

Another Installment of Cute

I realized that I hadn't emptied my camera in awhile, so when I finally did, I found some great pictures!



Told you it was a busy Labor Day weekend!



The girls dressed Charity up like a princess – her blue eye always gets photographic red-eye, but she actually let the kids dress her up! Wonder what kind of food they enticed her with...



The "baby" has been climbing everything in sight. Here he is on top of the folding table in the laundry room. And he's been running while using his walker-toy; he went right from crawling to running! Guess it's time to start calling him a toddler!



Here are all 4 four kids in the same cart at Menard's... awww!



And this is the ~~baby~~ toddler's first time going all the way up in the tunnels at the

McDonald's Playplace – he loved it!

Putting The Fun Into Labor...

Well, it was a last-minute attempt at a Labor Day outing with friends, and even though we strayed from our original idea of going to a Lake Erie-area haunted house and drive-thru zoo, we had LOTS of fun!

We went to the Toledo Zoo, always a great zoo, even if this Labor Day Saturday of 2009 equated to being one of the most crowded we've ever seen that zoo. It was just over 80°, so the animals weren't all that active, but we did get to see Louie, the "baby" elephant (who is now 6 years old and awaiting the completion of construction of his very own zoo exhibit area) lying down and taking a break, which was cool. We also saw one of their huge hippos swimming in the underwater hippo-quarium, which is always a treat because you can see a humongous hippo swim right past up close. After the zoo, we ate at one of our favorite places in the Toledo area – Nick's Cafe on Reynolds (not sure if it's actually Toledo or the suburb of Maumee). But the place is just north of Ohio's turnpike, I 80/90, and they have great food and almost *unimaginable* portion sizes – are they used to feeding GIANTS?!? Unfortunately for Nick's, the place was empty, but this is (just) one of the reasons we go to Nick's when we're in the area – they have GREAT food. Besides, **you** try withstanding the crowds to get a table at the Olive Garden on a Saturday evening, especially with 4 starving kids!

After dinner, we were going to head to another nearby Toledo suburb for a free exotic animal / magic show, something right up our alley. But the combination of the big weekend, crabby

kids and crowds at the zoo caused our driver and his wife to veto that great idea, so luckily we hadn't told the kids since it sounded like fun and they would have been disappointed (no matter their exhaustive state) to miss it. But we've learned that over-doing it with little kids along is **always** regretful, and so we happily prepared for our journey home after we gorged ourselves and piled leftovers into boxes at Nick's. But we grew distracted by a strip-mall across Reynolds from Nick's Cafe, and that's how we finally discovered what Nickel World of Toledo really is...

We had seen it in the strip-mall before, but we had always busily assumed that it was the 2009 incarnate of the early 20th century 5 and dime store. On Saturday night, we discovered that Nickel World is actually a family entertainment place, filled with **many** arcade, skill, and video games! They have a unique business model – they charge an entrance fee of \$2.50 per person, and then they sell \$5 bags of nickels for use on the games. Most of the games are just one nickel to play, some are two, and there's even a large selection of FREE games! The place is so cool; what a great concept! For about \$25, our party of 4 adults and 5 kids were easily entertained for at least an hour, PLUS the kids took home quite a bounty of prizes with the 5,000 tickets they were able to rack up in just that hour! Nickel World has just about every type of video game you can think of – two types of Skeeball, multiple Crane Games, ball-roller games, basketball shooting games, racing games, Bozo Buckets, even air hockey as well as FREE! vintage arcade games like X-Men, Bust-A-Move, Dueling Dragons, and many more... We had a GREAT time, and Hubby and I are dying to return on a date night to fight, race and out-shoot each other without distraction from the kids! The only thing is that they are closed on Tuesday nights when we have our date nights... oh well, perhaps we can reschedule. If **you** are in the Toledo area, you **have** to check out Nickel World on Reynolds (US 20) – a rarity for an awesome value in family entertainment in this day and age of

