

Florida 2011 – Trip Diary – Part 4

(NOTE – This is part 4/4 of our family's trip diary detailing our vacation to Orlando, FL taken a year ago now. This last installment is quite late, but better late than never, I think!)

Friday, January 21 – Today our house seemed quite empty as our travel companions left and it was just Hubby, me and the kids. We did enjoy a day of family time, beginning with breakfast at... Sizzler. Actually, I don't remember where we ate breakfast. To be honest, I put the Florida trip diary aside for the past few months and now I don't remember where we ate breakfast. I don't remember all of the details of the day, but I have enough treasured vacation memories to know that it was an excellent day spent with my family. We drove over to Downtown Disney to try something different for a change – we had never been there. Downtown Disney has so much to see that we just walked around for a few hours and were entertained without having to spend money. My personal favorite was the amazing Lego store where one can buy just about any type of Lego a heart desires. You can buy the flat building platforms, bricks in any color of the rainbow, minifigs, and there was even a sort of Lego buffet – you can fill a container with all different types of pieces, any kinds you want: basic building blocks, doors, windows, steering wheels, joints, hinges, you name it. There were stations with samples to play with, and I had to exercise some self-control to let the kids play instead of sitting there myself for hours on end. Because this is Florida, there were Lego things to see outside too – little stations with ramps where you can build Lego vehicles and race them, as well as full scale Lego models of people, the London Bridge, and even a large Loch Ness monster in the lake:



It's really a good thing for my family's budget that there is not a Lego store within 100 miles of our house; I could go nuts in there!

We also went to the Rainforest Cafe and a few other stores and restaurants where they had really cool decor for the kids to see. There was a restaurant with huge dinosaurs where we stopped to use the bathroom, and the kids even enjoyed the Little Miss Match shop (a company that sells socks in sets of 3 and none of them match. The store has socks and lots of other stuff that little girls love to accessorize with). It began to rain, so we got on a boat to cross the lagoon to get to the bus. If you are on vacation in the Orlando area and you find yourself with an extra day or some downtime, then I recommend taking a spin on the Disney transportation – especially if you are over-budget on your trip because it's all free. A fair warning that Disney property is so large that riding the buses, boats and monorails can take up a significant part of your day, but it is a fun and FREE way to see the sights of Disney. So we took a bus to the Grand Floridian hotel to catch the monorail, just for fun. Parking at Downtown Disney is free, so we got on Disney grounds without even having to pay parking! We did have to spend a good 45 minutes on the bus though, but by now it was pouring, so we didn't mind too much. Besides, Hubby surprised me on the bus when he presented me with a Severus Snape minifig that he had picked up as a surprise without me seeing when we were

at the Lego store!! I could not even tell him that Snape is my favorite Harry Potter character because he would have wanted to know why – I didn't want to spoil the last Harry Potter movie for him when it wasn't out yet at that time.

At the Grand Floridian, I had to take some kids to the bathroom, and while I was in there, Hubby got a last minute great deal on a character dinner for us! So we enjoyed dinner with Cinderella, her prince, her step-sisters and her step-mother. The food was wonderful, and the kids loved meeting the characters as they walked around to greet tables. After that, we made our way back to our car, and we were exhausted.. I think we called it a night – I'm not really sure; it's taken me so long to finish this trip diary that my memory has faded. All I know is it was a really great day, and a super way to end a wonderful vacation – SO WISH we could go back this year!

Saturday, January 22, 2011 – On this day I know we began to make our way back to Ohio, but I don't remember the details. I think we had told the kids we were going to do some souvenir shopping, but we ran out of time and just wanted to hit the road. Then we had an idea – there are Cracker Barrel restaurants lined up along the expressway all the way home, so we found one on the GPS and got there just before it closed. Cracker Barrels have little stores in them, and the one we stopped at (in Georgia) had a great sale going on. The kids were able to shop and had fun getting some great deals – it was a nice way to add a little more fun to our trip. We arrived home very early Sunday morning, if I'm not mistaken, and probably slept all day and unpacked. SUPER trip that made awesome memories – can't wait to do it again someday, I hope!!

Harvey, You Were Awesome

I was thinking that I should get in one more blog post before the New Year. I was going to write a general update about my beautiful family, but before I got to writing it, I found myself thinking of Harvey.

