

Clap, Clap, Slap The Chest...

What IS this? It's something that is popular among tween girls lately. They walk around doing some kind of ritual that involves clapping and slapping their chests, among other things. I didn't really think much of it, until my daughter's 9th birthday party, and there were other kids here doing it. When my 2-year-old picked it up, it became annoying and I decided to take action by writing a blog post and looking it up on the internet. I asked my daughter if it's from a movie or a tv show or something, but she didn't seem to know where it came from. When I tried to look it up on the internet, I just got instructions for other games of this type and didn't see anything about any sort of fad that's sweeping our tweens. So is anyone reading this whose kids do the same thing, or is this a NW Ohio thing? I'd like to know where it came from so I can decide if it's a behavior I want all of my kids duplicating.

You Delivered My Pizza, But Please Don't Watch Me Eat It

We had a great weekend, even though the weather on Sunday was horrid – so cold my Christmas teddy bear got frozen to the window! Friday night was an all-night work session to finish up the planning and organization of our community theater's awards show, which is where we went Saturday night. But first on Saturday afternoon, it was a birthday celebration for our oldest who turned 9 on Sunday with a MUCH anticipated visit from family who live out of state. We had a great time catching up and watching the kids open their birthday and

Christmas presents, and the kids got to have a sleepover in the hotel with Grandma, Papa, and Uncle Bud while we went to the awards show. The awards show was lots of fun, as always, and I got to watch 2 very good friends win much-deserved achievement awards. Congratulations, guys!

It was lots of fun putting the show together, even if we didn't have much time to do so due to last minute notice from the theater. It was fun and also rewarding to watch the individual skits, shorts, songs, and awards presentations start as ideas on paper and then watch when they came together as a whole. It's also a fun excuse to get everyone together, and it's always nice to see long-lost busy friends who are unable to get together but for this one night. It might be fun to produce the awards show again next year, but then again, I'd love to have my best friend sitting beside me to watch them because I missed him this year – even though he did make an excellent host. If there are a few individuals in the theater community who have a hard time because they don't win awards, then let them have their hard time. There is talk of cancelling this awards show, and I would be very sad if that happened. It's definitely a whole ton of fun for most of us, and I really don't think we should let a few individuals ruin it for everyone. That's all I'm going to say on the subject for now, but expect to hear more from me once this very topic is discussed at the next production board meeting.

Sunday we had major Grandma-let-down, and because we didn't want our oldest daughter to be depressed on her actual birthday, we let her have a friend sleep over. During football season, we usually set aside Sundays for low-key stuff, like watching football, reading newspapers, and blogging, but we always end up with crazy kids so it's never exactly low-key. But I don't usually cook dinner on Sundays, and today we ordered pizza. Five minutes after the pizza was delivered, we noticed the delivery guy was still parked out front and that he was standing outside of his car. Turns out,

he had locked himself out of the car, and so we offered him a warm place to wait for his ride. Since the temperature outside has been hovering around 0° all day, with wind chills near -20°, he gratefully accepted. And he stood in our front hall for almost 30 minutes! If he were outside, he would have frozen to death. But it did feel a little awkward eating the pizza he delivered while he stood there. We offered him a seat in the living room, but he opted to stand in the entryway, and I'm kind of glad because at least we were then eating out of his view. Our 2-year-old kept asking about "the pizza guy", and then he became scary to her – "I scared pizza guy" – probably cuz he was just standing there, doing nothing, and she's never seen anyone do that in our front hall before. But finally his ride came, thank goodness, and he left. I wonder if he gets paid for the time he was standing in our house? I wonder who pays for the gas that was used in his running car while he was waiting for his ride? Should we have offered him some pizza? It was kind of a weird situation, but it does make for interesting blog fodder. Of course it had to happen on the coldest day of the year – that guy has a new story to tell!

Toy Culling

A few weeks ago, our kids were chronically misbehaving. Our oldest, a tween, was sassing back and saying "no" too much, her younger sister (the "spirited" one) was throwing lots of tantrums and trying to cause trouble with her sisters, and our youngest daughter was constantly upset and insecure about the continuous chaos in the house. Desperate times call for desperate measures, so one day while the oldest kids were at school and the younger ones were sleeping, my husband took off work for an afternoon of "toy culling". This is a drastic

discipline measure we only use in emergency situations. It is time-consuming and intensive labor for the parents, but well worth it, at least in our house.

