

These Are A Few Of My Favorite Things...

animals. Animals are my favorite things. If I'm bored – yeah, right, with 4 kids, when does that happen? Ok, if I were ever bored, my activity of choice would be to visit a zoo, wildlife park, pet store, or anyplace I could see animals. Without leaving the house, I can also research animals on the internet. One of my favorite animal sites is the [University of Michigan's Animal Diversity Web](#). It's amazing how much they've changed the taxonomy (classification of animals) from when I first started doing research on the subject not more than 10 years ago, but it's true – this field is one that's ever-changing.

Every now and then, I think I'll choose an animal to share on my blog. Today's animal is the pangolin. What is a pangolin, you ask? Well, it's a mammal, and it's not a marsupial, a group which contains some of the lesser known species. See, in the classification of mammals, you begin by separating them into placental mammals (live birth) and marsupials (young live in the mother's pouch – all but one type live in Australia). Of course, there is also a third category – egg-laying mammals, but we won't go there because I don't want to lose people's interest by getting too complicated.

So anyway, the pangolin is a placental mammal, yet it's scaly. The scales are actually made of a hair-like material, thereby preserving its status as mammal. Check this out – does this thing look prehistoric or what?



But they're not prehistoric; they still exist today – I wonder how come I've never seen one at a zoo? I guess it's because some animals do better in captivity than others, and I applaud the zoo community for recognizing this.

Interesting tidbits about pangolins, as stated on the Animal Diversity Web:

Pangolins are a small group (seven living species placed in one genus and one family, Manidae) of mammals that feed mostly on ants. They are found in the tropical regions of Africa and Asia. Pangolins are conspicuous and remarkable because their backs are covered with large, overlapping scales made up of agglutinated hairs. But they are strange in other ways as well. Their tongue is extraordinarily long and muscular, arising from the pelvis and the last pair of ribs deep in the animal's chest. As a result, the tongue and associated muscles are longer than the animal's head and body, allowing the tongue to be extruded to an astonishing degree. Pangolins lack teeth. Instead, the the pyloric part of their stomach is thickened and muscular, with odd keratinous spines projecting into its interior. It usually contains pebbles and seems to be used for "chewing" in much the same way as a bird's gizzard. Pangolins have the ability to close their ears and nostrils as well as eyes, presumably to keep ants out.

In short, pangolins are fascinating animals that are closer to you and me on the taxonomy tree than most people would guess – they are mammals, after all. Yet they are a mammal that most

people have not heard of, and surprisingly, there are more than a few mammalian species that have this in common – I will try to share little known facts about little known mammals in my blog.

And oh yeah, since there was a complaint in the comments of another tangents.org blog about this – the song I quoted in my title is “My Favorite Things” from The Sound of Music.

Frumpy or Stylish?

What follows is an insignificant blog post about nothing of particular importance – pure fluff! And this post is for Office fans only! Have you noticed that Pam Beesly has changed her look? When you watch episodes of The Office from Seasons 1, 2 or even 3, you’ll notice that Pam used to be frumpy. Her hair was blah, and she wore the ugliest shirts, sometimes two at a time! But nowadays, she has a nice chic hairdo and dresses less like a 60-year-old librarian and more like a young woman in her late 20’s or early 30’s. At first, I was wondering if the popularity of the show and the character was the inspiration for the change in her character – you know, make her more appealing to her adoring fans. But The Office is my favorite show, and I don’t like to think that it’s sinking to that level – I prefer to attribute the change in Pam to her finally being happily in true love. In the first few seasons, she wasn’t yet in love with Jim (that she was consciously aware of, anyway), and she was unhappy being a receptionist because that’s a far cry from her calling in life – art and illustration. Now she is truly happy, she is in love, and her looks-update reflects this. Ironic that as the character Pam Beesly finds love, the actress who plays her, Jenna Fischer, is in the process of a real-life divorce from

her husband, James Gunn. I don't know, what do you think?

