

Laundry, Origami-Style

I received an interesting email forward the other day; it's a Japanese video that shows a woman folding a shirt perfectly in a *matter of seconds* using an origami technique. I haven't tried it out yet; I've been too busy blogging instead of folding my laundry ☐

Another Wonderful Zoo Visit

We went to the Toledo Zoo again last weekend (it was our second weekend to visit the zoo in a row; we visited on Feb 7 and 15). Almost a week has passed since our last visit, but I had other blog posts lined up and ready to go, so that's why I'm first writing about it now.

Having a zoo membership is awesome because you get to visit the zoo whenever you have free time, and you don't have to worry about seeing EVERYTHING on EVERY visit since you know you'll be back soon. The last few times we've gone, we parked in the back parking lot and stay on that side of the zoo, which cuts the amount of walking considerably – a great option for winter months since this parking lot is free in the off-season and very close to the rear zoo entrance. With 4 small children, this is the way that works best for us, even though it means skipping the other side of the zoo which includes the polar bears, seals, wolves, and giraffes. No matter, we still see plenty, and now we have a whole half a zoo to see sometime if we go without the kids or are feeling extra ambitious.

Every zoo visit is different, which is one of the things I love about going. The animals are always doing different things, and my favorite exhibits vary with each visit. Here are the highlights from last Sunday's visit:

Lions – The Toledo Zoo has white lions. White lions are rare and the result of a recessive gene similar to the gene of white tigers. The Toledo Zoo has 3 white lion brothers on loan from Siegfried and Roy, the famous Las Vegas magicians. Normally during our zoo visits, the lions are sleeping and up on a ledge far from the viewing glass, but last Sunday they were walking around, and one of them even walked right up

against the viewing glass! I've seen lions up close before, but not for a long time and never the gorgeous white lion until last week.

Hippos – The hippos are in their indoor enclosure for the winter, and even though their room seems somewhat cramped, the animals don't seem unhappy, and it's very cool to see these HUGE animals up close. It's amazing to me that their small pool must get very deep very fast in order to allow the animal to be completely submerged. As we watched, the hippo was bobbing for apples, and he caught his apple and swallowed it whole. This hippo was so large that the apple in his mouth looked about as big as a grape would look in the mouth of a human being. And this provided an extreme close-up of his humongous teeth!

Gorillas – When we got to the gorilla exhibit, it was empty. But a friendly zookeeper told us to stick around for about 10 minutes for gorilla feeding time. We then got to watch as the keepers threw greens, fruit, and straw all around the enclosure; taking care to place some on the various ledges and hide some within crevices of the exhibit (seriously, am I too old to embark on this as a career?!? I'm afraid so...). Then they let the gorillas back in, and it was a frenzy. Well, an orderly frenzy – there was no pushing nor shoving; just some excited gorillas foraging in their exhibit. They quickly found all the hidden surprises, and we laughed as one of the females hoarded as much lettuce as she could carry and brought it up to a high ledge to enjoy it all by herself.

Elephants – The elephants were indoors, and the now 6-year-old baby Louie was using his trunk to eat jello off the floor. I really enjoy watching elephants use their trunks; it's fascinating to me how dexterous they are – almost like they have 2 fingers on the end. But we've watched Louie grow up ever since we've been coming to this zoo when he was just a year or two old, and now he's getting pretty big! Last time we were at the zoo, he was trying to get down a step so he

could get to the water, and he ended up going backwards down the step – it was so cute!

So great day, awesome fun as always! Like I said, every visit is different, and I am never disappointed! I am a zoo-addict!

Sick Of Winter?

If you're like me, then you are sick of winter. I'm sick of getting snowed in, sick of bundling up the kids, and sick of the high heating bills. So even though it's a very dark type of humor, I did have to chuckle at this picture of a poor snowman I received via email; no doubt created by some poor soul who is a victim of the winter blues:



And since we're on the subject of snowmen, I read an article a few weeks ago with many interesting tidbits about them, so I'll share a few. After all, it's the least I can do after sharing such a depressing picture like the one above, right?

– Snowman art is one of the few activities modern man shares with his earliest ancestors. The earliest illustration of a snowman found was made in about 1380, and snow sculpting was a popular pastime during the Middle Ages.

– In the year 1494, Michelangelo sculpted snow figures in Florence, Italy.

