

An Afgan Girl on the Other Side of the Sky

I just finished reading a really interesting book about a girl named Farah Ahmedi. She grew up in Afghanistan, and when she was only 7 years old, she stepped on a land mine and was almost killed. She was one of the wounded children chosen to get medical care in Germany, so she had good medical care for 2 years, but it came with the price of loneliness because her family had to stay behind in Afghanistan, she didn't speak German, and no one at the hospital spoke her language. Her leg was amputated, and her other leg was rebuilt without a knee, leaving her unable to bend it. When she returned to Afghanistan as a 9-year-old, the Taliban was starting to take over, and a rocket hit her house, killing her father and two sisters. Her brothers were forced to try to flee to Pakistan in fear of being drafted or executed by the Taliban, and she hasn't heard from them since. Since she and her mother were the only members of her family left, they were forced to flee the Taliban also – we've all heard about how the Taliban don't treat women very well, and women couldn't even go out in public without men. This was difficult for Farah and her mother since they didn't have any men left in their family. They spent 4 years as refugees in Pakistan until they were finally granted approval into the World Relief's American Refugee program. After the long process of applying and finally getting approved, they were waiting to leave for America when September 11, 2001 happened, and their trip was cancelled as no foreigners were being allowed into the country. Within 6 months however, the program was reinstated, and they came to America.

The book chronicles all the adventures, trials, and tribulations it took for Farah to become the successful American citizen she is today. It was a VERY interesting

read; from the details of life in Afghanistan under the Taliban to the struggles of an Afgan widow and her daughter getting used to the American way of life. In fact, they had been through so much, that when they got to America, they were certain that their American hosts were actually slave owners who were trying to imprison them. It's a wonderful story about the triumph of the human spirit, and I recommend the book to anyone who likes learning about different parts of the world, other cultures, or just likes reading a good non-fiction life story. In fact, her book was published when she entered a Good Morning America contest and became a finalist. I heard about it because Farah attended the rival high school to the one where I went, so for me, it was interesting to read about the area I grew up in as seen through the eyes of someone who had been through as much as Farah and was seeing the area for the first time as an immigrant. [Check it out!](#)

Letter to the Humane Society

As an animal lover, I am a big believer in getting as many of your pets from a humane society as you can. Sometimes there are reasons why a family might need a "purebred" animal (allergies to certain breeds, professional showmanship, etc.), but for the most part, I don't really like when pet stores carry dogs and cats for sale, especially when they try to make "breeds" out of dogs that are mutts! Case in point – we visited a Petland this weekend, just something to do to pass the time while we were in Fort Wayne, Indiana visiting the zoo, and I noticed that at least HALF of their puppy stock was mixed breeds! The same animals you could buy (rescue!) for a small fraction of the price at a humane society, or even a pound, where they euthanize (KILL) animals just because they have too many! And here these pet stores are creating more,

just for profit and to “design” a custom-made dog for somebody that in my opinion, does not have their priorities straight if they’re willing to spend extra money just to have a “designer” puppy. Petland, etc. will make up breeds; for example, the store we went to had “puggles” (a pug crossed with a beagle), cock-a-poos (cocker spaniels mixed with poodles), and “borderjacks” (border collie mixed with a jack russell terrier), to name a few. Anyway, I won’t go into the reasons for choosing to adopt your next dog from a shelter vs. a pet store (except to say it will SAVE A LIFE!!!), but I just thought I would post a copy of the letter I’m going to send to my local humane society to thank them for the awesome family pet we adopted a few months ago from their shelter:

Dear Humane Society:

We just wanted to say thank you for our new family member. We adopted “Sasha” from your facility on March 4, 2008. We renamed her Beesley after a character from our favorite tv show, and not only has she learned her new name and some new tricks, she has become a very much loved part of our family. She gets along with our 2 dogs just like one of the “pack”, and she is an energetic, obedient, and gentle playmate for our 3 young children. She seems really happy in our house, and we couldn’t be happier after choosing any other dog for our new pet. Thanks so much for taking such good care of her while she was a homeless dog and for having patience with us while we got to know her to see if she would fit into our family. She fits like a lost piece of our family puzzle, and we couldn’t imagine a better dog... well, except for our “old lady” of the house, the pack leader named Charity, who Beesley worships and spoils along with the rest of us! Here is a picture of the kids with Charity and Beesley. Thanks again!