Let's begin at December 26, 2011. My husband and the kids surprised me with a wonderful Christmas gift: they had **all** saved and planned for months to buy us a zoo membership. Our family loves zoos and has had a membership to the local zoo (whichever zoo happened to be local at the time) for as long as Hubby and I have been married. I remember that our most recent zoo membership expired on April 1st of last year – I remember this because I made sure to visit on April 1st for what would be our last visit to the zoo for many months. For budget reasons, it didn't make a lot of sense for us to renew the membership because I was expecting our 5th child in October – what pregnant lady wants to take her 4 kids to the zoo in the summer? Not this one. So we let the membership lapse. I missed our visits to the zoo, but at the same time, plagued by pregnancy related nausea and fatigue, followed by post-cesarean surgery recovery and the joys (and trials) of caring for a new baby brother to 4 other kids, I didn't *really* miss our visits to the zoo...

But then my family surprised me with that membership. Now that I'm healed from the surgery. Now that the baby has stayed with the babysitter a few times and actually liked it. Now that I can take my home-schooled kids to the zoo any time I feel like taking a field trip!

This past week was a great one! Hubby was able to flex his work schedule to spend a lot of time with the family, and we all enjoyed the break, which included visiting the Toledo Zoo. In our travels to zoos over the years, we saw many amazing things and learned many amazing things. Among them:

zoos are GREAT to visit in the winter! Many animals are so much more active in the cold weather, and there are many less people, allowing visiting families opportunities not normally offered (Example: my kids made bird feeders as a craft at the zoo and *loved* it!!).

Being winter, some of the exhibits were closed. Other animal environments were rearranged from the last time we had been there, so we couldn't quite keep tabs on our familiar favorites. We did notice that the Great Apes area was rearranged. There was a sign saying that the Great Apes area was going to be closed for the Lights Before Christmas event, but we saw the gorillas and orangutans, so we didn't think much of it. Until we didn't see Harvey the Chimp. When I got home, I looked in the Toledo Zoo's newsroom online and saw that Harvey had passed away in August. It was sad for me; Harvey's exhibit was one of my favorite stops at the zoo. He was an elderly chimp who loved little kids, and here is a video I have of him playing with my kids. I can't be too sad though; Harvey died in his sleep, at the healthy chimp age of 52 – DOUBLE the average life expectancy of a chimp in captivity.

My other favorite exhibit at the zoo, the orangutan family, was also rearranged – during our visit we saw only the mom and daughter – what happened to Boomer (my favorite zoo animal until Harvey stole the title), the patriarch of the oranges? Such things are commonplace in zoos, and I'm thankful that I once again have a membership that gives me insight to studying the wonderful creatures inhabiting the zoo. As much as I mourn my old favorites, I will be looking forward to watching the new additions as well: baby Lucas the elephant, the new baby tigers soon to be exhibited, and the new addition soon to be announced to the public due any day! Yes, I have inside info! One thing I love doing while visiting the zoo is talking to the volunteers, and one was beside herself with the awesome news of an impending birth! So much so that she

couldn't keep it to herself, even if she was supposed to!
Would I do the same if I was a zoo volunteer? Dunno... but in
the meantime, a HUGE THANK YOU GOES OUT TO HUBBY AND THE
KIDS!!! I've already enjoyed my zoo membership more than you
would have ever hoped for when you planned and saved!! LOVE
YOU GUYS!!!

I wish everyone reading this a very happy and safe New Year!

Here are tribute videos to Harvey the chimp – watch how he
played with my kids! We will miss him!

Monday, Monday

Don't you just hate when you run out of certain household staples and a trip to the store becomes imminent whether you planned it for that day or not? Happened to me today, and wouldn't you know, it was a cold December rainy day. Complicating what should have been a simple run to the store were my 5 kids and the fact that the rain decided to change over into sleet and ice during the trip.

As always, it took us almost an hour to get ready to go. It takes forever for the kids to listen well enough and to stop playing long enough to pull on socks, shoes, and coats. Since 2 of my kids are in diapers and one is being bottle fed, my diaper bag these days is huge and takes some time to pack every time I leave the house; especially when I have to take breaks from packing it to tend to the baby and the various needs of various kids. Finally, we were ready to leave the house, but somewhere in the melee I decided to leave my 2 oldest kids home. Contributing to my decision, Sammie was having a rough and crabby day, so I decided it would be most productive for the family if she and her brother were separated since that's where today's fights were centered. Except that meant that I had to come up with a home-schooling project for the girls to do while the rest of us were out, which meant further delay.