– In 1999, residents of Bethel, Maine constructed the largest snowman ever built with 8 million pounds of snow. They beat

their own record in 2008 using 13 million pounds of snow when they created Olympia (actually a snowwoman) who stood 122 feet and one inch tall and could be seen from 4 miles away! They used snow skis for her eyelashes, car tires for her lips, trees for her arms, and kids created her 6-foot nose from chicken wire and muslin. Her hand-stitched hat had a 48-foot circumference. Here is a picture of Olympia:



So don't let the winter blues get you down, especially since us here in the Midwest are having a winter relapse today with icy winds and snow flurries – yuck! Get some snowman inspiration, and go out there and try your hand at building your own winter work of art! Hurry – the first day of spring is only a month away – and thank goodness for that!

The preceding blog post contains information obtained from [American Profile magazine](#).

Happy Birthday To My Blog!

Happy Birthday to my blog! Today is the one-year anniversary of the day I started my blog on tangents.org! And 381 blog posts later, here we are! So even though I haven't been able to blog every day, there were a few days when I got more than one post up, and so in a 366 day year (leap year in 2008), I was able to make 381 blog posts, and that averages more than one a day, surpassing my goal I had when I started this thing! So I'd like to thank everybody who trudges through my rambling garbage – those who have read all 381 My Food Chain Gang blog posts and those who pretend to have read them ☐

Having this blog has been a great way to vent my feelings (from pride about my kids to my frustrations with Walmart), share news stories I find interesting (from funny police happenings to interesting animal tidbits), write movie reviews, and most importantly, keep in touch with my family and friends who live far away – especially when our lives are too busy to allow us to chat on the phone when we want. THANKS AGAIN FOR VISITING my site!

And Speaking Of Discoveries...

Unlike my Steve Wilkos show discovery, the following revelation is a great one! My daughter brought home a Weekly Reader from school – you know, it's like a newspaper for kids. We used to get those when I was in school too, and I really enjoyed them. So we're sitting in the waiting area of H & R Block waiting for my husband to get our taxes done, and

my 9-year-old daughter says to me, "Mom, did you know that they found an animal that they haven't seen for, like, a really long time? They thought there weren't any more left in the world! It looks like a Furby!" We talked about extinction for a little bit, and then my daughter said she couldn't remember what the animal was called or where they found it. So when we got home, she showed me the Weekly Reader, and I found that she was talking about the pygmy tarsier. Scientists believed this type of primate went extinct because no one had seen any specimens for about 70 years, but they recently found two males and a female tarsier alive in Indonesia. The animals each weigh only about 2 oz.!

So yes, it's safe to say this is a much better discovery for me than the Steve Wilkos show. Here's hoping the pygmy tarsier can re-populate and once again establish itself as a thriving species! And thanks to the Weekly Reader which has been publishing great kid-oriented articles for decades. These stories help youngsters develop many different kinds of interests in the world around them!

Insomniac Discovery

Though I wouldn't call it a great discovery, by any means... Every few months, I go through a period of insomnia that lasts a few days. I don't know why this happens, but it starts when I stay up too late a few nights in a row, waiting for my kids to go to bed and then having too much fun to go to bed myself. Then for some reason, I start waking up early in the morning and am unable to fall back asleep, and the more tired I get, the less easy it is for me to sleep and the cycle continues. So anyway, a few weeks ago, during one of these bouts of insomnia, I was flipping channels and I came across

the Steve Wilkos show.

In case you don't know (and I hope you don't) Steve Wilkos is best known for being the main bodyguard on the Jerry Springer show – a talk show that aired in the '90's that was a total raunch fest. The show pushed the limits of television at the time and helped to give talk shows an even worse reputation than they already had. Nearly every episode of the Jerry Springer show contained bleeped-out profanity, guests taking their clothes off (censored for tv thank goodness) and brawling. It was a disgusting example of junk tv and helped give birth to the term "trailer trash". And Steve Wilkos had a big part to play. As the main bodyguard, he would have to break up the fights, often climbing in between scantily-clad (if that) guests as they tried to duke it out on the stage. As his popularity rose, the audience would often chant Steve's name as he broke up the fights with his trademark smirk and chrome dome. And how do I know this? Well, I was a college student at the time, and I guess I'll reluctantly admit to being present as some of my friends would get a big kick out of this show and watch it in their dorm room.

So anyway, the other night, it was really late, and I thought I must be hallucinating when I came across Steve the bodyguard from the Jerry Springer show hosting his own talk show here in 2009. And it didn't seem to be like the Jerry Springer show... no fights, no swearing, no nudity... Just Steve, the ex-Chicago cop complete with his thick Chicago accent, trying to work out life's problems for his "lucky" guests... He doesn't seem very natural in front of the camera, and I don't know whose idea it was to give this guy his own show... What is this (tv) world coming to? [Check it out for yourself](#), if you dare! And, just for kicks, here is a link to [some classic Jerry Springer moments](#) someone put up on youtube; I'm NOT embedding that garbage on my blog – you can just click on the link if you really want to see it. Where has the former-mayor-of-Cincinnati-who-wrote-a-check-to-a-prostitute-and-got-caught

been these days anyway?