recession! And while I'm on the topic, Nickel World reminded me of another cool arcade-type place in South Bend, Indiana. [Megaplay](#) has two indoor mini-golf courses, as well as lots of video games (some of the classics are free) and even an inflatable jousting area where they hold tournaments. I've never had the pleasure of participating in something like this, but it looks like lots of fun. If only I had discovered this sport before my sense of balance expired... I did see an indoor inflatable jousting space at another place in Toledo that we visited a few months ago. This place was pretty cool – they had adult-sized bouncy slides and ladders to climb, and my husband and I bounced down the slides and ran around like little kids until the unfortunate voices of reality (muscle strain and fatigue) made it loud and clear that we had better take it easy... But I can't remember the name of that place or where exactly it is, and I can't find it on the internet. Probably a bad sign that we were the only ones there at the time, I hope it hasn't closed down, but that's a lot of why it was so much fun – my kids weren't getting run over by eager older kids, and hubby and I weren't laughed out of the place by nasty teenagers...

So... back from my tangents. We had a really nice and safe Labor Day weekend free from any of the [speed traps we encountered in previous years](#). Hope yours was safe and fun also! God Bless!

Supressing My Whim For Another Parrot...

Believe me, I am definitely not expressing that parrots are pets to get on a whim, not that any pets should be obtained on

a whim. But I wouldn't really even recommend parrots, the loud and moody (however beautiful and insanely smart) creatures as pets, except to the perfect parrot owner – which might just be as rare as the gorgeous birds themselves. Due to a set of circumstances that transcribed long ago, we've found ourselves adapting to a be a parrot family. Years ago we adopted Squawky, as a needy unwanted baby, a Scarlet Macaw, who is now somewhere just older than 8 years old. He is finally starting to calm down just a tad, but he still makes me think of putting him in a more unused room of the house on an almost daily basis. That being said, it's time to share with you the video of a bird who re-kindled my childhood desire (not that I ever really lost it, but 4 kids and little sleep will certainly give one pause about adding any new pet to the family) to raise an African Grey Parrot – the type of parrot known more for their uncanny impressions and ability to reason than for their beautiful feathers. As a kid, I read a book that made me want the parrot in the first place. It is called *Harry's Mad* by Dick King-Smith (this author also wrote the story that the movie [The Water Horse](#)'s screenplay (good movie!!) is based upon), and it's a great read for young adults (and maybe regular adults too? Might be basic, but fun – haven't tried it as an adult). And as for the video that made me again want an African Grey, despite the daily blows to my eardrums from the Scarlet Macaw? See for yourself; her name is Sylvia, and I especially love her Rhett Butler and Desi Arnaz impressions!

Legitimate School Interruption or Propaganda?

Because I have two kids in the local city school system at the same time, I receive double the school memos. So while Friday's after-school-folder-clean-out yielded the usual classwork, homework and doodles, there were also some notices clearly indicative of these times in which we're living: a list of ~~swine-flu~~ H1N1 symptoms and (what I thought at the time anyway) to be a routine parental notice with optional exclusion form. You know the type – *I would not like my son / daughter to participate in the following school activity (fill in the blank, field trip, sex ed, open lunch, etc.), signed (parent's name)*. This time the form was in reference to an address by Barrack Obama, the President of the United States, to the students of the country. When I received the memo, I was all in favor. I would not be one of the parents who declined my child the opportunity to be involved with current events and history in the making. I thought it was great that the President was making an unprecedented, concentrated effort to make a positive influence on America's youth. But then I read CNN.com and the other news outlets, and I saw that some people seemed to be using this as a political soundboard, and I think it's just sad that some people use everything our President does as a reason to bring up racial tension.

I would like to steer my blog from most politics, however, I am a parent of two kids who are in American public schools, so this is an issue that hits close to home. So whether you watch the Obama student address or not, whether you approve of the President and/or his message to students, consider the significance of the Presidential address taking place this

Tuesday, September 8, 2009 for what it is – history in the making.

Tale Of Tartar

I did not go to Walmart yesterday, but I still have enough of a complaint to sit and write a blog post about the place! In case you've missed my other (many) Walmart rants, I'll save you the search and link to a few of the various episodes depicting the times they wronged me. Like [this time](#). And [this time](#). And [this time](#), to name a few...