Toy culling consists of us going into the girls' room (the three oldest girls share one big room, and our baby boy isn't yet old enough to cause trouble) and taking out every toy. We leave the tv, computer with educational games, books, and the clothes and board games in the closet. Everything else goes – dressup clothes, doll clothes, dolls, stuffed animals, all the little miscellaneous toys that can really junk up a child's room quickly, etc. If you have lots of time, you can sort it all by what you want to keep and organize the rest, but we are very busy people and so we just took all their junk and put it in our son's room for now. He's a baby who wakes in the night so he's still in our room. When it's time to move him into his room, we'll have to clean it out obviously, but for now it was a means to an end of the horrible behavior of the girls. We leave the board games, and they know that they take one out and put it away when they're done, just like the books that are left. If the rules aren't followed, anything that's left on the floor in subsequent days gets culled. You need to check their room everyday, and it's **imperitive** that you follow through with rule-enforcing. And for some reason, this process really works. I don't know what it is... Perhaps a feng shui effect where the much more pleasant ambience of the room and the *mucho* extra space is what leads to the kids being in better moods and hence, less trouble and more obedient. It could be the fact that there are less toys over which to fight. Maybe they're happier not having it constantly hanging over their heads that they're going to have to clean their room. But I don't care what the reason is, the toy culling has worked wonderfully the 3-5 times we've had to set aside a chunk of time to do it. My kids are now putting their dirty laundry in the hampers that are provided, and their trash is going into garbage cans. Also, their room is staying clean, and I don't have to worry about it staying that way because

they don't have anything with which to mess it up! And, as the behavior improves, they can earn their toys back – you don't have to spend money to get them any special reward PLUS the kids feel senses of accomplishment = WIN/WIN. Toy culling proves that less is more, and it helps put a damper on the sense of entitlement that can cloud the good attitude of even a generally well-behaved child.

I think I first read about the method in a parenting column in the newspaper. I'm not sure which expert gets the credit, but I do know that I highly recommend toy culling! And oh yes, early December is a perfect time to do this – makes room for the burst of new things they might receive for the holidays!

Please Come Home For Christmas

It's my favorite contemporary classic Christmas tune, yet I can't find the original version that made me fall in love with the song, "Please Come Home for Christmas". I spent much of yesterday evening downloading different samples of the song; it seems every famous recording artist from the past few decades covered it. The musical acts that were sampled were very diverse: Aaron Neville, Sawyer Brown, Bon Jovi, Vonda Sheperd, Gary Allan, the Drifters, Lonestar, Toby Keith...

Twenty renditions later and I still haven't found the original version I heard – my favorite one to date. I heard it in the 80's or early 90's, and it was the most popular version they would play all the time on the radio; country and easy listening / rock. It's sung by a male artist or group... if anyone has any suggestions of who it might be, I might be up to fishing through a few more versions of the song. That

is, unless any of them are as bad as Toby Keith's. And this is coming from a country music fan!

Road Kill Etiquette?

Saturday morning started off completely crazily of course – it was the morning of our oldest daughter's ninth birthday party. We were running around like lunatics, trying to take care of our own 4 kids and getting last minute details for the party worked out – we didn't even know how many kids were going to show up since people refuse to RSVP, but that's a separate post altogether. I had invited 25 kids – I know that sounds completely crazy, but my daughter's school has a rule that you have to invite the entire class if you're handing invitations out at school (understandable, don't want any kids' feelings hurt) – so with the 17 in her class + Brownies + outside of school friends = meant almost 30 eight and nine-year-olds could have shown up at my house on Saturday. But thank goodness, only about 6 or 7 showed up (they never stood still long enough for me to count them), which is another reason why I invite every kid my daughter knows – if we had only invited 5 kids, none of them would have been able to come probably.

