

Furry Babies Sucks!!!

We began our trip to Chicago last Saturday, and the 3-state, 4-kid, mini-van trip went pretty smoothly. At some point, we achieved the quadruple-kid-pass-out which is never anything short of a great thing!

We arrived at our hotel in Naperville, Illinois on Saturday afternoon, and we decided to take the girls swimming in the outdoor pool which was really refreshing on an 80°+ day. It's been a long time since I've been swimming outdoors, and it was nice of my mom to meet us there for a swim instead of us driving the girls to her house for their week of fun with Grandma. After the girls left with her, we wanted to meet with a friend, but we were staying in the west 'burbs rather than the north 'burbs this time. Both parties had just endured long car rides, so we settled on a halfway point – a mall in the west 'burbs. Not really knowing what to plan on doing, we ended up finding such a great parking space at the mall that we just ended up going in to bumble. And it was fun! Partly because I haven't been in a real mall for years, so it was really interesting to see the different techniques that have evolved to try and entice shoppers to buy and visit... But I also enjoyed my mall visit because of the company we were keeping; it was nice to chat and catch up. And as you might have read in [derek's blog](#), we happened upon a glow-in-the-dark indoor mini-golf course that was less than a week old! It had 56 holes, but I don't think I could ever play that much mini-golf at once, so we stuck with the traditional 18 holes. I guess I should add in that I won the round and also had a lucky day with two holes-in-1 ☐ And I must comment on how good the baby was – he just sat in the shopping cart and watched the glow-in-the-dark golf balls throughout ALL 18 holes! There were these small contraptions sprinkled throughout the golfing space – you put your ball in, and it rolls around and comes out glowing brighter – those

were fun! And it was fun to see the mall again. It wasn't the same mall I hung out in all the time as a teenager, but I had still been to this one a lot growing up, and it was neat to see how much (or how little, compared to most things in the area) it had changed over the past decade and a half. That reminds me, speaking of change... when we arrived in Chicago, err Naperville on Saturday, we took the Naperville Road exit off of I-88 which is an area with which I am used to be very familiar. Back in the day (did I really just say that?), I would commute through that same intersection to work and back every single day, yuck... but apparently they've completely redone the entire area in the past few years because the intersection was unrecognizable. I mean, they added new roads and everything – it was the most bizarre feeling, it felt like I had gotten dropped into the middle of the twilight zone. We exited I-88, and all of a sudden, we were on Freedom Drive. Where now? Freedom Drive? I had literally never heard of Freedom Drive, they created the street from scratch and plopped it down into this area where I worked and played so many years ago. As much as I thought I knew where we were going, Jill the GPS was actually quite helpful during this twilight zone adventure, and she got us to our hotel, even though I knew where it was – WAS being the key word here. But back to the mall... we bumbled around some more after getting some pretzel dogs (yummier in Chicagoland, of course, what isn't?) at the food court. I heard some lady talking on a cell phone about the “puppy store”, and sure enough, we happened across it. I'm an animal lover, so I love to see and visit with animals, but I think a side effect of my tenderness toward animals is my loathing of pet stores. And the pet store in the Stratford Mall in Bloomingdale Illinois is just about the worst I've ever seen. It's no secret that many of the major chains of pet stores get their “wares” from puppy mills; ie dog breeding facilities with cramped quarters, little food, and animal abuse. The huge chain famous for bad press, Petland, just closed a bunch of stores, which I believe is a good thing for dogs and dog lovers everywhere. I

strongly believe that people should adopt animals, namely dogs and cats, from humane societies and other animal shelters. There are so many homeless pets, so how can it be justified to buy a puppy who is bred for selling when there are so many others bred accidentally who are also looking for love? I strongly support spay/neuter programs as well, fyi...

