

ALS Is An Awful Disease

Well, ok, what disease is NOT awful? But ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease) robs a person of his or her motor skills and leaves their mind intact. So essentially, ALS victims are imprisoned in their own body. And ALS often strikes at a young age, and most people struggle with it for less than 3 years before it takes their life. We watched my husband's father struggle with it for over 2 years. We watched as it robbed him of his ability to walk, talk, eat and pretty much everything else. He passed away very peacefully, a week before Christmas. We were all in the room with him, and a hospital volunteer was playing Silent Night on the harp as he passed. It was beautiful, but it's still hard for me to hear that song. The reason I'm bringing this up is because the most famous victim of ALS, besides Lou Gehrig himself, is Stephen Hawking, and I was sorry to read in the news today that he is very ill.

Stephen Hawking is a brilliant scientist and an inspirational man – he has lived with ALS for over 40 years. Lou Gehrig had it for nearly two years before he died at the age of 37. Gehrig's was a New York Yankees player, and he was forced to retire when he was diagnosed with ALS. His record of most career grand slams still holds at 23 today! We watched *The Pride of the Yankees* (which tells the story of Lou Gehrig) with my father-in-law after his diagnosis, and that was tough. Same thing with *Tuesdays With Morrie*... why did my father-in-law want to do that to himself? To get a better grip on what was happening to him, maybe? I don't know.

My father-in-law was a remarkable man. He had the biggest heart of anyone I've ever known, second only to my husband. He was kind, generous, smart, and funny. He knew a lot about everything; especially movies and religion – he had the Bible practically memorized. One of my favorite memories of him was when we took him to the zoo. It was after the ALS had already

taken hold of his body, but his humor was still intact. As we were wheeling his wheelchair over a bumpy bridge at the zoo, he said, "Ahhhh" – not because the ALS had taken away his speech (it hadn't yet) but because it was a bumpy ride and he was jokingly letting the bumps affect his voice. He was taken from us too soon; I wonder what he would have thought of having 7 grandchildren? He's been gone longer than I knew him now – over 8 years. His funeral was on our oldest daughter's first birthday. But anyway... I don't know why I'm going into all of this now. Let's pray for Stephen Hawking. ALS is a terrible disease.

I'm Grounded

I will spare you the details, but apparently I've caught some sort of stomach virus (and it causes stomach pain – OUCH!). Of course, I can't call in sick to my job as a SAHM (stay at home mom), and just my luck that my husband has work today, so I'm stuck with the two little ones. Actually, they're stuck with me – I don't feel well enough to go to Walmart or to take them anywhere else, so I can't even kill time that way – I'm grounded. And I do need to go to Walmart – I've already endured one tantrum about our lack of fruit loops. I don't think I could handle another one. Is there fruit loops delivery? I actually *want* to go to Walmart – like I said, it would kill the time anyway. At least I can blog like a maniac right now while the baby is napping. When he wakes up, I will be at his mercy. He gets really bored around the house and wants to be held all the time. But when I hold him, he just wants to grab things he shouldn't and bang on my computer keyboard. I guess I might say I'm bored. It's not that I have nothing to do; there are always blog posts to write (I'm sitting on 14 drafts right now!), newspapers from weeks ago to

read, thank you notes and birthday party invitations to write, a messy house to clean, laundry to do, an anniversary photo album to put together... it's just that I don't feel like doing any of that. Or feel like doing much of anything, for that matter. I guess I'll sit here and watch Dora the Explorer all day. I'm getting hungry, but I'm scared to eat anything because of my stomach. I have a meeting I'd really like to get to later... sigh. Being sick sucks. I hope I feel better for date day tomorrow!!!

Busiest Weekend EVER! Part Two

(continued from a previous blog post)

So here's a recap of Sunday – church, brunch, Hannah Montana movie – and that is where I left off.

So we get to the Hannah Montana movie, and of course our 9-month-old son wakes up from his nap just in time for the movie (couldn't be awake to play at church, couldn't be awake to indulge in brunch, alas – that's always the way when you have kids – they sleep thru everything good, and I swear it's a rule – they always wake when the irony is thick!) But, because the Hannah Montana movie is a musical, our 3 youngest were kept too busy to perform their usual awful antics at the movie theater. It was a girly movie, especially with a double love story plot, but our little boy is only 9-months-old, so he didn't notice the girliness. Instead he loved the musical interludes, and he clapped to each one enthusiastically. For some reason, and I've written about this before, the movie theater turns our normally sweet 2-

year-old into a little stripper. Luckily, by the time the idea to take her clothes off occurred to her today, it was near the end of the movie, so she only got as far as taking off her socks and shoes – although she did make sure to note (yell) while doing so, “Don’t look at me – I take clothes off!” Ok, Disney, if you don’t want people looking, why are you taking your clothes off? Such is the logic of a 2-year-old, I guess.