Family Update

I haven't been posting as much as I used to lately. This is because of the surge of activity in our lives... It's also led to me making less phone calls to catch up with people, so let me fill you in this way about what's been going on with us...

Taylor has been needing lots of dental work in Toledo. It's been treacherous, but we have only ONE appointment left, and her teeth look (and now that the pain is gone today – feel) great! She's been handling it all SO well that she is the dentists' and dental assistants' favorite patient. I think they will really miss her. After she leaves the office though, she has a really hard time with the bleeding, and

today was especially bad for her, and she also had some pain. But she came out of it all ok, and if she takes good care of her teeth from now on, we shouldn't have to go through anything like this again!

Despite all the bleeding, pain, and the \$30 price tag for gas (!), our trips to Toledo have been kind of a fun time for just the 3 of us – Mom, Dad, and biggest sister – to hang out. We've been going out to eat, and stopping at the zoo a lot. That zoo membership they got me for my birthday last year has REALLY paid off! We've been watching the family of orangutans they have at the Toledo Zoo – there's a mom, dad, a 4-year-old, and an almost 2-year-old. Seeing them week-to-week, I've gotten to know their personalities and have grown a little attached to them – when our trips to Toledo stop, I will miss them! The patriarch of the family, a VERY large orang named Boomer, is a gentle giant. His hands alone are about the size of my 8-year-old's leg from hip to knee! While most males of his species are solitary creatures, Boomer enjoys being with his family, and he even assists with the rearing of the young, something almost unheard of for male orangs! Today, Kutai, the mother, carried her youngest baby with her and sat on the window of her exhibit that positions her directly above the guests. People were looking up at her, and when they took their camera out, she smiled, teeth and all! I of course did not have my camera with me today to capture this awesome zoo moment ☐ The keeper was saying that Kutai enjoys looking at books, and she can recognize pictures of herself vs. pics of other orangs, so is it possible that she understands what a camera is?!? I think the orangs have taken over the gorillas as my favorite zoo animals to watch. They are just so intelligent and their actions are so individual... Last week when we were there, we heard the zookeeper talking about how they escaped from their exhibit after it was first built. Seems they watched the contractors build their new exhibit from an adjacent one, and apparently noticed when they missed caulk in one little spot. As soon as they were let into their

new exhibit, they went right over to the spot, pulled the fence from the wall, and out they climbed, leaving the zookeepers to fetch them from the roof! Sounds like something that would have happened to Jack Hanna ☐ The oranges were inside on such a nice day today because the keepers were hooking up their water toy – when they push a button, it soaks guests who walk by on the outside of the exhibit! That should be lots of fun; I really hope I can make it there at least once this summer to see them activate it, but with the new baby and all, it's doubtful... But anyway, it was a great day at the zoo, and we even saw a wild woodpecker, pecking away high in a tree!

Monday night, the girls had their “sibling class” at the hospital. It was really fun and informative. They saw the room where mom and baby will be staying, then they diapered and swaddled “babies” (fake of course!) and made little t-shirts for their new sister. The one thing I would recommend for the class that they didn't include however, is an emphasis on how older siblings can even help mom way BEFORE the baby comes by being well behaved, picking up some extra chores, or just doing the chores they are asked to do. We've had some difficulties in these areas lately, and they are lucky their wonderful father has picked up all their slack around the house! But other than that, the sibling class was great and they loved it.