I get most of our family's staples at Walmart because they are usually cheapest and it's the whole one-stop shopping thing. Except that their milk prices are horrible, so today I found it worth the savings to unload all 3 kids (ages 2 mos., 3 years and 5 years) to make an extra stop at Rite Aid. Besides, I've had a hankering for some Combos and Rite Aid often has them on sale. But wouldn't you know it, today was a

Monday and there wasn't a sale on Combos, nor was there any milk on the shelves at all! "The truck is usually here by now," said the clerk when I asked about the absence of milk, but his musing didn't help me any. So I re-loaded all the little kids and headed to Walmart – by now the rain was turning to sleet and the driving visibility was compromised. We made it across town safely with a quick pitstop at the gas station because it was coffee Monday, which meant all sizes of coffee are just \$.89. But they were out of 24 oz. cups. Which meant that I had to have a 20 ounce cup for the same price as a 24 ounce cup would have cost – the kind of stuff that normally gets my goat. No matter, I shouldn't have coffee greed anyway, but now I was cold, wet, and slightly irritated... and I had all these KIDS with which to deal... that extra 4 ounces of coffee could have served me well!

On to Walmart where I had to circle the lot 3 times to find a decent parking spot. Not that I'm lazy, but it makes me nervous to walk through the parking lot with so many little kids, at least one of whom doesn't listen well and tends to run off whenever he pleases. I got a break because my parking spot was next to a cart return, so I loaded all 3 kids into a cart – though it was a bit of a feat to fit them all in along with my huge diaper bag. We had plans to switch into a more kid-friendly cart once we got inside, but the kid-rider carts were all buried behind other carts, leaving me no choice but to leave my kid-filled cart in the path of every other shopper who entered the Walmart in that particular 5 minute span. The shopping itself was uneventful, unless you count the fact that my son tumbled out of the cart (did it have to be while he was explaining to me how he likes Justin Beiber's songs just not Justin Beiber himself? And one wonders what that all even means when coming from a 3-year-old...) We had to stop a few times to nurse his wounds and to feed his brother, but then we were on our way. I didn't realize until my groceries were all bagged up that I forgot my wallet, meaning that I had to drag all the kids back out to the car in the now freezing rain (it

actually made noises as it bounced against our cheeks) to get my wallet and then to return to the store to buy our groceries... not to mention maneuvering BACK to the car to load up all the kids and the groceries...

Following that, my intentions were good; I was going to bring Hubby a special half-price fountain drink from Sonic for Happy Hour, but I ran out of gas. Well, I didn't run out of gas and get stranded in the cold, so for that I'm thankful. But after all of the illustrations of Murphy's Law I witnessed on this Monday, I decided not to risk stopping at the gas station again for gas – coffee Monday or not.

In case you had the same sort of Monday and need a theme song:

Little Luke Likes Lights

Thought I would post a quick little update about our youngest child who is growing so quickly that I don't know if we can call him our "new addition" any longer! Luke James is almost 2 months old, and among his likes are being held, listening to music, and looking at lights. He's been especially impressed by the colorful lights on the Christmas tree. These things are common favorites among many almost-2-month-olds, but Luke is a very special baby – he has been able to hold his head up for a few weeks and is extremely alert for a baby his age. His VERY FAVORITE thing to do in the whole world is to be held like this while his little hands open and close and his eyes bulge as he takes in the world around him:



Luke

doesn't sleep well at night, but we aren't really surprised because none of our 5 kids were very good sleepers as babies. But Luke doesn't sleep much during the day, either – he takes about one good nap per day about 3-4 days per week. And by "good nap" I mean him sleeping for over an hour without waking up. Actually, I thought of the perfect way to describe Luke the other day: he is an *intense* baby. He wants **what** he wants **when** he wants it, and he's not shy about asking. Don't get me wrong; it's not that he is a disagreeable baby, and he is very

smiley. He's just very demanding, and since he is always awake... well, you can understand why my free time is down to almost none and the blog posts from me remain infrequent. Especially because he demands to have 100% of the available attention, whether it's eye contact while playing with him or using both hands to feed him – he is not a fan of a multi-tasking parent.

He's already able to play – he loves looking into the eyes of people who play with him, and he especially likes to exchange baby talk with “goo” being his favorite word. He loves when his sisters and brother play with him, but it's hard to tell if he has a favorite yet. Christopher is 3 and Luke's only brother, but he doesn't play with him often – it seems like Christopher is afraid of hurting Luke, and he also seems shy about talking to him or playing with him. Disney likes to hold Luke (she's 5), but she loses interest in a matter of minutes. Taylor is almost 12, and she enjoys Luke's cuteness, but she is too busy with a life of her own to spend a lot of time with her baby brother. Sammie stands out as the remarkable sibling. 7-year-old Sammie just adores her baby brother; she's always asking to hold him, and she doesn't soon grow tired of it. She plays with Luke, asks how he's doing, expresses interest in his activities, misses him when she's gone, and loves seeing cute pictures of him. I'm looking forward to watching their special bond strengthen even further as they grow up together. His brother and sisters love their baby brother in their own ways, and any time Luke does something new, he is crowded by an admiring entourage that can rival that of most celebrities.