Pole Dancing In Gym Class?

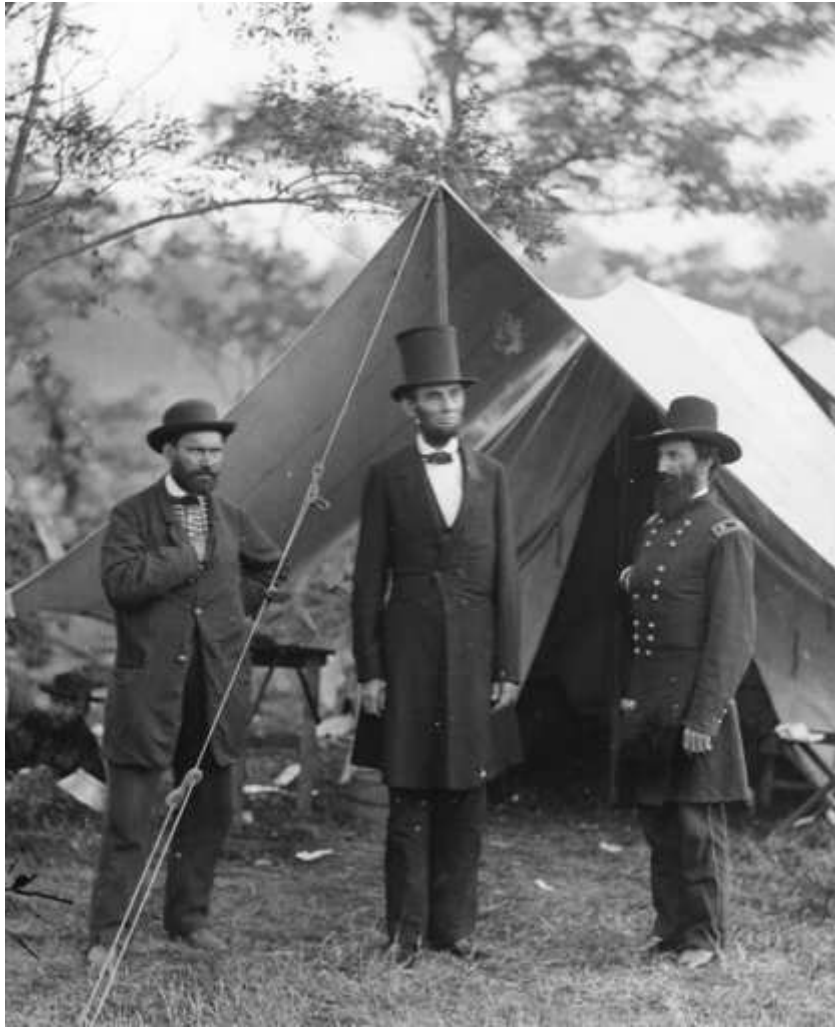
We were grocery shopping the other night and my 9-year-old daughter was jumping around and telling us about some kind of dance she was learning in gym class. “And then you dance with the pole...”, she said, and that got our attention – pole dancing in gym class? She then went on to explain that they have 2 little poles (closer to stick-sized, it sounds like) the kids dance with... but you can see where I’m coming from. In this day and age, pole dancing has a much different meaning. It’s something popularized in the adult entertainment industry, and because I’ve heard that it’s recently found its way into normal (?) families’ homes as a form of exercise. Not that I know of anyone who actually exercises this way (and if any of my friends or family reading this have taken up pole dancing, I really **don’t** want to know about it, even if it is just for exercise!), but for a minute during my daughter’s story, I was worried that this form of “exercise” had become SO mainstream that they were teaching it in the schools! I couldn’t be happier to be wrong, but the misunderstanding makes for a funny story!

Happy Birthday Abe!

