

New Baby!

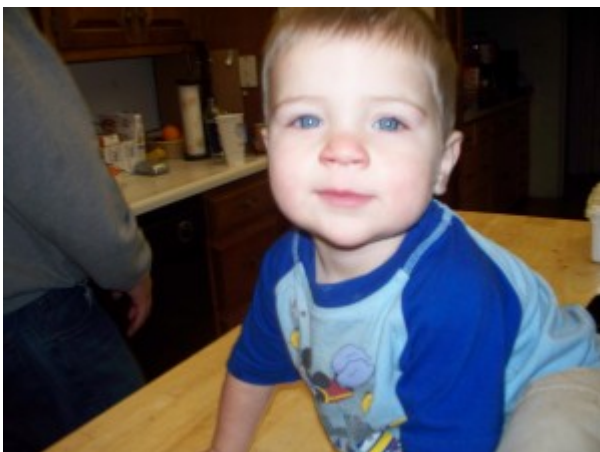
Made you look! Did you think I was going to say we were awaiting the arrival of our 5th child?

No such luck – probably wouldn't declare it for the first time on a blog anyway. I just wanted to share my son's first professional haircut that made everyone joke about him being a different baby – although "toddler" is a much more appropriate word here than "baby" – my son is all over the place, and the haircut made him look SO MUCH older! He's really cute with the haircut, but why do they grow up so fast!?! These pictures were taken only 4 days apart.

BEFORE:



AFTER:



Bad Things Come In Threes

Ok, so no one in the family has bad health (at least not yet, we'll see what happens in a few weeks after the stress from the holidays and everything I'm about to unload takes its toll) and for that I am very grateful, but we have been hit by some bad luck in the past few days.

First was worst – my husband's hard drive went *kaput*. No warning; he just went to work Monday and found that virtually everything he had worked upon for the past 5 years or so is **gone**. Software he had written, info for clients that are now going to be extremely unhappy – **everything**. There are few options; everything he read on the internet about this problem raises little hope. He can send the hard drive away to a company with special equipment, but it's doubtful they can fix it, plus the price tag would be \$1500-2000. Basically there is no hope for the hard drive, and it's essentially as if he was laid off from his job less than a month before Christmas.

As if that wasn't enough, we noticed the other day that we no longer have a metal flap guarding our van's gas tank. We have no idea what happened to it, but now that it's missing, we are going through gas about twice as fast as we should be. Of course the car is no longer under warranty, so it will cost who-knows-how-much to fix it. The glove box broke months ago, and the tires are getting pretty bald (all 4 of course). We were going to get everything taken care of at the same time, but with no income now, that won't be happening.

And for #3 – our mortgage company decided to buy us extra disaster insurance for our house. Except it's not their treat – we have to pay for it. What happened is that we switched

insurance companies about a month ago, trying to save money. Apparently there was some sort of mix-up, and everything was not transferred smoothly, leaving us lacking in the disaster area of the insurance. So the mortgage company got us some of their own choosing, added \$300 to our monthly bill, and sent us a letter about it after it was too late to avoid paying this monthly fee. I hate insurance companies!!!

Don't mean to complain, like I said earlier, at least no one is ill and we do still have our health – that is the most important thing. And if it's really true that bad things happen in threes, then we should be done with the bad news for at least a little while, right?

Classy.

Family brawl erupts at children's pizza place

Deborah Donovan | Daily Herald Staff

Contact writer

CHICAGO:

Arlington Heights police are investigating a “family ordeal that got out of hand” Sunday night at the Chuck E. Cheese restaurant, 955 W. Dundee Road.

According to Sgt. Tom Boggs, a family was apparently celebrating the birthday of a young man in his early teens when other members of the family showed up, and an argument began.

“There was a pushing match and things were thrown,” said Boggs.

One person was taken to Northwest Community Hospital with a cut below an eye and another person went to a clinic for a cut on a hand.

“We tried to talk to everybody there last night,” Boggs said. “It’s hard to say at this point whether there will be charges.”

Boggs said he believes some of the participants had been drinking. He is not sure how many people were involved, but officers talked with five or six Sunday night.

While the altercation created a mess in the restaurant, no physical damage was done there, the sergeant said.

Boggs said the people involved were from the Northwest suburbs.

The restaurant has pizza, arcade games, shows and other things that appeal to young children. A woman who answered the phone Monday afternoon declined to comment on the record.