Luke also really likes baths. He smiles like crazy the whole time he's in the bath; he'll even throw out a couple of "goo"s and "gaa"s and doesn't seem to notice that he sounds different when his ears are under water.

Luke is also the tie-breaker in our family – we have 3 brown-eyed people and 3 blue-eyed people. Two months old is too early to tell what color a baby's eyes will be, so right now we don't know which "side" will win. It's interesting also that our 2 blue-eyed kids are left-handed while our 2 brown-eyed kids are right-handed. Will Luke be a tie-breaker in only the eye color category or will he break the mold and be a blue-eyed righty or a brown-eyed lefty?

Even with his intensity, Luke is a wonderful baby and it's been nothing but a pleasure so far to get to know him as his personality develops – I wouldn't change any part of him or anything about him, no matter how far behind on stay-at-home-mommy-work I am! Here he is wearing the adorable camouflage hoodie someone got him – it's so cute! And here's an interesting bit of culture clash for you – where I grew up in the suburbs of Chicago, Luke would wear this and we'd be trendy. Here in the woods of rural Northwest Ohio, I put the camo hoodie on Luke, and we heard no fewer than FIVE comments about hunting and him being a little woodsman ☐



King Praising King

Our new addition, Luke James, is almost 2 months old (already!), and he loves music. While I sit cuddling, feeding, and playing with him, I've been perusing youtube.com looking for music for us to enjoy together. Being the time of year that it is, we've really been appreciating Christmas tunes, especially Martina McBride and Celine Dion's versions of O Holy Night. How I love to sit with my little Luke and think about what the lyrics of these songs REALLY mean! I've also been especially appreciative of Elvis' gospel songs and praise music lately. My favorites are "How Great Thou Art" and "Put Your Hand in the Hand". Today it came to my attention that my friend's dad composed a praise song for Elvis and sang backup for the track with his music group, The Imperials! How cool is that! Thanks to Amanda who shared her dad's talent on this song, "If the Lord Wasn't Walking by My Side":

Getting Old... Er, Growing Up

Wednesday November 9 is the 2011 Country Music Awards – an event once so important to me that I would put my schedule on hold so I could enjoy watching this annual awards show on tv. For a few years now, I have committed my Wednesday nights to leading a small group for church's student ministries. The past 2 years, one of my kids happened to be sick on the same Wednesday nights as the awards show, so I volunteered to be the parent to stay home with the sick kid and I didn't have to miss the show nor play hooky from youth group – I had a legitimate reason for calling in sick. This year, there is again a virus circulating through our family, and I think I have a mild case... but things have changed. Even if one of my kids was ill tonight, I would be the one to go to youth group and let Hubby stay home with the sick kid(s). Luckily, I think we'll both be able to make it to youth group tonight, and I am so excited! The new series we started last week is about demons, and it gave me a great connecting point with my girls – we had a great group time last week! Now that I'm back from maternity leave and free from the distractions of pregnancy, I am stoked to build relationships with my youth group girls and help them build their spiritual relationships with Jesus Christ. I am so excited about youth group tonight that the country awards show hardly matters to me – I might try to set up a recording device so I can watch it later, but watching it live doesn't matter to me at all when once it was dire for my entertainment.

Maybe I'm getting old... no, I think I'm growing up! It's so cool to me that God is teaching me about prioritizing and also about using my free time and leading me toward hobbies that glorify Him. How amazing is it that I can be entertained,

relaxed, refreshed, and feel fulfilled, not by doing something that only I enjoy but by doing something that affects others in a positive way as well?

How Hubby Saved Halloween

October is normally one of the busiest months for our family, and that was true before October 2011 – the month that saw us being blessed with a new baby, starting homeschooling, and Hubby starting a new job/career all at the same time. There are so many fun fall and Halloween events and activities that we like to do this time of year; we didn't even realize exactly how many until this year when we had to scale it back a bit. We skipped the corn mazes, the pumpkin farms, and all the haunted attractions this year. We did take the kids to the mall for the trick-or-treating there, and it was lots of fun even if there were 50 times more people than last year – there was a line circling the perimeter of the entire mall! Not a problem, seeing as how we live near the smallest mall I've ever seen and the line was continuously moving – as I said, lots of fun!