So anyway, back to last night – I needed tartar sauce for dinner and didn't realize it until after the kids got home from school, so I ran out (for what I thought was going to be) really quick to get some. I went to Walgreens first, but they don't carry tartar sauce, so I went across town to Dollar General, and they don't carry tartar sauce either. Is this a side effect of living in a small town – it's hard to find the things I need last minute if needed? If so, I will gladly take it in exchange for the traffic, air pollution, and the general stress that exudes from larger cities (see [hubby's blog post](#) about a recent news article about the most stressed cities – ew). But most likely the apparent lack of tartar sauce in rural NW Ohio is due to scenario #2 – ever since we got a Super Walmart a few years ago, the competitors have phased out certain grocery non-necessities like tartar sauce. Why should they carry old crusty tartar sauce when no one buys it there because everyone shops at Walmart? I begrudgingly include myself in that category – you can read those previous posts of mine if you really want to know more about my Walmart paradox and why I shop there. (At least my kids were never [slapped by strangers](#), and I haven't shown up [here](#) – yet.)

If you're still with me – I've linked all over the internet in this post, so I wouldn't be surprised if I've lost some people – I'm going to blame Walmart for my lack-of-tartar-sauce problem. And in case you're wondering how it all turned out, it really wasn't a problem after all. We just convinced the kids to try ranch dressing instead of the tartar sauce, and they actually liked it – well, until the ranch dressing came out too fast and spilled and incited a tantrum that caused a chain reaction that ruined dinner, but that's another post! And before my comment board lights up with healthy eating advice, I'm already aware that the kids really shouldn't grow up so sauce-dependent. But in these parts where the kids outnumber the adults, you must adapt to survive, and “pick your battles” is essential parenting advice!

Quite Possibly My Worst Nightmare

Did you hear about [this](#)? Seems a man settling back for a quiet afternoon in his **tiki bar** (that's a whole 'nother story, I guess. Us Midwestern folks can't really identify...) when he opened his can of Diet Pepsi, took a big gulp and began to gag. His wife came over, and to make a long story short, found a blob in his pop can that was tested and discovered to be a *gutted* frog or toad. For more of the gory details, click the link above, and you can find out how (and this is a direct quote from the frog-drinker's wife), “what started out as a normal afternoon in our tiki bar has blown up into this crazy thing.”

I titled this post appropriately because while I love all animals, I'm scared of frogs and toads. It's a weird thing

and I won't go into it (more scared of the "ugly" harmless ones than the pretty poisonous ones, go figure), but the only thing I can think of worse than finding a gutted amphibian in my pop is to find a live one or even a dead one that still resembles its living form. That being said, in all seriousness, my true greatest fear is something bad happening to my family, but I thought this made for interesting reading anyway. I smell a lawsuit.

Redbox Junkies

Now that the kids are back in school (2 out of 4 anyway), I have some (stress on the *some*, not a lot of) extra time to sit and blog again – something that wasn't made a priority over our busy summer. Among our summertime fun and adventures were many trips to the [Redbox](#). Surely you know what I'm referring to, for if we have such futuristic technology here in the NW Ohio boonies, then it must exist in most places. The Redbox is a machine (about the size of a gas station ATM on steroids) that distributes \$1 one-night dvd movie rentals. You can choose a movie for \$1 from any Redbox location (our small town has 3, just an example of how they are *everywhere*), and then you return your movie to any Redbox location by 9:00pm the next night. We first got hooked on the concept when we were on the way back home from Florida and the kids got sick of the movies we had brought for the car dvd player (poor things! Who's with me from the days when we were lucky enough to bring our Walkman on the trip with a couple of tapes!) . So anyway – we stopped at a Redbox at a McDonald's in Tennessee, the kids watched the movie a few times, and we returned it at a Walmart in Ohio – for just \$1! Ok, this is quickly and unintentionally turning into a plug...

So anyway, my husband and I got kind of hooked on the Redbox this summer, watching a movie almost every night – seriously! We went through a horror phase and watched many of a series called After Dark Horror Fest: 8 Films To Die For, and even though many of the movies (there were 8 movies in the series, but the series ran multiple years) in the series were low-budget, many were actually worthy of the recognition and worth watching. Among our favorites of the horror genre was Hack! starring none other than Danica McKellar, Winnie from the late '80's / early 90's tv show [The Wonder Years](#); as well as [The Hamiltons](#), a surprisingly great-for-what-it-is little horror flick.