So Saturday morning was hectic, to say the least. Various kids were melting down in anticipation of the party, and adults were scrambling to decorate and plan games for somewhere between 5 and 25 kids. My husband is brilliant and came up with an idea to do a craft, and luckily we have a pretty big supply of craft items. So we threw a bunch of stuff together, and the kids made Christmas ornaments out of small red plastic cups and whatever else we found and had an awesome time doing so. I was feeling much better after the

craft idea was hatched, because it was almost time for kids to arrive and now everything was ready. My dog started barking, so I went to the window to see what the barking was about this time. Just as I got to the window, a squirrel ran out in front of a car and got hit – right in front of my house and my eyes – ugh. What an awful way to start a birthday party – I'm really sensitive about those kind of things. I wanted my husband to go out and move it – it was right in front of our house – but he refused. I can't say I blame him, I wasn't going to go near it for anything, and I made him tie the party balloons out front. But I knew at the very least, kids (especially boys) would be talking about the dead squirrel for the entire party. At least it wasn't warm out, which would have increased the chances of the party spilling outside, further leading to more attention on the poor unlucky squirrel. So I don't know, what's road kill / birthday party etiquette? Should we have removed the squirrel? Never had to deal with THAT problem before. And I hope I never have to again; it cast a terrible shadow over my day. But as it happened, no need to worry about the squirrel – by party time he was flat as a pancake and no one noticed him. By the end of the party, he had disappeared completely. I'm just glad none of my kids had to see it happen; I think that would have been rough on them. And I'm happy to report that the birthday party was a HUGE success with several kids exclaiming that it was the best birthday party they had ever been to... of course one of those comments came from a kid who was at his first birthday party ever. But we did catch one kid lying about calling her grandma to come pick her up. She said grandma wasn't home but it turns out that she had never dialed – I'm glad I'm well-informed of that trick now. This same kid's grandma didn't show up last year until an hour after the party was over, hmmm... As President George W. Bush would say – Fool me once, shame on... fool me twice... if you get fooled, you'll be fooled again.

Happy 9th Birthday Taylor!

Francis = MIA

It seems my new pet has gone missing. Thank goodness I didn't end up with something bigger, like a rat or a tortoise or something I wouldn't really want crawling around the house unattended. But I didn't see this coming. If anything, I thought my new ladybug friend would kick the bucket. I wouldn't have guessed that he'd vanish. I don't think the kids got to him; they wouldn't have been able to keep something like that a secret for long. But today when I went to check on Francis the ladybug he wasn't in his cage. And by the way, the name is after the ladybug in *A Bug's Life*, not my late Grandmother – that would be FrancEs and yes, I still want a daughter to have that name.

Yesterday at the thrift store I found a bug catcher for a quarter, so I bought it and put Francis in his new home last night. Today when I went to check on him, he's no where to be found in the bug catcher. My husband and I both examined the lid, and we don't think he escaped, so my guess is that he's hiding in these little pockets in the bug catcher that hold the screws – people can't see in them, but they're ladybug-sized. And I think ladybugs hibernate during the winter, so we might not be hearing from Francis for awhile if he crawled into one of those holes to hibernate... Nuts, he had a bunch of visitors all lined up!

Biological Treasure Trove

As a change of pace from the usual “the world is falling apart”-type articles about conservation, I decided to share the following article from CNN.com about an area of Asia called the Mekong Delta region. Scientists are calling the place a “biological treasure trove” because of its rich diversity of flora and fauna. 1,068 species were discovered there between 1997 and 2007 alone; including 15 new species of mammals. Fascinating stuff AND something to read that contains *promising* news about the status of the Earth, rather than the usual bad news and negativity. Here is the article – I find the part about the hot pink cyanide-producing dragon millipede particularly interesting – there’s a picture of it on cnn.com, see the link at the bottom of this post.

(CNN) – A rat believed to be extinct for 11 million years, a spider with a foot-long legspan, and a hot pink cyanide-producing “dragon millipede” are among the thousand newly discovered species in the largely unexplored Mekong Delta region.

The “dragon millipede” is among the 1,068 new species discovered in the Mekong Delta region.

more photos » The region, including parts of Vietnam and five other countries, is home to 1,068 species found between 1997 and 2007, according to a World Wildlife Fund report released this week.

Some of the creatures were not lurking in fertile floodplains or tropical foliage.