We had no major spills this time (I’m referring to our last experience when we saw Monsters Vs. Aliens and we somehow dumped an entire soft drink into the lady’s purse who was sitting behind us – major oops!), and today our baby was on his best behavior as well because of all the music in the movie – something that I think saved us as far as our 3 youngest kids’ behavior at the movies today. As for the movie itself, I enjoyed it more than I did Monsters Vs. Aliens, probably because I actually got to watch this one. But an extra nice surprise for me was the country music add-ins – surprise performances from Taylor Swift and my favorite group, Rascal Flatts. They sang one of their best songs acoustically as if they were relatives just sitting around jamming at a family get-together (can this be MY family get-together?), and it was thoroughly enjoyable. Miley Cyrus even showed her country roots in a song which attempts to revive line-dancing; I guess kids these days (now I sound like I’m 80 – GREAT, when did THAT happen?!?) have a dance they do to this song, but whatever, I kind of liked the song. Overall, I truly enjoyed the country theme that was abundant in this movie – groovin’ country music, gorgeous farm fields, cowboys ropin’ horses... what’s not to like? There was also a surprise (for me) appearance by Jan Levinson Gould from the tv show, The Office. Of course in this movie, she wasn’t Jan – she was some southern belle who played Miley’s dad’s love interest – almost as far away from Jan as one could be, but I still enjoyed the Office reference. Also, keep in mind that this is a Disney film, so there are LOTS of prat-fallish types of humor, as well as recurring movie themes. For example,

'lobster trouble' (ala Splash, circa 1984), 'switching identities for different dinner dates' (ala Mrs. Doubtfire, circa 1993), 'major celebrity comes in to save a town' (ala Wayne's World 2, circa 1993 or ala Mystery, Alaska circa 1999), it's always best to be yourself' (ala... wow, WAY TOO MANY TO MENTION – take your pick...)

So anyway, I have to (reluctantly) admit that I was pleasantly surprised with the Hannah Montana movie – plenty of stuff in this one for the parents as well as the tweens and even the stripping two-year-olds. But the movie wasn't as plot-less as I had hoped – in other words, we didn't get home until 2:55 – just 20 short minutes before we had to leave for a class we had signed up for through church. So for the next 20 minutes we scrambled around – letting dogs out, repacking diaper bags, changing diapers, etc. We arrived at our class pretty much on time, though a bit exhausted, thank you very much!

The class was great! We learned a lot about our church – their beliefs, their history, as well as their foundations for building a relationship with Christ – a very well-spent 3 hours. And we got to meet other couples at our table too – which is memorable for me because they were surprised to learn we had 4 kids – and I quote, "You don't look old enough to have 4 kids!" NICE!

Following the class was a great dinner of homemade pasta provided by a local chef. Following the delicious dinner was a tour of the north campus of our church – we worship in the south campus, so it was nice to learn the ins and outs of the north campus – so awesome! Our oldest daughter was so excited to show us where her Sunday school was held, and their rooms for youth were VERY impressive! There was a room with a stage for youth productions, and it even had backstage areas, which is almost more than I can say for one of our community theater's stages, haha! Also, there was a game room with multiple foosball tables and 'carpet ball' – something new to me, but a game I'd definitely like to try! One of the youth

rooms had state-of-the-art stage lights and restaurant-style booths for kids to 'hang out' in... Overall, it was a fun evening, and I learned a lot. But, as became common for today, we had to rush from the church class in order to be home in time for the community theater's play reading committee meeting and my much anticipated Cubs game. I was looking forward to this game for days. It was a long series (most are 3 game, some are 2 game, this one was 4 game) against the Cubs rival – the St. Louis Cardinals, with whom the Cubs are vying for first place. The game was at night, which is rare for a Sunday, so I was VERY excited about rounding out my weekend with such a game. But alas, the darn rain had its way, and the game was postponed. So only play reading meeting to look forward to for me – at least I didn't have to rush the meeting and kick people too hard to leave my house since there was no Cub's game! And for once, I think we actually achieved a lot at the play reading committee meeting. Probably because of the fact that there were only 4 of us in attendance – but hey, maybe that 's what needs to be done in order to achieve something... too many people get in each others way, I guess. It will be interesting to see what the absent members think of the decisions the four of us made while they were absent – I hope the decisions stick!