So anyway, the new pet store at the mall is called "Furry Babies". Their website calls it an "upscale puppy boutique, not just a pet store", but I call it disgusting. The puppies were in cribs, for goodness sakes, and along the walls they had a large variety of dog clothes for sale, no doubt at prices that I wouldn't pay to clothe my human kids. We inquired about one particular puppy, who was cute but looked to be slightly cross-eyed. We found out that she was a "designer dog" – they pretend like they meant to mix two breeds together (in this case a golden retriever and a poodle, thus giving us a "Goldendoodle"), but where I come from (the reality land of logic), we would call it a "mutt". And mutts tend to be better with kids, live longer, and are cheaper than purebreds – at least they were until a few years ago. Now mutts are these "designer dogs" and they cost **a lot** of money – in the case of the furry baby Goldendoodle – a cool \$1600. I cannot denounce this place loud enough! I also don't want to spend a ton of time going off about animal welfare nor lose readers by getting political. This just happens to be an issue I feel strongly about, and I plead that if you are in the market for a family pet, you consider adopting your animal companion from a shelter and also realize that you are entering into a life-long committment! That being said, Furry Babies sucks, but the good news is that I can't see them lasting that long. Oh yeah, I forgot to mention that the employees wear mock scrubs, in order to imitate delivery room nurses, I guess, which to me is even more sickening. But there I go again... get me going and I will never stop... so if you want to read more, [here is a link](#) to the forums about Furry Babies on the bestfriends.org website, which is an awesome organization – the country's largest animal sanctuary

for homeless pets of all kinds! I hope to visit them someday in Utah, but until I get over my fear of flying I will just persue their website and I suggest you do the same...

Now that I'm actually leaving the homeless pet tangent behind... we left the mall at a decent hour since we wanted a good night's sleep to rest up for the Cubs / Sox game the following day – the entire reason we were in town to begin with. Poor us – that did not happen! We got back to the hotel (which was pretty crappy for a Naperville Hampton Inn – see my [Small Separate Side Post](#)), and the baby decided he was going to go nuts and stay up until midnight. Then the little booger awoke at 6 the next morning, and he crawled around and caused mischief like dipping my drying bathing suit into the toilet, thanks for THAT. My husband was nice enough to take him in the bath for awhile and do other various quiet activities with him in the small room so that I could get a little more sleep, and then we all went down to breakfast – my poor husband was a zombie. I decided for us (he could not make decisions at that point) that he would go back up to the room while I drove our son over to my mom's for the day while we went to the Cubs game. We did that, and it took me about an hour to get all the way out to Aurora (not much traffic on a Sunday morning, but 5000 many stoplights!) and back. I thought we had plenty of time, but if you read my "A Patch of Blue In A Sea Of Black And White" post, you'll see why I should have stepped on the gas a little...

Small Separate Side Post

I didn't really see a place for bitching and moaning in the few posts I wrote about our wonderful trip to Chicago – hence the small separate side post.

First, when we arrived at our hotel, we requested a crib for the baby. Evening turned to night, and we were still without a crib. We called down to the front desk, and she kept saying strange things about the missing maintenance guy, but finally he was located. He delivered the crib and took a look at our ant (!) problem and declared it was no big deal. Maybe not to him, but I saw the Dateline episodes about the people who got severely bit by the hotel bed bugs! On top of this, we had a door that would stick so that I'd have to knock every time I came back from getting pop or ice or something from the car, etc. And then there were the drunken celebrity phone calls...

Not something we did, rather, something we came across when perusing the hotel's tv offerings. On the hotel's video menu, where they usually have movies you can buy, games you can play, and stuff about the hotel, we learned that the Hampton Inn offered some offbeat choices. First, there was the Hilton Family Channel – 24/7 documentaries about the Hilton family, how they began their hotel empire, and where it is today. After 10 minutes, I had had enough. And after those 10 minutes, not a word of Paris, interesting...

Another strange tv offering was under the 'short takes' menu. These seemed to be youtube.com videos – I know I had even seen a few on youtube. You know, Charlie Bit Me (the British siblings posing for a picture when the baby bites his big brother, a youtube / talkshow sensation), Office Pranks; I'm sure you've come across some of those popular videos somewhere in pop culture, yet here they were being offered for (free) viewing in the hotel room!

Still another strange tv offering was "hot for words". And before you get the wrong idea (or is it? I'm confused by this whole concept), this was not the 'adult' menu. Each 'hot for words' video however, looked to be something naughty but was actually proven to be individual dictionary lessons – to increase one's vocab, perhaps? But it still seemed to be a strange selection for a hotel tv – I've never seen anything

like that before...