All I know for sure is that I am happy to see Pam's old wardrobe go by the wayside. It was truly hideous and sometimes even difficult to watch – as you can see by watching some of the older episodes!

Technology And Santa

Due to the many technological advances that have been made in the world since we were kids, I think today's youth have somewhat of a different perspective on Santa.

First of all, on Christmas Eve, they can track Santa's travels on the internet. When we were young, it was "get to bed, and if you're not sleeping by the time Santa gets here, he's going to skip our house!" And in 2008, you can forget about needing the zip code for the North Pole so that your kids can use the post office to snail-mail their lists to Santa. In today's world, kids communicate with Santa via email. Also, the lines "He sees you when you're sleeping; he knows when you're awake... etc." have a whole new meaning with the modern-day concept of Big Brother. I reminded my 4-year-old daughter the other day that Santa is always watching her and can see when she's not behaving. Her reply is what led me to wonder about the perception kids in 2008 have of Santa: "Mom, do you have blue lights on the Christmas tree cuz they have cameras and Santa can see." So somewhere my daughter had gotten the idea that Santa uses cameras to watch kids, and the cameras are inside the blue Christmas lights! I wonder, if I invest in some blue Christmas lights, will that make her behavior improve any?

Speaking Of Blagojevich...

In my previous post about Governor Rod Blagojevich of Illinois, I forgot to include a [funny clip from the Daily Show](#) featuring Mr. Blag... Mr. Blavo, um Governor Smith.

And if you have trouble pronouncing his Serbian surname, here is a pronunciation guide from wikipedia.com:

Milorad “Rod” R. Blagojevich (pronounced /blə'gɔɪəvɪtʃ, born December 10, 1956) is an American politician from the state of Illinois.

A Stricken State

I took the tv away from the kids today (not that they watch it that much anyway) so I can watch the events in Illinois unfold as their governor Rod Blagojevich is arrested on corruption charges. No surprise there, just an interesting story being followed by a former resident of that state. In fact, we left Illinois for good in 2003 just months after Blago assumed office, which was mostly a coincidence, but I would say that his being elected to the governor's office did add to the feeling we had that the state was falling apart. It was that obvious from the beginning that Blago was no good. Over the years, I've been following news stories in Illinois by reading dailyherald.com, an online version of a suburban newspaper. Every time there was anything in the paper related to Blago, there was no shortage of comments from readers about the purported corruption of the governor. In October of this year, the governor's approval rating was a measly 4%. And

today, the you-know-what has hit the fan. The governor of Illinois is in prison – the second gov in a row from that state to serve time, as a matter of fact. As we speak, err, as you read this, former Illinois Governor George Ryan is probably watching the Blagojevich coverage from the federal prison he currently calls home. I'm just curious if it makes anyone nervous that our new President-elect is from a state that can't seem to keep its leaders out of the slammer. Hopefully, Barack Obama can set a new standard for politicians from Illinois – that would be refreshing.

But in the meantime, watching Blago's saga unfold is compelling – the reporters on CNN are saying that the breadth of the corruption is unimaginable. They're saying Blago engaged in a 'crime spree' while in office and the details are troubling – including allegations of \$8 million in funding being pulled from a children's hospital because its CEO did not contribute \$50,000 to Blago's campaign. And I'm not writing this to pick on Blago or make any sort of political statement – it's not that I'm the type of person who smiles at the misfortune of others either, but hey, he did this to himself. I just feel badly for the residents of Illinois who trusted this man to be their leader and their representative, and now they're forced to watch with the rest of the world while he is exposed for what he truly is, giving their state a horrible reputation in the process. The main victims in this situation are the Blagojevich family, and it's sad that Rod's two young children will probably have to grow up now without a father in their lives. And unfortunately, Blagojevich is just the latest in a long line of corrupt officials from the Land of Lincoln. Since the early 1970's, 3 former Illinois governors have served time in prison, not including Blagojevich who is a current governor. Here's to hoping the politicians of Illinois can get their act together amidst their growing tradition of disreputableness.