Somewhere within the mix was a forgotten (though I liked it slightly more than my husband did) [Michael Moore parody](#) (making fun of Michael Moore movies, not done by Michael Moore) and the best Redbox movie **ever** called Sunshine Cleaning.

I highly recommend [Sunshine Cleaning](#). Don't let its similarities with another movie called [Little Miss Sunshine](#) get you confused. The two movies share the word *Sunshine* in their titles, an actor (the late Alan Arkin, wonderful in both roles), and some producers – but neither their plot lines nor their characters intersect. You can check out Little Miss Sunshine for yourself if you haven't already – I recommend that one as well. But Sunshine Cleaning is less mainstream and my husband and I enjoyed it immensely. It stars the talented Amy Adams as a single mom who, along with her flighty sister (Emily Blunt, also a really good actress), start a cleaning business, though it's not your normal, everyday cleaning business – they are hired to clean up extreme biological hazards, ie, crime scenes. What follows is a heartwarming tale which takes many entertaining and at times, comedic turns. The characters are well developed as is the plot, and the movie just makes for a well-spent evening – especially for just \$1. Again, I'm at risk here for sounding

like a plug, but oh well! Go get Sunshine Cleaning from your local Redbox – you can even reserve online for pickup before you go!

What Will Happen To Marvel Island?

From the Financial Pages today – business news is not something I usually write about, but you'll see why the following story would interest me:

[Disney To Acquire Marvel Entertainment](#)

Our family frequents the Orlando Florida area, home of Disney World and also their major competitor – Universal Studios. For those of you who don't know, at Universal's Islands of Adventure (the newer and more thrill-ride oriented of Universal's two Orlando parks), there is an entire area called Marvel Superhero Island®. So my question is, now that Disney, Universal's biggest competitor and business enemy, has bought Marvel, what will happen to Superhero Island at Islands of Adventure? I can't imagine that Universal would want to keep the same characters, now owned by Disney, at their park. And I can't imagine Disney letting Universal keep the characters at their park, unless the price was right, of course. But based upon the competitiveness that is obvious to the tourists flocking to the area, Disney's superhero lease price would probably put Universal out of business!

[Marvel's Superhero Island](#) currently contains (click the link for an interactive map – Superhero Island is on the left side of the park, just left of the main gate) the following attractions: The Amazing Adventures of Spiderman, The

Incredible Hulk Coaster, Doctor Doom's Fear Fall, and Storm Force Accelatron, which we've always skipped since it seemed like Universal's answer to Disney's Teacup ride. We always skipped Doctor Doom also since it's a free-fall ride and I'm afraid to go on those. I think my husband went on this one however, but I don't remember him saying it was any different from the rest of these types of rides. In short, it probably won't be much of a problem to rename these two rides. The Hulk coaster is an awesome coaster and should also be able to withstand the re-themeing, although it might need a paint job to change its current green/purple Hulk theme. The Adventures of Spiderman is another story. This ride is awesome! There really isn't anything else like it in either of the two parks. It's basically like taking a thrill ride *into* a 3D Spiderman movie. I guess they'd have to choose a new character and make a new movie. Whatever they do, I hope it's as good as the original Spiderman ride! Also complicating a theming switch would be the superheros and villians that walk around Marvel's Superhero Island. I guess all the costumes would be sold to Disney. Perhaps Disney will build a superhero section – my guess would be at MGM Hollywood Studios if I had to pick a place.

And Universal would have an entire area to theme and fill. Hmmm, imagine the possibilities...

Let's see, would they coincide the new area with a new movie coming out (Smurfs (sorry Carol), Jetsons – not sure if those are Universal movies)? Or would they take one of their existing franchises (Simpsons – they'd have to move that super-cool new ride from the Studios park to the Islands park!, NBC land (The Office – The Ride!)) and create a whole new world? Any ideas?

****UPDATE**** – From orlandosentinel.com: *"...theme-park rival Universal Orlando will likely retain the park rights to its four Marvel superstars, including Spider-Man and the Incredible Hulk...*

...Universal's contracts apparently gives it exclusive U.S. rights east of the Mississippi River for theme-park attractions built around certain of those characters, notably Spider-Man, the Incredible Hulk, X-Men and Dr. Doom.