And lastly, perhaps what is the weirdest selection on the hotel tv: drunken celebrity phone calls. It was a young adult (I guess?) making prank phone calls to celebrities (supposedly). But the caller was the only person on camera, and there was no proof that celebrities were even involved – maybe it would have been funny if we had seen the celebrities reactions to being called by some random (drunk?) guy, but there was no proof that he was even able to get ahold of the celebrities phone numbers, and even then, a stretch. It was a really strange thing to have this kid on our tv, watching him make these really stupid, probably fake phone calls. What a strange tv offering... yet it was free, and we bit, I guess...

The final bad thing about this hotel is the ringer on the phone – it sounded like a woodland creature, no joke! I really wanted to get a video of the thing ringing, but when the baby didn't sleep that well, everything of least importance was put aside. Too bad, it was the strangest ringtone I've ever heard... at least it rang for the first time in the evening. If it had rung in the morning without us knowing it was the phone, I would have been convinced it was some sort of wild rodent loose in our room!

A Patch Of Blue In A Sea Of Black And White

We took a fun little excursion to Chicago this past weekend and had a few adventures! More about those later (if I get to them – my time to blog has dwindled A LOT lately!). What I want to write about now is the Chicago Cubs game. Let me

begin by escorting the elephant from the room – the Cubs got creamed by the White Sox yesterday. There, I said it. And I'm just stating fact, unfortunately. We were lucky enough to have tickets (happy birthday to me from Hubby – THANK YOU!!!!!!) for Sunday's game – the final game of a 3 game series between the cross-town MLB rivals the Cubs and the White Sox. This game was to be the "rubber match" – with both teams tied at 1 win apiece for this series, Sunday's outcome would decide the series winner. But the Cubs lost. Miserably. It was almost like they didn't show up to play baseball – which is something I and probably at least a few other Cubs fans lovingly yelled from the stands. We got to watch Carlos Zambrano, the Cubs famously hot-headed starting pitcher, take the mound – and consequently lose his control and get booed off the field. And let me say it wasn't just Sox fans who were booing Zambrano. But I think it was awesome that he was the starting pitcher the day we got to go watch the game live, and he was really fun to watch. It was frustrating to see the empty bullpen across right field though – it seemed empty forever. My husband and I really thought Lou Pinnella should have made the call to the bullpen a little bit sooner and at least get someone throwing balls down there – Zambrano does not recover his game often once he loses it. We were both watching for Lou's call, and finally Zambrano made his trademark nasty move – the guy gets so angry that he beans someone. He throws a 90ish mph baseball AT the batter! So then he stalks off the field, gives the fans a one-finger salute (I don't think it was THAT finger), and goes into the locker room to pout by himself. He didn't throw down any water coolers on the way this time as he's also been known to do, but I can't say that I wouldn't have liked to see that. As lucky as we were to get to see Big Z pitch, he didn't do very well and we were happy to see him go.

But alas, Zambrano was not the only problem yesterday since the Cubs' bats haven't produced much of anything for weeks, and our game day was no exception. Thus we witnessed a shut-

out on the Cubs.

But that's enough of that. It 's amazing how much fun we had despite the worst possible scenario for the game! I LOVE live baseball, and MLB almost doesn't compare to the smaller AAA and AA leagues. Those are fun too, but comparing those atmospheres is really like comparing apples and oranges. It was kind of toasty in the sun, and my knees got burnt to a crisp; I'm dealing with that today. For those of you who want to know the outrageous robbery they're getting away with in MLB stadiums across the country, at U.S. Cellular Field in Chicago, it costs \$23 to park, \$6.75 for a 20 oz. beer, \$4 for a bottle of pop or water (let me guess – they took out all the public drinking fountains, I sure didn't see any), and \$4.75 for a hot dog. If you can keep yourself hydrated during the game, you can save yourself \$6 on 2 bottles of water by buying one before and one after the game from the street vendors – they sell them for \$1, which isn't bad at all in that heat! Originally I had planned to eat all day at the stadium, but I just wasn't hungry in the heat. There's nothing like sitting there at a baseball game and cracking peanuts, but I actually passed on those too. I certainly didn't want to leave my seat much, and by the time the peanut vendor arrived, we no longer felt like sitting there calmly cracking peanuts while the Cubs played like you-know-what and gave the game away. That reminds me – we had GREAT seats, upper-level, 3rd base side, right about even with the pitcher. We had a bird's-eye view of Zambrano's animal-like pacing and stomping rituals on the mound. I guess that's enough about the game – interesting how we were ALMOST late...