Number Quest

One thing I was excited about doing in my blog was writing board game reviews. Since my husband and I have a game collecting hobby and thereby an extensive amassment of games, we can find a new game to play on any given night. But the kids keep us really busy, and so I forgot all about reviewing board games on my blog, not to mention that it's difficult for us to find the time to play them. But last night amidst the chaos of our house, we found time to haul out a new game and learn it. It was such a fun game that it inspired me to write a review – anyone heard of the game *Number Quest* (or sometimes known as *Nubble*) by DK Publishing Inc.?

The game board consists of a color-coded grid with numbers on it. The game is simple to learn, yet complex to play. *Number Quest* combines chance (dice), strategy, and traditional board game elements such as paper money and tokens. To begin, a player rolls 4 dice which each display the numbers 1-6. The player then uses these numbers to create any whole number 1-100 with any combination of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. The player then places their color chip on the corresponding number on the game board. The color of the number's space on the board determines how much money a player receives for creating that number. There are also Nubble Bonuses and Double-Nubbles, but if you want to find out what those are you should play the game. Even with the Nubbles (double-nubbles involve prime numbers – but don't worry, you don't have to know anything about prime numbers), it's a very easy game to learn. Also, you don't have to be great at math since there are 'cheat charts' provided.

Number Quest is like a two-player strategy game combined with favorite elements of other types of board games, except the

best thing is, you can have up to four players.

Here is a picture of the game board; evidently the game used to be called Nubble.



And another fun thing about Number Quest is how the game ends: it is over when there are tokens on numbers connecting the 1 and the 100 all the way across the board, and the player with the most money at that time wins. Also, there are LOTS of variations to the game; there's a kid-friendly version, you can try playing with a timer, or you can even try ending the game based upon a previously agreed upon time limit or money amount instead of when the tokens stretch across the board. The game is educational for kids, and a great way for adults to exercise their brains, especially if you don't use the cheat chart. Upon first playing, I would give it a 9/10, but keep in mind that we didn't even get in a full game due to time constraints. But it seems like a really fun game and I'm looking forward to trying it with 4 players!

Not Even A Snow Day!

Our first ground-sticking, hill-sledding, angel-making, sidewalk-shoveling snow of the year is here. And why not – it's already December 6th!

I slept in this morning, which is more than I can say for my poor husband. Ironically, last night, he was all gung-ho about staying up late. He's like, "And we can stay up late because the kids have been sleeping in lately – nothing to do tomorrow until later..." And he was right – the two littlest ones *have* been sleeping in lately – until today, of course. We stayed up really late last night thinking the kids would sleep in, but WRONG! They woke my poor husband at 7:20 in the morning today! Myself, I didn't stir until 9:30ish, and I was lolling out of bed when WHOOSH! The door to our walk-in bedroom closet flies open, and it is **snowing** into the closet! Turns out, the closet window was not locked, and so the winter storm had pushed it open, which pushed open the door to the bedroom, and all of a sudden, we had a winter storm *in our house!* 'I guess we're getting some snow," I thought as I pushed the window shut, closed the door, noticed the baby was still sleeping and climbed back into bed. A few minutes later, and WHOOSH! It happened again. "Wow, we're *really* getting snow!" I said to myself as I noticed the ground was already blanketed when I shut the window the second time. This time, I manipulated the frozen lock until it was shut so we wouldn't have to experience the WHOOSH effect again. Well, that's a heck of a way to wake up, especially twice. Besides, it was late enough and time for me to contribute to the daily household stuff. Once downstairs, I checked weather.com, which informed me that we were forecasted to get 1-2 inches of snow during the day, and another possible inch at night. Immediately we began making plans to go sledding, especially since our 4-year-old had been waiting for this all year. Well, it took us all over an *hour* to get ready. And that

didn't even include lunch. We dressed everyone in 2-3 layers, and then we realized we should probably have lunch before we tackled the sled hill. Seeing how difficult it was to unravel everyone from their winter clothes enough to find mouths to insert the lunch, we munched on a few pieces of lunchmeat before heading to the sled hill.