A scientist visiting an outdoor restaurant was startled to see a Laotian rock rat among the nearby wildlife. The hairy, nocturnal, thick-tailed rat, which resembles a squirrel, had been thought for centuries to be extinct.

“There is a certain amount of shock because our scientists

will sometimes see something that doesn't fit anything they know," said Dekila Chungyalpa, Director of the Fund's Mekong Program. "They run through a catalogue of wildlife in their brain, asking themselves, 'Have I seen this?'"

Perhaps a more startling discovery than the rat was a bright green pit viper scientists spotted slithering through the rafters of a restaurant in Khao Yai National Park in Thailand.

The Fund dubbed the Mekong a "biological treasure trove." The organization's report "First Contact in the Greater Mekong" says 519 plants, 279 fish, 88 frogs, 88 spiders, 46 lizards, 22 snakes, 15 mammals, four birds, four turtles, two salamanders and a toad were found.

Scientists are still trying to determine if they have uncovered thousands of new invertebrate species.

Scientists are discovering new species at a rate of two per week, said Chungyalpa, who said the reason for publishing the report now was twofold.

"We realized that we should highlight these discoveries in part because of the legacy of war and conflict in the region," she said. "There's an urgency with the threat of development in the Mekong countries."

A horned bovine found in 1991 living in the evergreen forests of the Annamite Mountains of Laos and Vietnam has not been found in recent years, she said.

Timber development and mining industries are encroaching. There are 150 large hydropower dams that have been constructed along the Mekong river, and another 150 are slated to be built, according to the Fund. Dams that can trap and kill fish are at different stages of planning in the Greater Mekong.

High variation in geography and climate zones that enabled species to flourish are now jeopardized by climate change,

said Chungyalpa.

War is always a threat in countries touched by the Mekong River, particularly Burma. Also known as Myanmar, the largest country by geographical area in mainland Southeast Asia has been ravaged over the years by conflict, political instability and natural disaster.

This summer, for example, the United Nations reported that as many as 100,000 people were killed by a cyclone that hit Myanmar. The country's ruling military junta blocked the outside world for weeks before allowing aid to flow into the region.

There are cultural obstacles to protecting rare species, too. Many restaurants serve them as food. Restaurants often have rickety bamboo floors that one can look through to see cages filled with exotic animals, Chungyalpa says. The more exotic the animal, the more status it often bestows on the person who consumes it.

"Reports [like the WWF's] are important because these regions can be educated," said Maureen Aung-Thwin, the director of The Burma Project, which is funded by the George Soros Foundation and supports local Indonesian organizations working toward an open society.

"People are taking climate change more seriously and even the ruling junta have a forestry NGO. There are glimpses of hope," said Aung-Thwin. "But it's also a situation where someone could step forward and say 'We don't need this' and cut it all down."

WWF said it is working with governments and industry to plan the conservation of more than 231,000 square miles of forest and freshwater habitats that cross borders with all countries in the Greater Mekong.

The preceding article was published on CNN.com. To read the entire original article, [click here](#).

My New Pet

I've wanted a new pet for awhile, mostly since my cat passed away almost a year ago now. What I want most is another cat – I love cats, and it would be the perfect type of pet for our household. But unfortunately, I'm allergic to cats. When I had my cat, it was a constant struggle to decide if I should pet her or not. I always wanted to of course, but then I would itch for hours, my eyes would water, and sometimes I'd get hives. And, my allergy symptoms were worse during my 4 pregnancies. I just don't want to go through that again – so no cat for us. We have a Jack Russell Terrier mix, so any type of animal she'll want to chase and bark at is out also – which means no rats, ferrets, small birds, etc. So that leaves me with reptiles or bugs, I guess. And the only reptile I'm interested in owning is a tortoise. Those can be kind of costly and I'm not entirely sure that my Jerk Russell Terrier mix won't want to hunt it, so I'm going to hold off on the tortoise for a little bit. Also complicating the situation is that I really don't have any extra time to spend with a pet, so that limits my options even further. So lately I've been in limbo, trying to decide what to get. But the other day, a new pet sort of fell into my lap.