Sox park (its real name is a tongue and finger-typing twister) is situated on I-90, one of Chicago's expressways. I was anxious to try Jill the GPS's skills in a city environment since she had so failed us in Pittsburgh, but more so in the outskirts, we weren't really in downtown Pittsburgh. Jill did fine in the big city of Chicago, but when we got off the

expressway, it was chaos – and it wasn't like Jill was programmed to guide us through the Sox's bizarre parking system; red coupons, green coupons, etc. We THOUGHT we had left in plenty of time for the game and might even see some batting practice, but we hit some traffic on the way down (did I mention this was also a weekend for the Taste of Chicago?!? Oops – bad planning on our part; we couldn't believe it. The Taste draws *millions!*). Anyway, when we arrived on the south side, we were confused about where to go for cash (\$23!) parking. There were people directing traffic (don't know if they were cops or city workers or Sox park workers, but I might find out so I can file a complaint!), so we asked one of the ladies how to get to cash parking. She said, "I'm going to let you make a U-Turn (we were heading east, toward the stadium), and you make the u-turn and go to 33rd street. So we made the U-turn and headed west when we began to get a not-so-comfortable feeling. Remember, we had seen the stadium, and we were now heading away from it, out of the city. And usually numbered streets in cities are parallel to each other. So if we were looking for 33rd, most likely we should see 31st, 32nd, or 34th streets first – but we weren't. So we turned around, and an hour later, when we finally figured out where to be, we had passed the "helpful" traffic person again and confirmed our suspicions: she had tried to take us out of the city **on purpose**. In fact, when we passed Ms. Directions again, there was a Sox parking pay lot *one block* in front of her. I like to think the best of people, but here it's obvious that earlier, she had us make the U-turn rather than turn around so we wouldn't be able to see that she was taking us the wrong way. Rude isn't even the word for that. As most locals know, Sox park is not known for being nestled in safe neighborhoods – Wrigley Field, home of the Cubs, is known as the "Friendly Confines" – NOT Sox Park. We were fine, the area didn't get too bad, my husband just got really upset that we might be late for the game. Indeed, when we did finally find our lot, there was a big line and we sat in it for a long time. I can't help but wonder if maybe Ms. Helpful had

noticed the color of our shirts – Cubbie blue- which isn't exactly welcome on the south side of Chicago. And those Cubbie blue shirts we wore (which ironically said "Cubs win!", sheesh) were probably responsible for other rude behaviors directed our way. For instance, my husband got bumped a little harder than regular crowd jostling, and some of his popcorn spilled. Sox fans nearby jeered, and there were also the people who would walk by us up the stairs on the way to their seats (we were seated on an aisle) and feel inclined to say "Cubs suck". Yesterday they may have had a point.

The people directly around us were friendly enough, a mix of Chicago fans, both north and south, Cubs and Sox. Some people wore a Sox hat and a Cubs shirt, while there were families of people dressed for both teams, an interesting mix. As I looked around the stadium, I saw mostly white shirts (the black shirts were hard to see) in the sea of people, although the sea was dotted with many patches of Cubbie blue, much like the blue patch the two of us created. As rude as a select few Sox fans were though, I suppose they can't be all bad... on the way in to the stadium, it was extremely windy and we both got our Cubs hats blown right off our heads – maybe it was a sign of things to come... But anyway, it was Sox fans who helped up retrieve the runaway hats.

Overall, a great day for some baseball; definitely something I hope to do again. Except next time, I think we'll park far away and take the train to the stadium and forget trying to park in the city. We hit traffic on the way out too, and an hour after the game had ended, I turned around and I could still see Sox park which was STILL within walking distance!
TOO MUCH TRAFFIC!