Well, the baby wasn't happy on the sled hill – and before I get all kinds of nasty comments, YES he was bundled intensely! 2-3 layers, then a snowsuit, then a fleece bag-like thingie, then a few blankets, and my husband and I built a little tent-like thing around his carrier... But he IS a July baby, and I have a theory that people are best suited for the season in which they were born, so... no sledding for the little guy. Or for mom, for that matter. I got down the hill once though, and it was lots of fun – much easier climbing the hill this time than last year being a few months pregnant! Although I was disappointed about only getting to go down the hill once, after that I got to sit in the warm car and catch up on my newspaper reading in peace and quiet after the baby fell asleep, so that was nice. And after sledding, since we had kind of cheated on lunch, we treated the kids to Pizza Hut because for some reason, they like to eat there. And every time we're set to go, I realize I don't like it, but I think I'll be able to find something – but I was wrong again! I just don't like Pizza Hut! Well, their iced tea is pretty good... but their buffet sucks, and so now I'm headed home with 4 exhausted kids and I'm all hepped up on iced tea... But the rest of the afternoon went surprisingly smoothly and we even let our daughter have a friend over – providing her mom drove her here so we wouldn't have to venture out in the snow again. When the friend's mom got here, we were chatting about the snow, and we were all dumbfounded about how much we were supposed to get. Usually, the weather channel will over-forecast us. If they say 1-3 inches, we usually get a ground dusting. Today, they say 1-3 inches, and for most of us, it snowed from the time we woke until well after the sun set.

We waited until it was finished to go out and shovel, and by then it was dark and we had gotten a few inches. Now I see on the news that we could get a few more inches...

But anyway, lots of fun today, and all without calling an official Snow Day! Can't all major snow falls be on Saturdays?!?

4 Christmases

I shouldn't have liked it. It's an 82 minute comedy farce co-starring Reese Witherspoon – what's to like? But I actually enjoyed the movie [4 Christmases](#) more than I thought.

So why did I see it if I thought I'd hate it? For one, it was the only thing playing at the matinee price and for two, I had a sort of curiosity about the acting abilities of two country music super-stars: Dwight Yoakam and Tim McGraw. Actually, having seen Dwight Yoakam in [Sling Blade](#), I'm well aware of his acting skills. It was such a great performance in Sling Blade that I thought it was Oscar-worthy. He's not given much to work with in this movie however, and his role as one of those [Leap of Faith](#)-type preachers is not very well developed. I don't think it's any fault of Yoakam, though, but more a testament to the lazy script.

Vince Vaughn and Reese Witherspoon star as a freewheeling couple who don't see the need to marry since they're already happy, and they don't want kids. The first scenes of the movie really emphasize how perfect this couple's lives are, and it's almost sickeningly sweet how well they get along. Enter their extended families, and they become miserable people. It begins when their flight to Fiji is cancelled on Christmas and they are featured on the news. The couple

(their names were not memorable) is now busted in their annual lie about travelling to some exotic location for charity work. They fib about this every year to their families so they can avoid seeing all 4 families (each set of parents is divorced) for Christmas. So now that they can't go to Fiji, they have to visit 4 sets of crazy relatives on one day and yada, yada, anticipated baby jokes and predictable chaos ensues, you get the picture.

For some reason, a lot of Hollywood stars agreed to be in this movie. And just as I expected, Vince Vaughn was the same in this movie as the characters he always plays. He can be funny, but he's not very versatile. I was surprised that Reese Witherspoon did not get under my skin because for some reason, she annoys the heck out of me, and it's distracting when watching her in movies. As far as the country music super-stars are concerned, I consider this movie a waste of Dwight Yoakam's acting talent, and Tim McGraw was barely in the movie at all. I read somewhere that he beefed up for the role, and he was hard to recognize, although I don't really know why he bothered gaining all the weight for a part that hardly has him on camera and with barely any lines. Other big name actors making cameos were Mary Steenburgen, Jon Voight, Robert Duvall, and Sissy Spacek – maybe it's just me, but even though she's almost 60, I still look at her and see [Carrie](#) the fire-starting teen from the famous Stephen King horror movie of the '70's.