In summary, a great, if extremely exhausting weekend. Come on now, would I have it any other way?

Busiest Weekend EVER!

Whew!!! It's Sunday night – the finale of what just might be our busiest weekend ever!

Friday night we stayed up late to tie up loose ends and

organize our film shoot scheduled for Saturday. Christopher, our 9-month-old, has decided to start waking up in the middle of the night again, so despite our best efforts (and going to bed early didn't work out either since there was SO much work to do for the film shoot), we did not achieve the much-needed good night's sleep on Friday night after not getting very much sleep Thursday night either. Saturday we were up bright and early to take the kids 20 miles into the country to their new babysitter – our regular babysitter had stopped doing weekends some time ago, and it finally became time to find a weekend babysitter. I know what you're thinking – a new babysitter in a different town = scary! But of course we had met with her beforehand, and we liked what we saw. Not only that, but she lives in a very small town, and her husband's a teacher (so he had an established reputation, and also would need to protect it) AND she is a friend of a very good friend – ie, she had awesome references that checked out, and when it was all said and done, the kids had a GREAT time over there. As for us, we had a VERY busy day trying to shoot our "short" film. I put 'short' into quotes because the short film took so LONG to film – at least in some of the cast members' opinions. I actually thought the shoot went quite well, considering certain factors. But the bottom line is, it was a heck of a lot different than doing live theater (how didn't some of us see THAT coming – it seems obvious that film and stage would be like comparing apples and oranges), and we did not wrap all of the scenes in one day. So guess what we're doing next Saturday? No complaints out of me, as long as attitudes stay positive...

Saturday night after the shoot we were exhausted. We were going to take the kids to the park, but it started to sprinkle, and so we were able to catch an AWESOME Cubs game on tv instead. This entire series with the St. Louis Cardinals has been so great to watch, even though I've actually only caught *parts* of two of the games – more on that later. Saturday night saw us staying up too late again because it

took awhile to settle down the kids after their big day. And, lo and behold, Christopher was up all night again. Right when we flopped into bed, he sat up in his crib. I pretended like I was sleeping for a few minutes so I could be a fly on the wall and see what he did to entertain himself. I almost giggled as he sat up and clapped his hands to himself – it was adorable! I must have fallen asleep though because the next thing I knew (after a few hazy awakenings throughout the night when kids were crying), it was morning and time to get up and get ready for church.

Church this morning was entertaining (I always find it entertaining and enlightening, but I really do need to get some more sleep – I SO don't want to be known as the lady who dozes in church!) as always, although our usual pastor did not give the sermon. I liked the sermon, but not as much as when our usual pastor does it... oh well. After church, we went to our usual brunch and there we decided to take the kids to the Hannah Montana movie. Except that once we decided, we had only 20 minutes to finish eating, get to the theater, and find a row of seats – what it takes to hold our family at the movie theater nowadays.

Come to think of it, it was such a busy weekend, and Sunday was busiest of all, so I think I'll end the post here and make it a two-parter. My regular readers can consider this a cliff-hanger because they know that any time we take all 4 kids to the movie theater, it's nothing short of an adventure... Until part two...

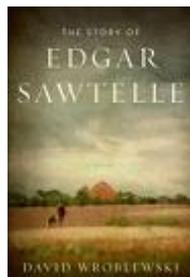
Not For The Faint Of Heart

After we got back from our trip to New York City a month ago, I did a bunch of research about September 11, 2001. I guess seeing the World Trade Center site in person piqued my curiosity about some of the details of that dreadful day. Some of the websites I found with information about the disaster were intriguing, and I'd like to share them – they are the stories of survivors of the World Trade Center. But I warn you, the following depictions are very graphic, very disturbing, and most of all, very tragic.

[John Schroeder of Engine 10](#)

[Witness Accounts from inside the north tower](#)

The Story Of Edgar Sawtelle



I just finished the almost 570-page novel Edgar Sawtelle by David Wroblewski. It took me months to read this mega-novel; especially because I only read at night before bed. There are some nights when I can't read at all because I'm just too tired (and this book was heavy – both physically and emotionally – for reading late at night!). Some nights, I only read a few pages, and then there are times like the night I finished the book – when I actually went to bed around 10:30

just so I could stay up reading for over an hour – and this is how I finally finished the story.