Zoo trips aside, just the same business around here as usual... Taylor is still taking her piano lessons, her school will be over for the summer in June (5 or 6 weather days to make up; I've lost count!), Sammie really likes her school, especially now that they go outside every day they are able, and Disney is growing by leaps and bounds, totally walking, totally talking, making her way towards two... help us all ☐ Seriously, though, Sammie's terrible two's had already started by the time she was the age Dis is now, and I wouldn't say they are over yet! So I am optimistic that Disney's will seem

like a piece of cake comparatively... and hopefully ☐

Game Days Past

For some reason, the old game show [“Sale of the Century”](#) from the 1980’s crossed my mind the other day. I enjoyed this show tremendously as a kid, so I looked on youtube to see if I could find any episodes because I don’t really remember what it was all about. They didn’t have any full episodes, but I did see enough bits and pieces to enjoy the nostalgia. And I came across this clip of Simon Cowell’s first tv appearance as a contestant on the British version of this show:

Watching vintage game shows on youtube got my husband thinking about the movie [Quiz Show](#), which is about the game show scandal of the late 1950's. It was a time when quiz shows were very popular, and one of the most popular shows of the time called "[Twenty-One](#)" was exposed for being rigged – in other words, the producers would tell the contestants the correct answers, and when to answer correctly or incorrectly to guarantee or fix the outcome of the show. On youtube, we were able to find the actual episode of "Twenty-One" that was chronicled in the movie and where the scandal broke. [Click here](#) to see it – it's in 3 parts, so you can find parts 2 and 3 off to the side where it says 'related videos'. We also watched a "Time and Again" documentary about the scandal, which included interviews with the contestants involved and was very interesting – [click here](#) to see part 1 of 5 of that show; again, the remaining parts can be linked from the right side of youtube. Surprisingly, the movie "Quiz Show" is very true to the real story of the scandal. When watching the episode of "Twenty-One" that started it all, my husband noted that it was very close to how the movie portrayed it. It's been awhile since I've seen the movie, so I will have to see it again because I didn't remember whether it was close or not.

After watching the interesting "Twenty-One" videos, we moved onto the game show "[Press Your Luck](#)" from the 1980's. It's the one where people get spins on a big game board, and they yell, "No Whammys, no whammys, STOP!" A whammy was like a 'lose-your-turn'. When a contestant spun one, a cartoon character (the whammy) would come out and do something different on the tv screen, like a dance or something silly, but it meant no money and the end of the contestant's turn. If you were like me and a kid watching the show when it was on, then you were waiting for people to get the whammys so you could see the little cartoons. For this reason, I would NOT have liked the episodes that aired with a contestant named Michael Larson, an unemployed ice cream truck driver who

memorized the pattern of the board, and spun a whopping 47 times! He won the following prizes:

1. \$104,950 in cash
2. 1 sailboat worth \$1015
3. 1 trip to Kauai worth \$1636
4. 1 trip to the Bahamas worth \$2636

This amount of cash was unheard of for this show, and the host kept making dumb jokes about how the contestant could now *buy* the Bahamas or CBS. After the show, they gave Michael Larson a hard time about collecting his winnings, but in the end, it was found that his memorizing the board's patterns was not cheating. They reconfigured the game show board, of course, but sadly, Michael Larson's story did not have a happy ending. He had some struggles over the years, and ended up dying of throat cancer in 1999. His life during and after the "Press Your Luck" appearances makes for a very interesting story though; perhaps they should make a movie about that – [read it here](#). They pulled those episodes of "Press Your Luck" in syndication, but they have shown them in multiple specials that aired on tv, most notably the game show network. They even invited Larson's brother to compete against the newly configured Press Your Luck whammy board to see if he could beat it, and he could not. Below are Larson's appearances on "Press Your Luck". Note the reactions of his fellow contestants as well as those of the host. A few interesting notes: While waiting to be on the show, Larson met Ed Long, a Baptist preacher booked for his fourth taping. They struck up a conversation. When it was Ed's turn to go on, Michael said to him, "I hope we don't have to face each other on the show." His wish wouldn't come true, as Ed had won his previous game with \$11,516. Watch for Ed on the clip. Also note the host of the show, Peter Tomarken, who was killed in a plane crash in 2006. He was a private pilot who volunteered for an organization that flew low-income patients for medical needs. His airplane had engine trouble, and he and his wife were killed when their plane crashed into the Santa Monica Bay.