Today is Abraham Lincoln’s birthday. The 16th president of the United States would be 200 years old today if he was still alive. Unfortunately, an assassin’s bullet cut his remarkable

life short at the age of 56 – not that he would still be alive today, but his assassination was still very tragic of course. Because this is such a milestone “birthday”, Lincoln has been in the news a lot lately. I learned something really interesting about his widow, Mary Todd. Ten years after Lincoln’s death, Mary was hospitalized in a mental institution for being delusional and for spending too much money. I guess her delusions were caused by a sleep medication she was taking, but intriguing to me is the fact that the institution where she was hospitalized was in Batavia Illinois – a stone’s throw from where I spent most of my childhood. Next time I’m in the area, I’m going to have to take a look at the place – it’s now apartment buildings, but I think it would still be cool to see the land that used to be the mental institution which housed Mary Todd Lincoln.

Another interesting Lincoln tidbit; I found this picture on the internet, and I thought it was so cool I had to share it. It captures Lincoln in real life, not just posing for a portrait as many people are used to seeing him. The man on his left was his bodyguard, Allan Pinkerton, and the man on the right was Major Gen. John A. McClernand.



Farm Frenzy

You might have noticed a decrease in the frequency of my blogging. I am still super-busy with my 4 kids, but now that the horrible months-long-lasting illness has run its course through our house, I have more energy and time than I've had in a long time... so why am I posting less? Because I've gone and gotten myself addicted to a video game, of all things!

It's called Farm Frenzy Pizza Party, and it's addicting to play! Basically, you get this little plot of land where you choose what animals to buy and manage. Each different kind of animal drops a type of product, and you can either use these

products to make other products, or you can sell them. You can upgrade your warehouse to make it store more products, you can upgrade your factories to produce products more quickly, and you can upgrade your vehicles to make them faster. The game is surprisingly complicated, yet easy to learn. Ultimately, the more difficult levels consist of making pizzas, and each pizza is made up of five types of product. Complicating the game player's goals is the fact that some of the pizza components are made up of two different products themselves, so you have to choose which animals and factories to buy and in what order to make the products with the funds you have. There are also bears that drop down from the sky that eat your animals and even trample your factories! It's really fast-paced (you get rewarded for completing the levels in a timely fashion also), and like I said, it's very addicting.

I was looking for a hobby, but this is ridiculous. I could have chosen something a little more productive than sitting on my butt and playing a video game. But this is *fun*. And I haven't let myself indulge in a hobby that's non-productive in a long time... Usually in my spare time I organize our family photos or work on our kids' school memory books or things like that... What's that you ask? What about my blogging? Well, ok, I see your point. So I have a few hobbies now; they'll have to compete for my time. And right now, Farm Frenzy is winning! Here is a screen shot:



The Crabby Magician

Saturday was one of the funnest days I've had in a long time. I've been having *major* zoo-fever lately, and my husband knew this and renewed our Toledo Zoo membership online before I even woke up Saturday morning. When I finally arose, he said, how about going to the zoo today? So we packed up all the kids, and took advantage of the almost 50° weather and headed to the zoo. We first ate lunch at our new favorite eating establishment in the Toledo area; a place called Nick's Cafe on Reynolds Road in Maumee. They have excellent gyros and scrumptious Greek salads, just to name a couple of their delicious dishes... pretty much everything is made from

scratch. Potatoes are sliced up for french fries right there in the kitchen, gyros are off the spit, the burger meat is hand-rolled... you get the idea. Awesome food and great service too. Highly recommended from this hard-to-please food critic!

On Saturday, everyone at Nick's was staring at us because of our ~~four~~ five adorable kids – we let our oldest invite her friend along who had slept over the night before. It made for a mini-van filled to capacity, but I'm so glad we invited her because she is a great kid, a big help (especially with our little ones because in her family, she is smack dab in the middle of 5 in birth order and knows how to help in cases of sibling rivalry!), and she had never been to a zoo before! If I had known that, we would have taken her sooner... **Every kid needs to get to a zoo!** This little girl is 9-years-old and for me, a highlight of my trip on Saturday was getting to witness her experience the zoo for the first time: the cuteness of a real-life cheetah, the immensity of a white rhinoceros, the playfulness of the baby orangutans... I'm currently reading Jack Hanna's new book, *My Wild Life* right now and it details many of the trials and tribulations the Director Emeritus of the Columbus Zoo has gone through to get where he is today. In one chapter, he addresses his many critics (people who protest live animals being held captive in zoos, as well as protesting Jack's taking animals on television show appearance tours), and Jack says something in defense of these practices which I completely agree with: Captive animals are ambassadors of their cousins in the wild. We NEED to have zoos and reach out to the public with animal tv appearances; it's the only way to get people to care enough to help with conservation.