Tool Man

My almost 17-month-old son has started using “tools”. When we put up the Christmas decorations, he started pulling chairs away from the table, pushing them over to the bookcase to try to climb and get at the nativity. Yesterday, he took down a wall hanging and began to use the hanger rod as a spoon for his mashed potatoes. When I told my dad about this mischief, he said that this behavior seems pretty smart. Yeah, I replied, smart like a chimpanzee! I really don’t remember the girls doing so much climbing, tool-using, or just general sabotage!

And another thing about little boys – the parental chasing. I always see moms chasing their little boys; running after them around the store, the zoo, wherever – and nine times out of ten, the kid being chased by the parent is a boy. I had a little boy almost a year and a half ago, and I've been wondering when my turn would come. Yesterday I got my answer. While I was getting my little boy dressed, he said an emphatic "NO!", then turned around and ran from me. He dove under the dining room table, where I had to drag him out, kicking and screaming. So yeah, the chasing of little boys by their parents begins shortly after they learn to walk.

Ah, the toddler days again – feels like it's been awhile, probably because the toddler in our family before our son was Disney, who is an almost perfectly behaved child. We often joke that Disney is [D.A.R.Y.L.](#) – remember that movie from the 80's about a boy who is actually a robot? And she is a quick learner! We've been doing "sight words" with our Kindergartener Sammie, which are flash cards with words on them, like "orange", "the", "purple", "my", "I", etc. Disney, who just turned 3, has been picking up the sight words as we practice with Sammie! She knows all the ones I listed above and is also starting to work on letter recognition – 3 years old is pretty early to start reading! I just feel badly for Sammie, who has her own gifts but is also very competitive by nature – it might be difficult for her to see her little sister learning certain things faster than herself.

But the point is, Disney's toddler stage was barely noticeable, which is probably why her little brother seems like more than a handful – and I hate to tell myself this, but I think this is just the beginning!!

Thanksgiving Favorites

I forgot to poll our Thanksgiving guests, but I was wondering about everyone's favorite Thanksgiving dish. Judging by what the kids had for breakfast this morning, I would say my kids' favorite Thanksgiving dishes are as follows:

Taylor, age 9 – sweet potatoes (we put marshmallow creme in ours)

Sammie, age 5 – mashed potatoes and gravy

Disney, age 3 – oatmeal (ok, so oatmeal wasn't at the Thanksgiving dinner, but Disney didn't really eat Thanksgiving dinner, so I don't think she has a favorite dish. She LOVES oatmeal though!)

Christopher, age 16 mos. – turkey

And for lunch, Mom and Dad had their first delicious leftover sandwiches. They were so good we think we'll have the same for dinner. We got a smoked turkey this year, and it was delicious! It was great to not have to mess with cooking a turkey with great company and all these little ones underfoot. There are so many ways to make a leftover sandwich; the best way is of course with creamed onions. We didn't have any creamed onions leftover this year, but my husband's yummy mashed potatoes make a really good leftover sandwich condiment. And not having leftover creamed onions is a good thing – I'm glad people enjoyed them! Creamed onions are my favorite Thanksgiving dish AND my husband's! So what's yours? Feel free to add anything in the comments section I may have forgotten!

[poll id="10"]

Happy Thanksgiving!!

I am thankful every day for all that I have, but today is an excuse to feast in celebration of our thankfulness. Here's to hoping you have a safe and happy holiday!



Parenting Pickle

My almost 10-year-old daughter has a friend I'll call Kathy. Kathy has been over to our house to play with my daughter for years, and we've never really had much of a problem. We've noticed lately that Kathy isn't as well behaved as our daughter's other friends, and she also is not as tolerant of my daughter's younger siblings. Yesterday, Kathy spent about 6 hours with our family, and it was a fun yet tiring day. It was one of the few times we've had an extra kid around and I've noticed extra chaos and strife; usually the extra kid(s) blend right in and sometimes even help out with the little ones. We took Kathy to the mall which is about 20 miles away, and we ate a Mexican buffet, bought the kids candy at the \$ store, and took the kids to the pet store.

Kathy's mother was supposed to come at 6, and since the kids had a late lunch, we were waiting to feed our kids until Kathy

was picked up. Kathy's mother was late, and the kids got hungry, so we tried to stretch our planned dinner for 4 kids into one for 5. It didn't really work, there was some squabbling about food, and Kathy's mother finally showed up around 6:25. On her way out, I called to Kathy who has asthma, "Do you have everything? Do you have your inhaler?" To which she responded, "I still haven't found my inhaler." (like she had told me she was missing it, but she hadn't!) I unlocked the car for her to look in there, and I went up to her mother's car and explained that this is the first I had heard about the missing inhaler. Her mother was extremely rude to me. We didn't find the inhaler, and they left, and I vented to my husband because I don't like when people are upset with me! He was sure that I had misunderstood; that Kathy's mom was upset with Kathy for losing her inhaler. After all, if her mother had told me at any time that Kathy has a tendency to lose her inhaler, she could have asked me to keep a special eye on it, and I would have! But not one word was said – I only know about the inhaler because I've seen her carry it; it was never explained to me.