The Office – Night Out

Just reading the synopsis of last night's episode even before I saw it made me laugh out loud:

Michael and Dwight decide a trip to the Big Apple is in order. There, they hope to mingle with bigwig Ryan and his colleagues at the nightclubs. Back in Scranton, the staffers must work on Ryan's pet website project – on a Saturday, no less.

The episode was hilarious, as usual. I won't give too much away, except that I almost fell off my couch laughing when Earl or Hank (or whatever the security guard's name ended up being) made a cameo – priceless!

For my friends who have just started watching the show, I don't know about you, but I really like to read tvguide's blog about the show the day after I watch it. Go to tvguide.com, find the tab at the top that says "What's on TV", and then go to Tv Show Blogs under that and find The Office. Here is a quick link to the tvguide write-up of this week's episode.

I agree with the tvguide writer – I caught on to Ryan's drug use pretty early in the episode, just before he ran for the bathroom sniffing, which only confirmed my suspicion. But I think the writer of the episode ([BJ Novak](#), aka "Ryan" himself) meant for it to be obvious that Ryan was experimenting with the nose candy. And to answer the tvguide blogger's question, yes, I think it will spell problems for him with corporate in the future. He's really been on my nerves lately, but in a good way, he is fun to watch and be annoyed with. Now with his drug problem and the fact that his 'perfect life' facade is starting to crack, I feel badly for him. It's been fun to

watch his transformation from temp to corporate bigwig, and along the way, he's always been kind of a jerk, not a very likable person at all. But that's what is so great about the Office – as the tvguide blogger says, “The Office is a terrific show because most of its comedy is rooted in real human behavior (no matter how exaggerated)...” – I couldn't agree more!

Parenthood

After all this piñata talk (found the ñ symbol!), we had to pop in the movie [Parenthood](#) the other night. Along with the hilarious piñata scene (ok, now I am over-using the ñ a little bit), I had actually forgotten how entertaining this movie really is. It's a really good blend of comedy and drama, and it's not just another silly comedy – it actually has a valuable life lesson. I highly recommend it to anyone who has kids, but I do not recommend it for the whole family since it's rated PG13 and can actually be somewhat crude at points. It has *great* directing and acting and 2 academy award nominations to boot.

The movie revolves around the Buckman family – elderly, empty-nesters (sort-of) and their 4 grown children and their families who are all facing regular life problems of their own. [Steve Martin](#) plays Gil, a man whose own overused stress responses to everyday life are mirrored in his son, and that situation only stresses him out further! He is such a worry-wart that he has lost all ability to enjoy regular life and its trials and tribulations, and my favorite part of the movie is when he realizes this; thanks to the wise, if confused, words of his very elderly grandmother. This scene is hilarious and heartwarming at the same time, and if you're

anything like me (someone who tends to be a worrywart, sweats the small things), a movie like this really helps to keep the small bumps of life in perspective.

Watching this movie again as a parent made me appreciate it so much more than I appreciated seeing it as a teenager. Again, I'd really recommend it to any parent, and if you've seen it already, I'd say try it again if it's been awhile. That's what I did, and I would have to say that it's now one of my favorite movies!

Blankie Woes

I think 8 is too old for a blankie. I mean, it's ok to have one at that age, but only if it doesn't interfere with daily life. On February 19, I made a post in my blog about the same subject – the post is called Blankies. It's funny to read that post now and see how far we've come, yet we've also gone no where on this issue at the same time. My 8-year-old daughter has this raggedy blankie that goes everywhere with her... well, that's not accurate – it would if it could, but I put the kabosh on that long ago. It got so bad that if we didn't remember it to go out to eat or walmart or somewhere simple like that, the whole family would pay the price. So, probably about a year ago now, I said, that's it, blankie stays home. I got tired of the liability involved also. If we brought it to a restaurant or anywhere for that matter and it got dirty, I would have to wash it immediately when we got home or else it wouldn't be ready for bed time that night, and my daughter would put up a huge fuss. Now it's gotten to the point where I'm worried it won't make it through the wash in one piece. Heck, it's barely in one piece as it is.