I heard about a congressman on the news who wants to pass legislation to move Halloween to the 4th Saturday in October because it's safer for kids and easier to work around school if trick-or-treating is always on a Saturday and earlier in the day. Some lady they interviewed for her opinion on the street was against it; she said that would be like moving Christmas to make it more convenient. Umm, not even close in my opinion, but I won't go there. My point is that the area in which I live always schedules the Halloween stuff on Saturdays anyway – I guess we're ahead of our time here in rural Ohio, haha. This year we had 2 Halloween parties and

our trick-or-treat on Saturday October 29. Except we found out during the mall trick or treat (which was on Tuesday night) that baby Luke is a homebody – he gets really fussy when we try to take him places, especially if it's outdoor places, and yes, we do bundle him up. Saturday was a very big day for all of us because Hubby's and my lack of sleep finally caught up to us. We began the day on a very grumpy note, and everything was very hectic as we tried to get our work done at the church and ready the kids for the Halloween festivities. We made it to the first party – the community Halloween party they have at the ice rink (no ice of course). We had tons of fun as usual, and we even got on the hayride before the rain came and before the line got too long. But Luke decided he was finished with the Halloween party before we were. No sticking this baby in a stroller and feeding him on the go like we did with the other 4 kids; he just won't have it and voices his complaints loudly. Luke is our fussiest baby; the others were all very adaptable babies – in retrospect, I guess we were spoiled. We are a very busy family, so either us scaling things back for Luke or trying to get him to adapt to our busyness will be interesting. He can go from what I call 'zero to screaming' in a matter of seconds, but don't get me wrong – he's oh-so-incredibly cute and lovable. It's just that his idea of a good time is being held and cuddled – constantly. Which also explains my lack of blogging lately – while I am feeling better after being sick most of the pregnancy and am recovering well after the surgery, I am not a very successful one-handed typist. There really isn't a choice between cuddling a cute baby or blogging, now is there? So anyway, I took Luke to the car while Hubby finished up at the party with the other kids, and we decided to put off trick-or-treating until another day and do it in a nearby community that had scheduled it on Sunday. We also decided that Hubby would stay home with Luke that evening while I took the other kids to our other planned Halloween party. We went home and tossed a couple of frozen pizzas in the oven for a quick dinner, but wouldn't you know by the way that Saturday

was going – we burnt a pizza and only the kids got fed. At least our evening plan worked out – I went to the party with the 4 older kids, and we all had a blast. Luke actually let Hubby catch a nap while we were gone too!

Sunday we drove the 10 miles to the town where we were going to trick-or-treat, but we quickly became confused – no one was out; it was like a ghost town. Hubby stopped at a gas station and found out that the trick-or-treating was from 3:30-5. We had readied ourselves and arrived there ready to trick-or-treat from 5:30-7. Apparently my lack of sleep had impaired my ability to read the time correctly in the newspaper. I can't believe I did that – I had checked the paper probably about FIVE times throughout the week to make sure I had the right time, day, and place. And I had misread the information each of those FIVE times. So my genius Hubby made us a plan. He stopped at Walmart and picked up 2 huge bags of candy – at full price I might add, which was hard for him. He loves store clearances and sales, and it's a testament to how much he loves his family that he bought all that candy at full price knowing that it would be half off in just a day or two. But anyway, we got the candy and stopped at the dollar store and bought each kid a flashlight. We drove over to the park, and Hubby hid the candy all around the park and then we let the kids loose with their flashlights and trick-or-treat bags to find it. They loved it! They said they liked it even more than trick-or-treating, and we even got an unprompted handmade thank you card later that evening from 7-year-old Sammie – and I quote, "I love wat we did today". I should add how great the kids were in the car as we tried to figure out what was going on with the trick-or-treating. They were all in their costumes and ready to go, and then mom and dad starting driving around aimlessly. When they found out they wouldn't be trick-or-treating after all, there was not a tear, not even a protest. Just a few questions and much patience as they waited to see what we would do instead – they are AMAZING!

I think I have some video of the kids at the mall, but other than that, things were way too hectic during our Halloween celebrations to take many pictures or video. We have our wonderful memories though, and those of course are priceless.