Edgar Sawtelle is an amazing book – it's almost indescribable. It took me a few chapters to get into the book however, mainly because of the author's extremely descriptive writing style. I wouldn't say it was boring in the beginning, but the narrative is very detailed, and it took awhile to get used to as well as for any actual events to take place. Once the action began, though, it didn't let up, and I was hooked. It's one of those books that I looked forward to ending my day with and one I was sorry to finish. Surprisingly, this is Wroblewski's **first** novel!

The Story of Edgar Sawtelle is set in the early 1970's in rural northern Wisconsin over one summer. It follows the life of a mute boy on the brink of manhood who is forced to grow up really quickly due to a set of tragic family circumstances beyond his control. Edgar's family has been breeding a special breed of dog for generations, and they do more than just breed the dogs. Almost from birth, the dogs are very meticulously trained. The book has been compared to Shakespeare's Hamlet. Although I've never read Hamlet, I read a summary, and the stories do sound as if they have similarities. The descriptive nature of the novel paints a beautiful picture of the Sawtelle's farm and the countryside beyond. There are some very well developed characters as well. That's as much as I'm going to describe of the story because I realized I'm not doing it justice. I wouldn't want to turn off anyone just because I'm writing an unintentionally bad review. I loved the book; I really did – I'll go into that more later. For now, here are some of the raving comments the novel received – most notably from author Stephen King, who knows a thing or two about story-telling himself!

I flat-out loved The Story of Edgar Sawtelle. In the end, this isn't a novel about dogs or heartland America, it's a novel about the human heart and the mysteries that live there,

understood but impossible to articulate... I don't reread many books because life is too short. I will be re-reading this one."

–Stephen King, author of Duma Key

The most enchanting debut novel of the summer... this is a great, big, mesmerizing read, audaciously envisioned as classic Americana... Pick up this book and expect to feel very, very reluctant to put it down.

– Janet Maslin, New York Times

Nothing quite compares to my experience of reading The Story of Edgar Sawtelle. This debut... is one of the most stunning, elegant books I have ever read... what can deservedly be called a great American novel.

– Lisa Jennifer Selzman, Houston Chronicle

I am completely smitten... The most hauntingly impressive debut I've read all year... Edgar might be silent, but his story will echo with readers for a long time.

– Yvonne Zipp, Christian Science Monitor

Overall, a great read, a book I highly recommend. Be warned however, that The Story of Edgar Sawtelle is not for the casual reader. I think that for one to truly enjoy this book, he or she has to be a dedicated reader – someone who truly enjoys reading and has the time to devote to it, for reading this book is an experience. If you are at all interested in reading the book, then stop reading my review now because there is something I must add that will be somewhat of a spoiler.

SPOILER ALERT-SPOILER ALERT-SPOILER ALERT

**DO NOT READ BELOW THIS LINE IF YOU INTEND TO READ THE STORY OF
EDGAR SAWTELLE!**

CONSIDER YOURSELF WARNED!

The ending SUCKS. As much as I truly enjoyed reading the book, the ending came close to ruining the experience for me.

Not because of death, but because of the way it's handled. The book ends rather abruptly, and I felt abandoned and ditched as a reader. There isn't any closure. The main character, Edgar, learns and grows so much during the course of the novel, and he takes us readers with him. But his knowledge isn't shared with any of the other main characters, mainly his mother! And his personal growth is also rendered pointless. And then there's the very last chapter, seen through the dog Essay's point of view, which I just didn't understand AT ALL. What was Essay's choice? I just didn't get it. And I know I'm not alone. It really says something when you do a google search for "Edgar Sawtelle ending" and all that comes up is a bunch of complaints from readers. That being said, I think it's still worth it to read this book – it was *that* good where a terrible ending didn't ruin it. But it came very close, and I was VERY disappointed when I first finished the book.

Sammie Hasn't Done This... Yet

Our almost 5-year-old Sammie is the firecracker of the group. She likes to be the one to stir things up, and she sometimes has some crazy ideas. My mom sent me an email with the following video and a message: "I'm surprised Sammie hasn't tried this."

I can't imagine what those poor parents were going through. First I'm sure horror and panic set in as they worried their little one would get injured or stuck in there – notice they wisely killed the power to the crane game. Then, once she got out, they were probably extremely embarrassed! I half expected to see them spank her little butt when it was the only part of her sticking out! Not that I condone spanking really, but you know how extreme relief often gives way to anger, especially when kids are involved... I'm certainly glad it was their problem and not mine. I know I will **not** be showing this video to Sammie nor any of my kids for that matter – they don't need any more “good” ideas!