A few weeks ago, I said, it's time for the blankie to stay upstairs. It's only for bed and that's it. My daughter would bring it down in the morning, then she'd leave for school all day, and I got tired of tripping over it while doing housework. She hasn't been listening to that rule very well... and old habits die hard, I guess. The other day, she brought it downstairs and left it on the couch where little sister came and sat on it. Problem was, little sister had just wet the bed, so needless to say, blankie needed a wash. Somehow, I did not find out about this until bedtime that night, when a huge fuss was made about blankie not being available for bedtime. I was not about to do a load of laundry at 10 at night, especially on a Sunday, which is technically (though it never works out this way with a family of 5 almost 6 and 3 of them little kids), my day off laundry. Not only that, but the blankie would not have been ready for at least an hour anyway, and it was already bedtime. There was much struggle and lots of tears, but she did finally spend a night without her beloved blankie. And guess what? She survived unscathed!

A few weeks ago, she had a sleepover for girl scouts. The rules were, bring a sleeping bag or a blanket, so she planned on bringing her blankie, which is holey, threadbare, and of no use when it comes to keeping someone warm. Not only that, but she is at a good age for kids to start making fun of her for something like that, and both my husband and I know from experience that kids do not forget things easily! She has a really nice sleeping bag that she's never actually gotten to use at a sleepover yet, so we convinced her to just bring that... or so we thought. She packed her own overnight bag, and I didn't think to check for contraband. The next day when I unpacked the overnight bag, I found the stowaway blankie. I felt so duped.

Ironically, as I'm writing this very post, my husband came downstairs and said, "Taylor can't find her blankie. She is really upset about it and crying." It was downstairs today,

even though it wasn't supposed to be, so I know I had to add it to my huge load of laundry to bring upstairs... I told him to pass the message to Taylor that if I find it down here again, it will be gone forever because I am so sick of the whole situation. And I haven't done anything with it yet, honest, tempting as it may be. Don't get me wrong, I'm not mean or cruel, and I don't have a problem with kids needing a comfort item, even at 8. But when that item interferes with daily life, and one cannot function without it, then I believe it's time for a change. She should hope Dad or I don't find the blankie first – we are pretty fed up with the situation and cannot guarantee the safety of the blankie should we come across it!

Here He Is!!!

My new nephew looks totally adorable, so I had to share his picture:

Ryan Timothy



Spring is in the Air = BABIES!!!

CONGRATULATIONS to my sister in Illinois, who gave birth to a healthy 8 lb. 15 oz. baby boy today!!! I can't wait to see pictures of the little darling, and I will post them when I get them (HINT HINT - no, just kidding, I know you have much more important things to do right now than to worry about sending pictures) I just wish I could hold him! And Congratulations to Austin on becoming a big brother - it's an important job buddy; I know you'll be a great one! Welcome, Ryan Timothy!

Other baby news - our kids' babysitter's cat had kittens the other day. Look how unbelievably cute they are:



See if you can count 'em - makes a good picture puzzle, doesn't it? There are 6 - the little orange one kinda blends in with the towel - he's unique!