So then today, our cell phone had some missed calls, and they were Kathy's mom. When my husband called her back, he was sure she had called because they had found the inhaler. No such luck. The frantic phone calls were Kathy's mom asking if we had found it yet and informing us (quite rudely) that if we did not find it, we would owe her \$47 for a new one. So my husband, now knowing that I had NOT overreacted to the rudeness last night, calls the mexican restaurant, and sure enough, they have it. He called Kathy's mom, who basically told us we would have to drive back out the twenty miles each way to get it. But it's Thanksgiving week, we have 4 kids, and my husband works during the day. So she hung up on my husband, and now I'm upset and writing a blog post about it. Here's the pickle:

Kathy is the real victim here. Her mother is mad at her and

her friends and their family, and her mother's erratic behavior is going to isolate her daughter. As it is, Kathy calls our house about 20 times every weekend and is pushy about being invited over – it's hard not to feel like our house might be the only place to where she gets invited. But as a parent, I did not like the negative influence I saw Kathy having on my younger children yesterday, and that was *before* any conflict was had with her mother. My daughter's birthday party is coming up, and I feel badly for both Kathy and my daughter if she isn't invited. On the other hand, I feel this is more than just a parental conflict that can be overlooked for the sake of the kids. I feel a little bit taken advantage of – after all, we invited Kathy to spend the day with our family, and her presence did incur some minor costs. Nothing I would have thought twice about, until I was given flak about our fun day... and I'm 95% sure we told her mother we'd be heading out to the mall ahead of time also, so it wasn't as if it came out of left field! Also, my husband and I are concerned about what Kathy's mom might hold us liable for should we have any further incidents with Kathy at our house or in our care.

So do I let my daughter invite her to the birthday party? Should I say anything to my daughter about this conflict? Do I pay any bills I might get from Kathy's mom for gas, etc? It's just a shame this had to happen; my daughter has plenty of friends whose parents are on the same page with us; we take their kids out all the time without incident, and they even usually say 'thank you!'. I honestly don't feel like we did anything out of the ordinary here... Should I have gotten a babysitter and driven the 40 miles to get the inhaler myself? Honestly, if I had done that though, I might have THROWN it at her when I got back!

I Want A Customized Cupcake Car For Christmas...

I really don't, but try singing this blog post title to the tune of "I Want a Hippopotamus for Christmas", just for laughs. And for further amusement, here is a picture of the customized cupcake cars, which of course come complete with candy caps for the contraptions' captains!



All joking aside, thankfully I don't know anyone who could or would blow \$25,000 on one of these, now that is just a waste. The title of the article I found this in was intriguing, ["9 Extravagant Holiday Gifts"](#), but honestly, I didn't find much amusement beyond the cupcake cars; maybe you'll disagree when you click on the link above.

Awesome Octopi

While I'm on the subject of our visit to the zoo... well, in some ways it wasn't our best visit, that's probably why it took me almost a week to get motivated to write about it. A few of us were still recovering from the flu, while others in the family were coming down with it, so the lot of us that day

were quite crabby! But we did see some amazing animal action, including the often inactive octopus – he was moving all around his tank, which prompted many questions from my kids, my husband, and myself. I did a bunch of research when I got home, and I learned what I already suspected – octopi are awesome! Here are some of the coolest facts:

- The octopus has a short lifespan; varying among species from 6 months to 5 years for the larger species held in captivity.
- Octopi are invertebrates, meaning they have no hard skeleton, and they are very intelligent creatures – considered the most intelligent of all the invertebrates. They have been known to manipulate man-made objects, like opening jars or even solving puzzles and mazes. Check out the following video – an octopus navigates a water maze by getting **out** of the water and going **over** the maze! (The major action starts about 2 minutes into the video.)

- Because of the fact that octopi don't have skeletons, they can squeeze their bodies (which is actually that bulbous looking mass most people mistake for a head – and it contains **three** hearts!) through extremely small openings.

Do Meerkats Often Sit Like This?



We had a chance to visit the Toledo Zoo the other day and snapped this amusing pic of a meerkat just chillin'. Is this a common pose for a meerkat? I've never seen one sitting up like this before last Saturday. Anyone watch Meerkat Manor?