SAVE OHIO LIBRARIES!

It's a catch-22. In this horrible economy, people are using the free resources provided by their local libraries **more than ever**. However, in this horrible economy, governments are having trouble funding the free resources provided by local libraries. Here in Ohio, Governor Strickland is contemplating a new state budget cut that would reduce our libraries' funding by an additional 52%, and that's on top of the 20% cut they've already seen in 2009. With this kind of reduction in funding, obviously the libraries would not be able to function on the same level on which they are currently functioning, nor with the same hours. If you live in Ohio, you can help the governor and congressmen know how harmful library funding cuts would be to each and every community in the state. Here is some contact info to help you do your part in saving the libraries:

[Click here to Contact the Governor's Office](#)

Contact the Governor's Office by phone @ (614)466-3555

Fax the Governor @ (614)466-9354

State Senator Steve Buehrer

Phone: (614) 466-8150

Fax: (614) 466-4250 ATTENTION STEVE BUEHRER

Email: SD01@senate.state.oh.us

For more information, click here:

www.saveohiolibraries.com

Thank you for your help! Closing library branches is harmful to communities in many ways and would affect everyone, even those who don't use the libraries themselves.

500th Post

WOW!

I've made 500 blog posts here on My Food Chain Gang! That is A LOT of rambling and a ton of tangents! Thank you for reading; especially those of you who have read all 500 posts, if there is anyone who could stand me for that long!

I think after that many posts, I'm entitled to a generic one, noting nothing other than my 500th blog post, don't you?

AWWW!!!

We were playing in the back yard yesterday when we saw something furry laying on the ground. Thinking the dog had gotten an animal, I put the dog inside and made myself scarce while my husband investigated – I'm sensitive about animals, and if the dog had killed a furry little creature in the back yard, I wanted to pretend like it didn't happen. So I come back outside a few minutes later, and my husband is still kneeling over the fur, saying he hasn't figured out what it is yet. What? Clearly the fur was not moving; why couldn't he figure out what it was? I fetched him a stick, and when he poked it, he found that it was just fur. And underneath the fur was a hole containing teeny tiny baby bunnies – live ones! They are incredibly cute, and they even hop! After some investigation on the internet, we found that the best thing to do is to leave them alone and that their mother didn't abandon them. Baby bunnies only get nursed for 5 minutes per day, and if the mother were to stay near the nest, she would alert predators to the babies. I couldn't resist pushing aside the fur to take a picture. It's very

inconspicuous yet also in the middle of the open yard. I sure hope nothing happens to those babies. The first one is of the nest, then you move the fur, and the second picture is of a little head, note the white blaze on the top of the head. The third picture is a baby bunny face with eyes closed, see if you can find it in the middle of the fur:



I'm too afraid of hurting them to examine them closely enough

to count them or take better pictures, but aren't they cute! From what I read, they will venture out of the nest at around 3 weeks old, and they will leave it altogether at 6-8 weeks. Judging by the size of our babies and the fact that we didn't see the nest before yesterday, I'd say ours are probably only days old; perhaps they were even only hours old when we found them yesterday! I am so glad we have a fenced yard now to keep the neighborhood cats out – we have a few, and I've been feeding one of them. I feed her at the front of the house though, so I wonder if continuing to feed the cat will encourage her to come over here or if it will distract her and keep her in the front of the house, away from the baby bunnies?

I'm excited to watch them grow – they already look bigger than they did yesterday! Maybe I'll post their progress on my blog – stay tuned!