My daughter's teacher had her baby, and my two cousins also had their babies, which means 3 of my grandmother's 4 expected great-grandchildren for this year are here already! I am the last one standing ☐

Seriously, I feel left out, being the only one left pregnant out of all the women I knew who were expecting. I am ecstatic that all the babies are healthy and thriving though - that is truly something to be thankful for! For the most part, I love being pregnant, though I have to say this one is the most difficult pregnancy yet in some ways. Also the easiest in some ways too, so it's not all bad... But my feet are killing me constantly... I feel like I can't stand for more than 10-15 minutes at a time, and with a toddler and 2 other little kids to care for, that is a tough feeling to have. Plus I'm exhausted much of the time, and have terrible heartburn a lot... all this and 3 months to go, not to mention the fact that the weather is only getting nicer, then it will get really hot and then I'll just be miserable. I hate not having the energy or the desire to go outside to enjoy these

nice days... it makes me feel guilty, especially because it means my toddler can't enjoy them with me. Is it mean for her to be couped up in the house with me on gorgeous days like today? She doesn't seem to mind though, and we do play together lots while I'm sitting down, so it can't be all bad... I just tell myself that in August I will have much more energy and time to enjoy the weather. It's hard to imagine now, but some of the fatigue and aches and pains will lift, I HOPE!

Holy Regrettable Cooking Show, Batman!

For our date night tonight, we decided to attend the much hyped cooking show sponsored by our local newspaper. Maybe that explains why it was so hyped right there – being sponsored by the newspaper = lots of free advertising, and since I read the paper every day, maybe it was drilled into my head that this thing would be fun. Was I ever wrong.

It began when we arrived only 10 minutes before the show started, and every seat was full. It was held in the high school gym, which means we now had to find seats in the bleachers and squeeze past everyone else – pregnancy bump and all. I was so close to turning around and leaving right then and there; the fact that I didn't was my second mistake after buying the tickets to attend the thing in the first place. Apparently our local high school has no air conditioning, because the 1500 or so people who were crammed into the gym were all fanning themselves with their free cookbooks. Which brings me to another reason why I thought this thing would be such great fun. The tickets were \$10 / person, then there were coupons in the paper for \$3 off, which brings each ticket to \$7. They advertised a “bag full of samples, goodies, and free cookbooks” to every attendee, along with a chance to win

lots of pretty cool door prizes. The sample bag was alright – no complaints there. The “choosing which wine with dinner” wheel made a great fan to combat the heat, I must say, and I’m not the only one who thought so – most of the 1500 sardines in attendance were using it as such. But on the way into the show, apparently that’s when they handed out the doorprize entry blank and the free can of chili sauce, and somehow (maybe it was my panic when I saw the crowd we’d have to conquer to find a seat) I missed getting either handout. So, here we were, sitting on the bleachers packed in like sardines in 100°+ heat, and I’ve just found a way to cut our chances of winning a doorprize *in half*. Even though we were a little on the late side, that actually turned out to be a good thing because by the time we bumped and stumbled into our seats (ie, the square foot of space each person was allowed for their person, legs, knees, pregnancy bumps etc.), the “show” was ready to begin, thank goodness. Except it became clear that once the show began, it was not going to pick up pace. It was a woman on a stage making recipes (she was there to do 8 of them she said!) so far away that you couldn’t see anything she was doing. Her “jokes” were lame, and she barely had a personality. So now, this was hot, boring, uncomfortable for my aching body, and my chances of winning a cool grill are like 1 in 1500 instead of 2 in 1500? Forget being polite or wasting money. Our time is so much more important; especially with 3.5 kids. We bumped and stumbled our way out of there, same way we got in, mumbled our apologies for stepping on people, and didn’t look back. We fled the cooking show.

So that brings me to the Batman reference in the title of this post. When we went to pick up the kids at the babysitter’s after the cooking show debacle, we went in her laundry room to check out the 2-day-old kittens... all of a sudden, screams erupted. I’m normally not a screamer, really more of a gasper when I get startled, but the babysitter and her daughter and my daughters were ahead of me in the laundry room and saw a bat. Their screams made me scream – I’m not afraid of a

little Ohio brown bat, I swear, but apparently screaming is contagious. So both of our husbands come running, and hers goes for a broom. Mine respects how sensitive I am about animals, so he asked for a bowl and was going to capture it. So they open the door, only to find the mommy cat had beaten the babysitter's husband to the murder of the bat. She devoured it whole, and there was really nothing left for me to be sad about, so I pretended it didn't happen, took pictures of the really cute kittens, and left. What a night!