So anyway on Saturday, after lunch, we made our way to the zoo. When we first got in, we discovered there was going to be a magic show in the Museum of Science (one of those old Works Progress Administration buildings from the post-Great Depression era; I love their architecture!). We settled in with the kids looking forward to a fun show. My husband is

into magic, and we staged a magic show for our local theater company a few years ago, so I know a little bit about how some tricks are performed – enough to know that this guy hired by the Toledo Zoo last Saturday was simply *awful*. First, he began the show with a crabby demeanor. He didn't have much charisma or charm; he wasn't very good with the kids, and his tricks *stank* – everything he performed could be bought in a magic store for under \$100 – for the whole lot! And during the show, he would literally sum up his tricks with one sentence – “and that's the magic coloring book.” Also, according to my husband, he continuously broke one of the cardinal rules of magic – telling his audience what to expect ahead of time. For example, he had a ball trick where he told the audience, “Wouldn't it be amazing if the red ball were no longer on the top?” And then *magically*, it wasn't... Amazing trick, maybe; amazing magician, I think not... On top of all that, he messed up some tricks (which happens, I guess... a little hard to forgive when it involves tricks this simple, but...), and announced the fact that he did indeed mess them up! Oh well, this “magic” show was free with zoo admission. I was a little anxious after the first 7 or 8 minutes; wanting to make sure we had enough time to see actual animals, but the kids seemed to like the show, so we did not leave the magic show before its finale. I will mention that we literally broke into a run when the guy announced that he was doing a puppet show next... Our 4-year-old was asking to see it, but I cannot imagine what that guy (his name is [Chris Clark](#) and you can click on his name to visit his website if you're interested in renting a ~~magician entertainer~~ popcorn machine) would do with puppets, so we told her we missed the puppet show... Besides, we were at the zoo to see animals, and we were running out of time! Here is a picture of the crabby magician (sorry Derek for the large pics – I don't really have time to be trying to figure out how to change code):



But not a terrible experience, because look at the amazement on the face of our 4-year-old when she witnessed the “magic”:



Luckily, we did get out of the magic show in time to see lots of animals at the zoo. The elephants were moved from their outdoor exhibit to indoors, and in the process, they crossed the path right in front of us zoo visitors:



Then, the silverback (dominating male and largest) gorilla was sitting right up against the glass of his exhibit, and at the Toledo Zoo, the visitors are allowed to get right up close and personal with the great apes. Unfortunately, I had run out of available space on my camera after taking so many pictures of the worst magician in the world – I was worried people wouldn't believe me about how awful he was, so I made sure to snap lots of pics! But anyway, the silverback gorilla was right there, and as we did with the chimp just minutes before, we held up everything we had in our arsenal (double-stroller) that we thought might interest him, but all to no avail. Maybe he likes shiny things, we thought, so we held up our car keys. Maybe he will recognize babies, we decided, so we held up our 7 month old son... and no reaction (held up the baby with caution since witnessing a gorilla CHARGE a little boy and pound the glass really hard in his exhibit in Omaha Nebraska years ago)... This gorilla stayed cool as a cucumber

and didn't react to any of it.

My one complaint about this zoo visit (besides the magic show!) is: where the heck is the octopus? He is usually one of our favorite animals to see at the zoo, and this time he was missing – something else was in his tank. That's disappointing, the octopus was always fascinating for our family and fun to watch. I hope nothing bad happened to him...

Dinner at Steak N Shake after the zoo was also a fun treat – yes, even Steak N Shake is a treat when you live in a rural utopia like we do since the closest decent sit-down chain restaurant is an hour away. A fun treat (had to be something casual after a big day with 5 kids who had had a sleepover the night before), and Disney, our 2-year-old, went poopie on the potty for the first time EVER at Steak N Shake! That reminds me, we used to live in the same town – Normal, IL (which is actually anything but normal) as the very first Steak N Shake restaurant – it is (or at least was 10 years ago when we lived there) still in its original building – too bad I wasn't into history as much then as I am now... Oh well, anyway, extremely fun time at the zoo. And as I always ask the kids, what was your favorite animal that you saw today? Mine was the silverback gorilla. He was magnificent. For awhile, the gorillas were my favorite animal to see at the zoo. Then we visited frequently last summer and got to know the family of orangutans, especially dad Boomer (an extraordinary orang because he actually plays with and helps care for his offspring – orangs in the wild and even in captivity are very easily annoyed with youngsters). Boomer and the fam are doing great and only fell short of being my favorite animal at the zoo this weekend because of the close proximity of the humongous silverback gorilla... Maybe my preferences will reverse next spring when I visit and the orangs are back outside and pushing their button which sprays water upon unsuspecting zoo guests... Looking forward to that!