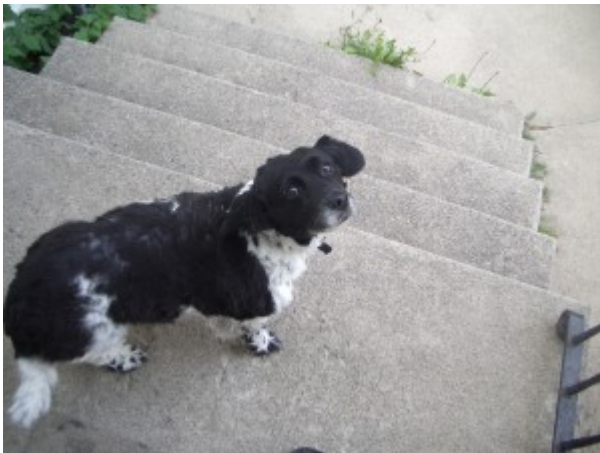
Before And After – Chapter 3 – Beesly

Our dog Beesly (named for the character Pam Beesly on the awesome NBC show The Office, which you should really watch (end of shameless plug)) can grow to be very fluffy. From people who have seen her, we've had comments ranging from "That dog is more round than she is tall!" to "there is more fur than dog there" and then there are the people who would just laugh after they saw her. She ~~is~~ was a very fluffy dog. Since it's summertime where Beesly lives, we figured it was time to shear her like a sheep, which ended up being a surprise doggie makeover because she had SO much fur. Check this out:

BEFORE:



AFTER:



After we sheared Beesly, we looked forward to showing her to our 9-year-old daughter, Taylor, who is Beesly's main caregiver. We told the kids we had a surprise for them, and we let Beesly in from the back yard and my daughter's friend cried out that the surprise was that we got a new dog. Well, thanks for giving the kids expectations about the surprise (hehe), but she **was** half-right. The surprise was a "new" dog. The kids can now pet Beesly since before the haircut you would only be petting a thick mat of fur. Beesly herself appreciates this makeover a lot too! She is much more cool when she lays outside, she is less thirsty, and she even has lots more energy! She IS like a new dog! And by the way, the kids all liked the surprise. Taylor saw Beesly and laughed and laughed; it was adorable. And as a finale to this blog post, THIS is how much fur we got off of Beesly – the pen is sitting on top of the bag to reference the volume of the fur contained inside:



I know they make clothes out of alpaca fur and sheep's wool; does anyone know about the harvesting of dog fur? And I'm not talking about Burlington Coat Factory, YUCK!

Teaching Is Probably Not My Forte

Another tangents.org blogger, who is also a very good friend of mine, blogs about his (mis)adventures concerning substitute teaching. He has posted a poll or two about what subjects and ages his readers would like to teach if they could choose. I never really took the questions seriously since I could never picture myself in the situation to teach. After all, you need a degree to teach most anything these days, and I stopped college short of a degree to get married, which is one of the best decisions I ever made, no regrets. So I would answer those polls, and I would say I'd like to teach zoology or animal behavior or something like that because I love animals. And I guessed that I would like to teach kids younger than high school, because I was a kid once, and I remember how older kids treat their substitute teachers... But again, until a few weeks ago, I never thought I'd find myself

in a position to actually teach a class...

At our family's church, childcare is provided. Over the summer, understandably there are many childcare volunteers who need a break, so they ask parents to volunteer. My husband and I quickly signed up – after all, we have 4 kids in childcare there every week, so it was time to give back. We didn't state an age nor gender preference of our students; we just noted that we didn't want to be in the 4-year-old nor 2-year-old classes since that's where our two daughters are who would have a chance of being clingy with Mom and Dad volunteering in their class. Basically, it was the luck of the draw – and our "luck" dictated that we were to be in the 3rd-5th grade boys class. Ok, no problem. I've seen the tail-end of those Brownies meetings while waiting to pick up my daughter – 9 or 10 tween girls running around; screaming, giggling, gossiping, sometimes somehow doing all 3 of those things at once... So um, no thanks, boys will be just fine for Sunday school. So I thought...

We got our "lesson plans", and there were not fewer than 10 pages of instructions to follow for our 1 hour and 5 minute class. Well, add-in the arrival games and we were in charge for about an hour and 15 minutes. But I haven't seen time crawl by that slowly since before I had kids; it was the longest hour I've had in a long time! Not that I wasn't having fun, because I was – A LOT of fun, actually. So anyway, all week, my husband and I have been poring over these lesson plans; I was committed to go in there today knowing exactly what I was doing and determined to keep control over those boys.