Overall, there was only one scene where I couldn't even watch because of its ludicrousness, so instead I turned to my husband and whispered, "This is unbelievably dumb". Other than that, I was entertained, and mostly because it was a holiday movie, it was fun to sit, watch, and eat popcorn. I wonder how [Christmas With The Kranks](#) will compare. I've heard that one is just awful, yet I want to see it since I read the John Grisham novel upon which it was based.

A-Z's of Me

I received another 'getting to know you' email forward, and this one promises to be 'different' so here goes...

Here's a new one & it's much better than previous versions. Cut and paste and fill in the answers. Then, send to all your friends!

- *A – Age: 30
- *B – Bed size: Queen
- *C – Chore you hate: drying dishes
- *D – Dessert you love: depends upon my mood
- *E – Essential start of your day item: yogurt
- *F – Favorite actor(s): Steve Carell, Tom Hanks
- *G – Gold or Silver: Gold
- *H – Height: 5 ft. 8 in.
- *I – Instruments you play: little bit of piano, various percussion instruments
- *J – Job title: Homemaker
- *K – Kid(s): 3 girls and a boy
- *L – Living arrangements: Husband, 4 kids, 2 dogs, and a parrot
- *M – Mom's name: Phyllis
- *N – Nicknames: Mom, Lis
- *O – Overnight hospital stay other than birth: other than MY birth or any birth? Cuz I've had 4 kids... Also some ear infections when I was a baby.
- *P – Phobia or fear: frogs
- *Q – Favorite quote: Until I can think of a better one – "Abraham Lincoln said, if you are a racist, I will attack you with the North." – Michael Scott
- *R – Right or left handed: Right
- *S – Siblings: 1 older sister

- *T- Talent: multi-tasking
 - *U – Unique skill: I can hang a spoon off the end of my nose
 - *V – Vegetable you hate: peas
 - *W Worst habit: procrastination
 - *X – X ray: dental
 - *Y – Yummy food you make: I just made a California blend soup yesterday out of leftovers that everyone loved
 - *Z – Zodiac Sign: Cancer, the crab!
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Review Debut!

As you may know, we are heavily involved in our local community theater. For each play in which we were involved, part of the fun was to see what the newspaper critic would publish about it. Well, the newspaper reviewer has been canned, and so my husband was asked to take over. Not wanting the responsibility of the fallout that one might incur when writing about specific individuals in a small town (not to mention his extremely busy work schedule), he agreed to only do the review about the most recent play because he and I produced it. The following is my husband's review debut that was (supposed to be) published in the newspaper, and I'll go ahead and give myself a secondary byline for editing. I must note however, that those of you who have seen this particular edition of the paper might notice more than a few differences between the two reviews. And my husband did not write the paragraph about his credentials that appears at the end of the print version – the newspaper wrote it with info my husband supplied when asked how he was qualified to do the review. It's just funny that for the past few years, we've been assuming the quirks of our play reviews were the fault of the reviewer when in actuality, the newspaper changes much and

does lots of editing!

Don't Hug Me is a Winter Treat

This past Wednesday evening my wife and I had the privilege of attending a preview of *Don't Hug Me*, a comedy by Paul Olson.

As we took our seats, my eyes were immediately drawn to the brilliantly detailed set. Just a quick glance at the rustic wood paneling, Paul Bunyan style restroom sign, and moose head beer tap and I was instantly transported to a northern Minnesota bar.

This first little scene sets the stage for the show perfectly. Minnesota gets cold in the winter, and Gunner is tired of it. He wants to escape the frigid temperatures and move to Florida, but Clara's heart is in Minnesota. This conflict is the basic central plot throughout *Don't Hug Me* and Roberts and Snider deliver it with a very nice chemistry together. Their bantering back-and-forth comes across as genuine and is also very funny.