This Boyle Madness

Have you heard about the newest media sensation, Susan Boyle? She is a woman who appeared on the European tv show, Britian's Got Talent and wowed the judges. When I first saw the headlines, I couldn't imagine how good someone could be to get that kind of attention. I didn't click on the headlines because they were only videos on cnn.com and I avoid those – I like to read my news when I get it from the internet. But I'm a news junkie, and eventually I caught the Talent clip on the real CNN – and the story unfolded. The woman has talent. She can really sing, and she makes a difficult song seem effortless. There are plenty of people with nice voices, so what's the big deal? I think it is about the way Susan Boyle looks. When she stepped up to sing, people (and you can see this in the judges' and audience's reactions) did not expect her to be a good singer because she does not comply with society's definition of “pretty”. Simon Cowell, specifically, who is a judge on the show, is known for judging people on their looks first and even making comments about them, which I

think is immature and disgusting. But I have to sound off on this topic because it's been all over the news lately, and this morning, Susan was on The Early Show. For some reason that I can only attribute to the way she looks, the Early Show anchors were treating her like she was mentally challenged – they were talking slowly, etc. One of the Early Show anchors stated, "Let's see if she can sing early in the morning", prompting Susan to do an acappella version of the song that made her famous, I Dreamed a Dream from Les Miserables. It was wonderful, but maybe that Early Show anchor should be treated as if *she* is mentally challenged – it was early morning in New York, but Susan Boyle was doing the interview from her home in Scotland, where it was 11:30-midnightish! Duh.

I personally think it's an extraordinary story because Susan Boyle is 47 and with a voice like that, I'm surprised she wasn't discovered sooner. I'm sick of everyone picking on her looks and using them to define her as a person. I think it's terrible that society says that people have to look good to have worth. Maybe that's why plastic surgery runs so rampant, but to me, plastic surgery tends to stick out. A lot of times, I can tell when someone's had something done. I think it looks fake and strange, and it baffles my mind that people would risk their lives to get knocked out and sliced open just to change something aesthetic. Not including those who get disfigured, of course – I can't blame those people, and I feel really sorry for them especially after noting how society acts about looks. Good looking people are assumed to be more successful, they're listened to more often, and they're just overall held in a higher regard in society than people who look different or what society deems as "ugly". To me, ugly is the mean, heartless person who doesn't care about others. I think Susan should be applauded for conquering society's "ugly". Bravo Susan, for a job well done – I hope you get to fulfill your wish of singing for the Queen!

For those of you who have no idea what I'm talking about, [here is a link to the clip](#) of the episode of Britian's Got Talent featuring Susan. As one of the judges put it, she is a privilege to listen to! I get chills and tears in my eyes as I watch those snooty judges eat crow while Susan triumphs!

Sundance, Here We Come!

This Saturday we're going to do something that should be pretty cool – we're going to film a movie! In 2007, we staged a short one-act play for our community theater called The Clinic which was written by my husband (also our O Great Admin). The play got a really good response from its audience; including two newspaper reviewers. Recently, we've struck up a friendship with a guy who runs a small production company, so we decided to make The Clinic into a short film for submission to film festivals. The part about the Sundance Film Festival in my blog post title was just a joke; it's not like we're expecting this to go anywhere. If it does, awesome! But mostly it's just for fun. And seeing as how the cast and crew contain some very good friends of ours, fun is exactly what we're expecting on Saturday! Once we wrap it and finish post-production, maybe I can put it on my blog or at least link to it... and ACTION!

Time Flies When You're Having

Fun

I was musing today about something...

Sometimes my son gets this look on his face where he looks more like a kid than a baby. He's 9 months old, so he's still very much a baby, but more frequently I can see on his face how he might look as a toddler. It's hard to explain, but my husband feels the same way. The bottom line is, time flies when you're having fun, and I'm having the time of my life watching my kids grow up!

I got a little overtired and frustrated with them once during our last road trip, and I was thinking to myself, ok, no more doing **this** for at least five years. Then it hit me – in five years, my kids will be 14, 10, 7, and 5! No more little little ones, in just a short half of a decade!

So I asked my husband the question – why is time flying so fast? Does it fly faster as I get older? More quickly when I have more kids? Is it just because our youngest is a boy and we're used to how girls grow up after having 3 of those? I just don't know, but as hard as the work is with 4 little ones, 2 still in diapers, I still wish they'd stay little longer – I really do.

Sunrise, sunset, quickly flow the years...