So we arrive, and the helpful leader tells us to grab snacks for the kids ahead of their arrival, but we don't know how many we'll be expecting, so in her words, "10 should be plenty". We get to the classroom, she explains a few things, and kids begin to arrive. From the beginning, it was clear we were going to have to keep one eye on a rambunctious and

mischievous (though intelligent) little boy named Avery. In fact, the very minute after I made a mental note to watch Avery very closely, I looked up and he was *gone*. I had no choice but to leave my poor defenseless husband in the clutches of the growing number of 8-10 year-old-boys while I literally **ran** after the wayward Avery. The Kid's Kingdom building of our church is still somewhat of a maze to me, so it was pure luck that I got out into the hallway just in time to see the back of Avery disappearing through a set of double doors. "I've got you now, sucker" I thought as I ran through the gym after him. I chased him right up to the kids' check-in desk, where I, the newbie, had to explain to the staff person why I was chasing a kid who had escaped from my classroom. Luckily for me, she seemed to know Avery and to be familiar with his escapades, and she was grateful that I had chased him down. Turns out, he had decided to get himself a name tag (which he is supposed to do *before* class but evidently did not), so he decided to leave the classroom to do so without telling anyone, which of course is a big no-no.

So I collar Avery, and we return to the classroom, and there are now kids everywhere who all had apparently arrived during the chase scene! There was one teeny-tiny little girl who stuck out like a sore thumb in a room full of all boys years older than her, so I went over to her and offered to walk her to the girls' class – and that's how I found out that she was a guest of one of the kids in the class, who turned out to be one of the pastor's sons. Actually, he was the son of the pastor who was our friend before we chose this church, so seeing him was a bit of a relief – for that moment anyway. I thought for sure he would be a nice, helpful boy... but more on that later. We did a head count, and we discovered in our classroom, we had 14 boys + 1 little girl + 2 freshman teachers with Ø experience = fun times ahead!

We played the activity that was slated for play while the kids were arriving, and it was a worksheet where the kids matched

words with the fears they represent, like arachnophobia=the fear of spiders, felinaphobia=the fear of cats, etc. It went pretty well, despite disappearing pens (one guess – yes, Avery. Though I countered his pen trick well. When he said that he **ate** the pens, I said, well, you won't be needing snack then, and the pens were automatically recovered). Finally it was time to line up to go to large group.

Once in the large group room, also known as The Warehouse, our responsibilities diminished as the leader took over and we relished a break of sorts. We got to see a few of the kids act things out, which was neat, and we also got to see our oldest daughter who had come over from her class. Let me tell you, she was a pro at their songs and dances! She just performed them without even giving a glance over to Mom and Dad, which is so the way we wanted it and exactly what we were afraid of when declining to volunteer in any of our kids' classrooms. But her section of the room was also eerily quiet, and I kind of regretted the decision to stay away from teaching our kids' classrooms as I envied their parent volunteer with her *four* quiet girls versus our *fourteen* borderline obnoxious boys (and one little girl). Large group was uneventful, crisis-wise anyway. I tried some of the dances and my husband made fun of me... but the kids don't want to see some grumpy-looking adult standing there, not having fun, right? My job was to encourage them to participate, and I figured step one would be to participate myself!

So at 11:30, after Large Group, it was time to go back to the classrooms until 12:05. And that's when time began to creep in a way it hasn't for us since our engagement. We began class with one of the suggested games; a relay race involving cups of water. The instructions said it was "great for boys", so without really giving it thought, we learned the rules of that game and one other. The relay involved carrying a cup of water on the back of one's hand down a "balance beam" (tape line on the floor) and back again. This was fun, but as you

can imagine, there were more than a few spills. And a note: Avery chose to get himself kicked out of this one – kudos to my husband for putting his foot down! Of course, by then all the boys were getting really rowdy (the pastor's son was one of the tricksters; here I thought he'd be a big help), so we shut the door and passed out the snack. But if you remember, earlier I said that we had only brought 10 snacks to the classroom, which "should be plenty" but alas, were not nearly enough for 15 hungry kids. Luckily, there were other snacks leftover from the previous session, and we didn't bother letting them choose which of the two snacks they would get, so snack time was very peaceful thanks to my husband's brilliant "you-get-what-you-get" snack tactic. I maintain from my many observations of kids that the #1 cause of **all** kid meltdowns is lack of food. That is free advice ☐

