phone, and I resorted to lying to Hubby about what time the party started (I am ashamed) – which is another reason why I probably won't do the whole surprise thing again; lying to Hubby was awful. But when we got to the party, he didn't recognize anyone's car, and when we walked into the shelter house, everyone was gathered in there and shouted out SURPRISE!!! That was fun, but it was also kind of funny because again, my husband was confused – he knew that it was our son's party, and he was thinking that my son wouldn't understand a surprise party... We

sorted it out and the fun commenced and that reminds me, there was one other bump in the road to the surprise: my daughter had been trying to get ahold of her friend to have her come over, and I knew that her mother was bringing their family to the party. So I let my daughter in on the secret, but when she called her friend, my husband decided for some reason to stay on the line and listen to the phone call – which is when he heard my daughter’s friend’s mother tell my daughter that their family was coming to the party. The simple thing to do would have been for me to just admit that I invited them to our son’s party, but I’m not really fast on my feet sometimes, so instead I just acted confused (I’m good at acting confused) about the “mis-communication”. Sneaky, huh?

But my boys had a good party, and that’s what counts. Thanks to everyone who helped with everything, and thanks to those who were able to come celebrate with us!

Been Waiting Over 7 Years For This!!!

I HAVE TICKETS TO SEE JACK HANNA!!!



I've been waiting MORE than 7 years for this! Mr. Hanna became a personal hero of mine and Hubby's around 1998, and as we were driving down to Florida from Illinois for our honeymoon in 1999, we speculated on how cool it would be to run into Jack Hanna since we were going to Sea World (where he would and still does often appear). And guess what happened? We ran into Jack Hanna at Sea World!!! We were going down to an underwater viewing area for one of the exhibits (don't even remember which one, don't care), and it was roped off with a sign, "tv show taping in progress". Just as we turned around, they took down the ropes, and so we went in, and there was Jack Hanna! And we were the only fans in there with him! I got tongue-tied, and I forgot every question I wanted to ask him, but luckily, Hubby was able to explain to him what big fans we were. Jack Hanna autographed a special picture for us, even writing our names on it, but I'm sad to say that this honeymoon treasure was one of a few coveted items that was put in a special box and left with so-called trusted friends during a move when it wouldn't fit into our car. Unfortunately, the "friends" never sent the box to us as they promised, and who knows what has happened to our Jack Hanna autograph or other treasures by now?

But that's not the point. I've been hoping to replace it and to see Mr. Hanna do a show, but he never has appearances close to my corner of Ohio. He came to Toledo once 7 years ago, but the ticket prices were kind of steep, especially since we

didn't know if our then 2-year-old would enjoy it, plus we had just moved to the state and didn't know any babysitters. I've regretted not going to Jack's Toledo show ever since, especially when he hasn't come close to the area. But about a month ago, I happened to check his website, and Jack was going to be less than 2 hours away from us AS WELL as appearing in the town where my parents live – TWO opportunities to see him! So anyway, long story short, we have tickets to see JACK HANNA in OCTOBER!!! I can't wait! This is going to make it so much easier for me to have to forget about the MLB post-season this year (my team is terrible this year and essentially eliminated themselves opening day).

Before the show, we are scheduled to attend a Jungle Jamboree with Jack Hanna also! Maybe I can find a way to get my honeymoon autographed picture replaced. Hubby actually tried once to get me one for a birthday, but there was miscommunication, and Jack Hanna signed it to my husband instead of to me. I actually thought that was pretty funny and classic Jack – totally something he would do as Jack tends to use his brain to store animal facts rather than organizational details. I think I'll bring my favorite book, Monkeys on the Interstate for him to autograph also; I just have to sneak backstage with all my things I want him to autograph somehow. And I'll have to read Monkeys on the Interstate again just so I can study up on it and write a list of questions down to ask Jack in case I get the chance again – I WILL NOT get tongue-tied this time!!! I'll have to take a break from reading the Harry Potter series, so now I definitely won't be finished in time to get to see part one of the last Harry Potter movie while it's in the theater – OH WELL! I'm going to see Jack Hanna live on stage!!!



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Backyard Thrill Rides (Don't Try These At Home – Watch Youtube Instead!)

In the newspaper the other day, there was an article that caught my interest about a couple of college engineering students who built a homemade roller coaster in their backyard (with mom's reluctant approval). I figured there would be video of their creation on youtube.com, but I was unable to find the exact coaster from the article. I did, however, find many videos featuring brave and creative souls fashioning their own various types of thrill rides and testing them out – some so amusing I had to put them together. You can probably tell by the picture on the video if it's going to be one

you'll want to watch in action. And by the way, more than a few of these trials reminded me of that article I read and [wrote about](#) a while back about reasons for common ER visits called: Don't Laugh, It Could Happen To You...

This guy rides his backyard roller coaster in a little chair, and it even has an inversion:

This guy uses a little mining type cart, and he seems to achieve some pretty good speed:

This one looks more like it's on train tracks, but it's a long ride, and he also looks like he hits some pretty decent speeds:

This one's not a roller coaster, but sort of homemade gravitron:

Are you going to be as surprised as I was about the speeds this ATV uses to wind up this poor lady's sling shot? This is one heck of a human sling shot!!

And finally, this video begins with saying this kid's parents were out of town... uh, oh. This guy builds a slip n' slide off the 2nd story of his house. Does anyone else find it funnily ironic that the test subject gets congratulated after his run by a guy with his arm in a sling? The first tester, perhaps?

Cincinnati Kids

When I wrote about our trip to King's Island (an amusement park near Cincinnati Ohio) a few blog posts ago, I mentioned how I have the behind-the-scenes Brady Bunch book written by the actor who played Greg Brady on the show, Barry Williams. A few nights ago, I looked up the episode in the book where the Bradys visit King's Island, and I read the synopsis (including the part about how the Bradys almost didn't make it off The Racer roller coaster alive! If you watch the episode, look for their terrified faces as they pulled into the station – that was not acting!) and dug up clips of the episode on [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com)

If you've been to King's Island recently or in the past 10 or 20 years, then you will see how much the park has changed since this episode was filmed – enjoy!