Here's a picture of my kids dressed in their Halloween costumes on the day they arrived in the mail from Grammie. 11-year-old Taylor was a pirate, 7-year-old Sammie and 5-year-old Disney were princesses, and 3-year-old Christopher was Superman:



Warning About Potty Training At Walmart

My little boy Christopher is 3 years old, and we've been working on potty training for a while now. He gets it, but he just doesn't remember to make it to the potty every time he has to go. The other day we were in Walmart, and he wanted to use the potty. Because he was with mom, he had to go in the ladies' room, and because he is an independent little guy, he wanted to go into the stall by himself. Next thing I know, there was a huge CRASH!

It seems that Christopher had taken off his diaper and tried to throw it away in the little “garbage can” that they have in each stall of a ladies bathroom. The receptacle somehow fell off the wall, clattered to the floor, and now used tampon applicators were rolling everywhere. Beyond disgusting, right? How are those things not a bio-hazard? Being the considerate little boy that he is, Christopher tried to pick up the garbage, but thankfully I was right there and shouted NOOO just in time before he touched anything. After that happened, my sensitive little guy was trying to finish going potty with his hands on his ears. He wouldn't let go, not only because of the loud noise the “garbage can” made when it fell but also because the automatic flushing toilets really scare him too. After we got all that sorted out, he did pry his hands off his ears long enough to wash them, but then those darn automatic energy-saver hand dryers got the best of him – those things are loud! In the end, potty mission accomplished, but in the future, it might just be easier for us to stay home until we're done with this potty training business!



So How'd It Go?

Overall, so much better than my fears were telling me it would go. I had my second cesarean section on Friday, October 7. Boy was I nervous beforehand! I figured I would write out the details, just in case we decide to do this again I can look back at it and know what to expect. So I warn you, if you're squeamish about medical procedures or just plain not interested, then skip the post. But if I can make just one person feel more at ease about their impending cesarean, even if it's future me, then it's worth writing this all out and sharing the details.

The day of my scheduled cesarean, the hospital told me to arrive at 5:30 AM. Hubby and I set the alarm for 4:30 and got there a little early so we could visit the hospital chapel and pray together. Thankfully, Grandma had arrived in town the night before and had our 4 kids at her hotel. The first nurse we asked did not know where the chapel was in the hospital, which I found strange, but then again, our local hospital is undergoing major expansion and renovation, so I guess that's the excuse I'll let them have for the fact that their chapel (when we finally found someone who knew where it was) was just an empty room. No matter because God listens where ever you are, so we prayed together and went back to the maternity ward where they began to prep me for my surgery. They put an IV in, which didn't go very well. Seems I have great veins in my arms for drawing blood (the blood techs always ooh and ahh over me and my veins, which makes them weird in my book), but in my hands, not so much. Getting IVs is always very painful for me, and it bruises up my whole hand. This day was no exception. It hurt a lot, and they had to give me 2 holes before they got it right. Then the nurse comes and tells me that because of the combination of it being my 5th baby and the fact that I had to have a blood transfusion last time that they were going to have to give me a back-up port in my other

hand just in case. So they start doing that, and that one hurts even more. Next thing I know, I have a golf ball sized lump in my hand – “The vein blew” the nurse told me. I don’t ever want to hear anyone tell me that something carrying blood throughout my body “blew”, and I still haven’t googled that one to see what it is because it sounds so nasty. And at this point, I’m near tears thinking that if things are going wrong already, what will happen when they cut me open? But they finally got my second IV port in, and then after the insertion of the catheter (not a big deal and I will spare the details), I was ready to be wheeled off to the surgery room in a wheelchair.

Luckily I had taken the c-section class at the hospital, so the cold sterility of the operating room did not alarm me, and I also knew that my Hubby had to wait outside until certain preparations were made. On our way into the operating room, I saw the backup doctor, and he was talking to himself in the hallway in kind of a strange way. He is known for being a bit different, so it didn’t really worry me, especially since I knew my regular doctor would be there also. Besides, Dr. Strange delivered my 3rd child, and she was the easiest delivery I had. I will spare details for what happened next; it’s a bit personal – if you really need to know how they prep a patient for a c-section then take a class at your local hospital. Then the anesthesiologist came in, and my heart sank when I realized it was the same lady who gave me my epidural during the birth of baby #4 – the epidural that never worked. She gave me my spinal, and it pinched a little, but much less than an epidural, not really a big deal at all. My legs started to get tingly, and I was really starting to panic big time. I kept asking the anesthesiologist if everything I was feeling was normal, and she was so nice and reassuring. They had a blood pressure cuff on my arm which kept going off every few minutes, and they also gave me oxygen in my nose – I felt very well cared for. They let Hubby in, and he and the anesthesiologist (so tired of typing that word, think I’ll

just call her Dr. Drug from now on) sat by my head the whole time. Dr. Drug said that they would test me to make sure that I was numb before they did anything, but guess what – they didn't. I brought this up to someone after it was over, and they had a good point – they probably tested my numbness but didn't even tell me about it. Since it was working, I didn't feel the test, so they proceeded. Duh. It's just that I was so nervous about the numbing not working after what happened with my epidural; you can't blame me for being concerned.