Universal Orlando said Marvel characters will remain a staple at its parks.

"Marvel Super Hero Island at Universal's Islands of Adventure and the Marvel characters are an important part of the Universal Orlando experience. They will remain so," said Tom Schroder, a Universal spokesman. "Our agreement with Marvel stands for as long as we follow the terms of our existing contract and for as long as we want there to be a Marvel Super Hero Island."

So in response to several comments from blog readers, there are a separate set of rights for the Marvel characters in question – theme park rights.

Match.com – For Gorillas

See if you enjoy this as much as I did – a group of female gorillas is given posters of their prospective mate. How did they react to it? Read:

From cnn.com:

by Nick Hunt

So when three female gorillas at London Zoo heard that they would soon be visited by a brooding French hunk – well, they went a bit bananas.

The latest development in Anglo-French relations sees Yeboah, a 20-stone 12-year-old, leave his current home at La Boissiere Du Dore Zoo, Pays de la Loire, northwest France and head for

the British capital by the end of the year.

There he will be greeted by gorilla trio Zaire, Effie and Mjukuu, who were given posters of their prospective boyfriend for the first time Thursday.

One female gorilla shrieked in delight, while another wedged the poster in a tree to stare at it.

A third, clearly overcome by emotion, held the photo close to her chest – then ate it.

Their reception was somewhat unsurprising. The zoo has been without a male gorilla since the demise of Bobby, a silverback, in December.

Tracey Lee, team leader at London Zoo, put in a good word for the hirsute lothario on the London Zoo Web site, saying Yeboah is “a very charming, fun loving and intelligent gorilla.”

But whom will Yeboah choose to charm first?

Zaire, at 34, is the oldest female gorilla and has been at London Zoo since 1984. The zoo says she’s “happiest when she’s taking down and rebuilding her nest in various spots around the island. She loves to play with fabric and often drags it around with her all day. “

Then there’s Effie, 16, who “enjoys seeing toddlers and often makes her way over to the glass when they come to see her,” according to the zoo Web site.

Finally there’s 10-year-old Mjukuu, or “Jookie.” Dan Simmonds, a keeper at the zoo’s Gorilla Kingdom, says she “has this ‘butter wouldn’t melt look’ to her, and she gets away with murder.”

“The other two females get along with her very well; she seems to have them all wrapped around her little finger.”



Above is a picture of the gorilla who hung up the picture of her new beau.

At Least She's (Physically) OK

There's really not much to say about the following article – someone did something extremely stupid, and I thought I'd share. At least no one was seriously hurt...

CAR SET ABLAZE AFTER JOLIET WOMAN USED LIGHTER TO CHECK GAS CAN LEVEL

By Lee Filas | Daily Herald Staff

A 27-year-old Joliet woman is suffering from second-degree burns after using a lighter to check the fuel level in a gas can she was filling while the can was resting inside her car.

Police officials said the woman drove into a 7-11 gas station at 1609 E. Cass St. at about 10:30 p.m. Tuesday night and climbed out of her car.

She then placed the gas can on the passenger seat of the vehicle, pulled down the nozzle of the pump, and began filling

the can.

About halfway through, the woman ignited a lighter to shine some light on the gas can, apparently to see how full the can was, officials said.

The can ignited from the lighter's flame and exploded, setting the vehicle's interior ablaze, officials said.

After the fire started, the woman pushed the car away from the gas pumps to apparently ensure the fire didn't spread to the gas pumps itself.

Officials said, when police and fire officials arrived on the scene, the car was located about 5-feet from the pumps and was completely engulfed in flames.

The woman was transported from the scene to Silver Cross Hospital in Joliet with nonlife threatening injuries to her wrist and thigh, authorities said.

And is it any wonder why it doesn't list the woman's name? I can't decide if it's a nice thing that the press spared her the humiliation or if they should have included her name so the rest of society can watch out for her! I don't really understand how someone could do something that dumb, and then turn around and remember to push the car out of the way so it didn't ignite like the gas can!

Thank God there weren't any kids in the car!