It's a ladybug I found in the house – normally I'd let any bugs go outside that I find in the house, but it's way too cold out for a ladybug, and I don't want him to suffer while he froze to death. So I looked up what ladybugs eat, and I found out that their favorite food is aphids, which are an even smaller group of insects. Knowing I couldn't get any of those easily, I put a drop of honey in a little container with the ladybug. He went over to it and started eating it! So I put a little drop of water in there too, and he must have

smelled that or something, because he left the honey and went over to the water – it was really interesting to watch. He's survived in captivity about a week now, and I have to say I'm getting a little attached to him as a pet. It started out as just a fun little project, and I didn't expect it to live more than a few days. But he did, and I've named him Francis (like the ladybug from A Bug's Life), and he is my secret pet – the kids don't know about him. If they did, he'd be dead already because my 4-year-old adores bugs and often smothers them with love – literally. I think today I'll go out and get Francis some grass for his container, because earlier when I fed him, he REFUSED to go back into his container! I'm not kidding; he was sticking to my finger and just doing everything possible to not get locked back in there. Finally, I put him on a Q-tip and cut it to fit in the container and locked him in. I feel a little badly that I've kidnapped this ladybug, but I think I'm his only chance at life. Outside, he'd freeze, and if I let him go into my house, I don't think he'd be able to find food and water and he'd either die or go into hibernation until a kid or a dog got him.

So anyway, I guess I have my new pet. I still don't expect him to last very long, but for now it's fun just taking care of an animal, especially since he's my little secret. If he's still around in another week or so, I'll take his picture and post it. Say hi to Francis!

Indiana Jones-ette

Remember that CNN.com article I wrote about the unusual names? The article spotlighted a little girl named Indiana Elizabeth Jones and her brother, Dow. Well, this post is not going to be about them.

Rather, it's an excuse to post a cute photo of my 4-year-old daughter wearing an Indiana Jones-like costume. For the real buffs out there, I know it's not exact, but it's still cute...



Now THAT Is One HORRIBLE Stage Manager

Wow – what happened here? Due to a props department mix-up, an actor was doing a suicide scene with a real knife instead of a fake one. Luckily, he wasn't killed, but this qualifies as a bit more than a simple mistake, wouldn't you say? Perhaps I'll think twice about offering to stage manage anything in the future – apparently there's a lot at stake. And for you actors who read this, how much trust do you have in your props people? And how much will you trust them after reading something like this?

From Time.com

by Adam Smith

Try this for an Agatha Christie plotline: performing on stage inside Vienna's Burgtheater, one of Europe's oldest and grandest, an actor takes a knife to his throat in his character's desperate attempt at suicide. As audience applause

fills the opulent theater, blood pours from the actor's neck. But something's not right. Buckling and staggering his way off stage, the actor collapses to the floor. That's because the knife, and the harm that it's done, are both tragically real. Unfortunately for Daniel Hoevels, a 30-year-old actor from Hamburg, those pages from a murder-mystery came to life last Saturday night during a performance at the Burgtheater of Mary Stuart, Friedrich Schiller's play about the wretched life of Mary Queen of Scots. Rushed to the nearby Lorenz Bohler hospital having sliced through skin and fat tissue but thankfully not his main artery, Hoevels was fortunate to survive. "Just a little deeper," said Wolfgang Lenz, a doctor who treated him, "and he would have been drowning in his own blood."

The police investigation into the calamity points more to a foul-up than foul play. Viennese police say they're not probing the possibility of attempted murder; press reports had speculated a "jealous rival" could have had a hand in Hoevels' injury. Instead, investigators are focusing on possible negligence within the props department of Hoevels' Thalia Theater ensemble. According to local media, the company picked up the knife in Vienna to replace one brought from their Hamburg base that was then found to be defective. One possibility: that props staff forgot to blunt that new blade, which, police say, still had the price tag on it.

Hoevels himself seems to have put the snafu behind him. "I am now absolutely fine again," he told local media, "but I will always for the rest of my working life have a strange feeling about this scene." After reprising the role Sunday, albeit with neck bandaged, Hoevels headed back to Hamburg Monday in preparation for his role in Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. In that play, the long-suffering title character winds up shooting himself in the head. Someone might want to double-check the gun.