The next thing I remember is the tugging and pulling, which is also something for which the c-section class prepared me. But it was actually much less unpleasant than I had panicked it would be. It's just that it seemed to take forever. They said it would take about 1-2 minutes and according to Hubby, it took 4 minutes. If you ask me, I would say it took 15 minutes. The whole time I could hear the doctors talking and I kept asking Hubby what they were saying because I was panicking about the health of the baby and the fact that I was lying there sliced open on the table. He said they were just discussing their techniques. My Hubby kept looking down there, past the curtain, and I kept wondering how he could do that – if it were him lying on a table sliced open, I don't know that I could look. But then again, I don't think it was like surgery looks on tv – I was picturing a completely open body cavity, but that's a different kind of surgery. I guess that's why there was all that tugging and pulling. So anyway, finally Hubby says that the baby is out, but I don't hear crying, so I begin to panic even more (notice a trend here? I am a worrywart, in case you haven't noticed). But both people seated at my head tell me everything is fine, and then I hear the baby (Luke James) cry. I feel so relieved, and I can't believe it's over. Except it's not. They clean up the baby, and they hold him up in front of my face for about a millisecond, and then they take him out of the room along with my husband and probably about half the staff that was on hand. At some point, I don't remember when, but I'm pretty

sure it was after the baby was born, Dr. Drug held up a little vial and says, "I'm going to give you this." She puts it in my IV, and I find out later that it was Duramorph, a form of morphine. I'm wondering now if this is something they give all their c-section patients (those who are not opposed to medications), or if I got the "panicking patient" special. At any rate, after the morphine, my memory gets fuzzy, but I do remember lying there getting sewed up (still not feeling a thing below my chest). My complaint was that it seemed to take FOREVER because I had nothing to do but lie there, and all I could think about was seeing my baby. I even got envious of my poor husband, because here I had just gone through this surgery and now HE was getting to spend all this time with the baby and I hadn't even barely gotten a look at him. They should really think about putting a tv in there or something... or would that distract the doctors? Best not to think about it, I guess. I had to keep talking myself out of looking at the ceiling because it was reflective, and I could see a little of me and a lot of red there – they ought to fix that too; I would bet that no one wants to see themselves getting surgery. But finally they were finished, and a few of the staff people worked together to lift my helpless body onto the gurney for the transport back to my room.

When I got there, there was Hubby with the baby, all excited to see me, and then I finally got to hold our new son. And he was (is) so incredibly beautiful. The rest of the day was wonderful. Slowly my legs began to work again, and I could not believe it that I had absolutely no pain! It did not resonate with me that I was on drugs. I did feel kind of loopy, but I didn't really think much of it and enjoyed the euphoria of having a new healthy baby and the relief that the worst part was over. Weather-wise it ended up being a terrible weekend to be stuck in the hospital – it was 80 degrees out and sunny, and the grandmas took my kids to the zoo on Saturday, so I had to miss that, but at least they got to go. When I was released from the hospital on Monday, it

was still very nice out for a few days, but I didn't feel up to going outside and by the time I did, Northern Ohio fall weather was in full swing and I've been cold ever since. Oh well, such is life, and my Hubby had perfect advice when I was bummed about missing the beautiful fall colors (it was amazing how different our neighborhood looked with all the leaves on the ground after just 3 days!). He said, "There will be plenty more color-changing seasons, but there are only so many baby seasons." What a wise, wonderful man!