So then we sat at the table in the classroom, and it was time for a coin tossing game. Everyone got a partner (including me – a well-behaved boy named Brandon, thank goodness), chose a side and each team flipped the coin – the person whose side was flipped answered the first question (something relating to the verse lesson and what was shown in the play during large group). The game continued with asking questions of each partner, and the kids began to have some fun with it and come up with silly answers. It was a fun game, but we finished and there were still at least 10 minutes until dismissal! Again, my husband saved the day, and rather than trying to look over the instructions for another game and potentially losing control of the classroom while we did that, he made up an activity, so we went around the table discussing our fears. And I've complimented him enough so far because he did an awesome job with the kids, but here's where it gets ugly – my husband chose this moment to share my fear of frogs with 14 little boys. If I were a regular teacher, I would be terrified and would probably move from my house and my hometown. But as a one-time substitute Sunday school teacher, I think I'm safe from any horrid pranks involving amphibians.

So back to the game, according to their creativity, one boy's fear was of "cinderblocks", while a few of the students answered honestly that they were afraid of the dark. Quickly looking for our lesson plans to determine the next activity, we found them to be missing... "Avery" we said simultaneously, and like magic, there were the lesson plans, right in front of Avery's chair. But it was finally almost time to line up at the door for dismissal, and again, Hubby saved the day with another game – this one killed two birds with one stone by producing quiet AND spending time. The boys had to be quiet while my husband counted to 20 or else he would start over. We only had to reset twice, believe it or not! Once for (who else) Avery, and once for two other boys wrestling each other to the floor. And then it was over.

And then we got our beautiful oldest daughter back, and she is so good and obedient. And our other three, they were happy to see us as well, and us them, and things were going great until we pulled out of the parking lot and our 5-year-old noticed her older sister's new ring she had earned at church... and so began the fighting. And the making up. And the familial bonding which involves a beautiful process that also makes me want to tear my hair out at times.

I am looking forward to volunteering in Kid's Kingdom again. But maybe next time, changing diapers for an hour would be easier!

Battle Of The Bulge

If you think this is a weight-loss blog post, click again!

Recently, I've noticed a huge bulge appearing in the floor of our downstairs bathroom:



Ok, so it's difficult to see in the picture – it's a few inches above that rectangular green carpet, but believe me when I say it's getting bigger, seemingly by the day – it's now big enough to trip over! My husband thinks we'll be able to see what's happening by going into our basement and looking at it from below the bathroom floor. The only problem is that our bathroom is over the crawl space, not the basement. In the 2½ years that we've lived in this house, we've never set foot (nor knee) in the crawl space – it's always scary to think what one may find in a crawl space that hasn't been disturbed in years, at least for me. I guess I've seen too many horror movies... or maybe it's the fact that I grew up only miles away from the most macabrely (not a real word, but fits perfectly here if you ask me – maybe I will coin the term) famous crawl space – that of John Wayne Gacy, where 29 bodies were unearthed in the late '70's.

So anyway, someone needs to go into that crawl space to find out what this bulge it expands and takes over the entire house!

And we recently were told that our electric wiring in the house is out of date; here we've been spending money to fix up certain things on the house, and other things just keep breaking. Sometimes I'm not so sure about the joys of home ownership, sigh!

Cuteness To Get You Through The Weekend



Above is a picture of our second oldest, 5-year-old Sammie and her almost 1-year-old brother Christopher. He is the only boy in our family, and also the only sibling with which Sammie doesn't fight. It seems like the natives (kids) have been restless lately. Our oldest, Taylor, it back to her snotty tween "I'm-better-than-everyone-else-so-why-do-they-get-more-than-me" attitude, so she is constantly yelling at and fighting with her sisters. Disney is 2 and has been really sensitive, demanding, and impatient lately. Needless to say, our house has been very loud as of late. But in between the arguments, the kids still find time to be cute. Here is a picture of Disney actually sharing the activity table with her baby brother (whose looks seemingly aged months after he got his new haircut):