Back to my recovery in the hospital, it went fairly smoothly, although I did have a lot of pain starting Saturday once the morphine wore off. The baby was up all night on Friday, but I didn't mind at all because I just wanted to be with him. I haven't watched tv in years, but over the weekend, I watched countless episodes of 3's Company, Roseanne (forgot about the one where Becky gets into the liquor cabinet, haha!), and Everybody Loves Raymond – you know, shows from when tv was actually good. I learned about the Prohibition era from PBS, and I also learned that there are conspiracy theorists who believe that there really isn't gold in Fort Knox – hmm, that's something to think about I guess. Luke slept a full 5 hours on Saturday night from 1:30-6:30, and so did I since no one came for my blood until 6:30. Last time I was in the hospital, I seem to remember them coming for blood every hour on the hour which made it really hard to sleep, but then again I had a lot of complications last time including the need for an emergency cesarean and a blood transfusion. Sunday night, little Luke decided he wasn't going to sleep again, and I woke up from my 45 minute nap that night feeling terrible – achy and lots of other pain, and chills because of a fever I was running. Not only that, but there was a mean nurse who informed me in a not-so-nice way that I was over my limit of acetaminophen, which meant I was not allowed any pain medicine. That really ticked me off; partly because of the way she said it, and partly because no one had given me any indication that this was a problem. Had they warned me that I

was getting near the limit, I would have declined some of the meds offered to me to avoid this. Actually, all of the other nurses had been telling me that I should stay ahead of the pain. They specifically said not to wait until the pain was really bad to take the meds otherwise they wouldn't work. The staff must have known I was upset because at 11pm Sunday night, my doctor called my bedside phone personally and reassured me. And my doctor is the one I credit with my smooth delivery and quick recovery – she has been 1000% better than my previous doctors in every way throughout this process, and for that, I am so thankful.

Since I've been home, I've been resting (probably not as much as I should have, but I have 5 kids now, who can rest with 5 kids in the house??). Hubby has been *amazing* at taking care of me AND things around the house, but he also started a new job 2 days after the baby was born, which leaves him with 2 jobs, taking care of the 4 kids and me AND waking with the new baby at night as he likes to do. My mother did a ton of laundry while she was here, and I'm just now starting to do laundry again a week and a half later, so that helped a lot too. People from church have been wonderful about sending meals for our family, and that has been incredible. Not only that, but we also have frozen meals that people sent and that my husband's mother made while she was visiting for when our meal delivery runs out. It's been crazy, but we are managing, and a week and half later, I've been out and about and back in the real world. I still have pain, but nothing extreme, and my 600mg ibuprofen works pretty well for that. There are 2 complications I had that I was not expecting; one is worthy of a blog post all its own and I'll get to it next time. The other is the return of my backaches. I've had a sore back since high school; I worked fast food and had to pop a Doan's before every shift to make it through. There are various things that I think caused it, but what does that matter now. The strange thing is that during my pregnancy, my backaches disappeared. Most women find new backaches during pregnancy,

and mine disappeared. I didn't think much of it until I get home from the hospital and experience my back pain again. This is discouraging because I know the incision pain will go away with time, but the backaches seem to be getting worse, and I have no guarantee that my back will ever feel better. I guess it's something to talk to my wonder doc about in my 6-week follow-up. I already had my 1 week follow-up with the doctor, and she said my incision looks really great and my body is healing well – for that I am thankful.

Baby's healthy, 4 big sisters and brother are healthy, I'm getting healthy, and Hubby is healthy (even if he needs much more sleep – praying for that to come soon) – what more can we ask for! Life is good; God is great!

And oh yeah... everywhere little Luke goes, he has a constant crowd of admirers. If it wasn't so sweet, it would be annoying because hey, when is it MY turn to hold the baby?!?

□



Luke James

Our 5th bundle of joy arrived on October 7, 2011. His name is Luke James, and he was born at exactly 8 am, weighed 7 lbs 11

oz and was 19.5 inches long. He is healthy and a very happy easy-going baby. He seems to have his days and nights mixed up though, which I suspected based on his movements when he was still in the womb. We are enjoying him immensely, and so are his 3 sisters and his brother. I am recovering from the c-section pretty well, and I will write more about Luke's first days at home when it doesn't hurt to sit in a chair for longer than 10 minutes. I would love to put up a hundred pictures of gorgeous little Luke, but my bunny chewed my camera cord, and I can't get any pictures off my camera. I hope to have this situation remedied soon, but I depend on Hubby for all my tech-related needs, and Hubby is exhausted staying up with the baby at night, taking care of me and the kids during the day while also keeping up with his responsibilities at both of his jobs. It just seems mean and commanding of me to place more demands on him now, so I will have to somehow be patient about the picture taking and sharing. I wonder how long I can last; Luke is one of the cutest babies I've ever seen!!!

****UPDATE****

Hubby devised a way to transfer my pictures using my ebook reader – genius! So anyway, here is a picture of swaddled Luke at 1 day old:

