

An Afternoon With The FBI

It seemed like something out of a movie, our visit to the local FBI office yesterday. Except that it wasn't a movie, and the office wasn't exactly local...

Let me back up. It's December, and don't you know, that seems to signal a yearly torrent of bad luck thrown our way. Shortly after turning the page on our calendar this month, we found out (among other things) that my husband's website (and our family's livelihood) had been attacked. And I don't mean a little harmless virus or an annoying spam attack – it's a DDoS – simply put, someone targeted this website, and essentially used thousands of computers around the world to overload this website and crash the server. It's enough of an incident to capture both the interest of the local media and the FBI, both of whom politely requested interviews yesterday. So we drove out to the city, found the government building that houses the FBI offices, walked inside and checked with the doorman who wanted to know who we were there to see.

"I have an appointment with Mr. X at the FBI (*name changed for privacy*)."

said my husband, and once it was confirmed that he was on the list, the doorman stated that he "would get us up." He led us to the elevator and punched in a special code – can't just push the floor number for the FBI these days it seems. We got off the elevator and waited around for a few minutes, entertained by the FBI's 10 Most Wanted posters. One in particular caught my husband's eye. "Doesn't that look like our neighbor?" He asked me, and I had to agree. I began to read the description and was surprised to see that it did seem to describe our neighbor – he's into sports like golf and dirt-biking, and it's strange because my husband and I would often notice the neighbor packing up his car for weekend trips and coming back, unloading things like helmets, golf clubs, and lots of other sporting equipment. Such is life when you

don't have kids, we thought, and I guess you should know that the reason we pay so much attention to this neighbor's activities is because he happens to have a nasty cat that terrorizes our neighborhood. So while keeping tabs on [that darn cat](#), we've observed some of our ~~most-wanted~~ neighbor's behavior. The kicker of this whole coincidence is that the Wanted-by-the-FBI guy was listed as possibly having bi-sexual tendencies, and that fits in with what we've seen about our neighbor as well. Don't get me wrong, I don't think it's him, but it was an entertaining wait, to say the least.

So then an agent comes out of a door and asks if we've been helped. We said not yet and repeated the name of the agent we were there to see. We were led to a door, and there was a sophisticated series of security measures that the man went through to enter (not going to repeat them here on the internet out of respect for the security of the FBI – not that I even knew what he was doing anyway). In this small waiting area, there was a metal detector, which began to go crazy every time this guy went near it – I forgot to mention that he's carrying 2 or 3 very large bags. He disappears behind a door, and the man we were supposed to meet with appears and introduces his assistant – a lady carrying a notepad, a pen, and oh yeah, I shouldn't forget to mention the large gun she was packing tucked into the back of her skirt. What kind of assistant is that!?



Two of the most famous fictional FBI agents in pop culture history: Agents Mulder and Scully from the X-Files. Ok, so our agents were not Mulder and Scully, but I

couldn't resist making the comparison.

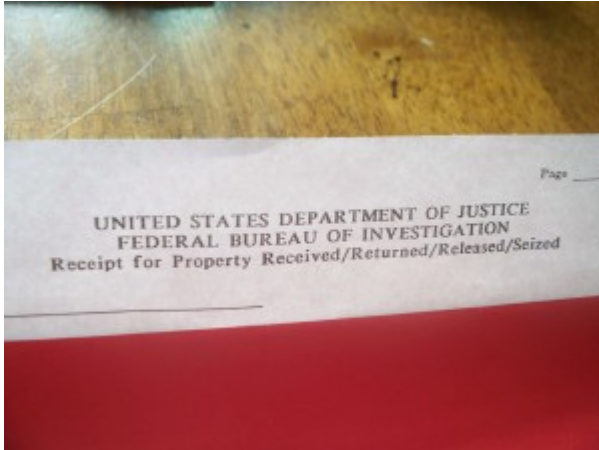
So we go into a conference room of sorts, and the interview begins. The agent and his assistant are not unfriendly, and they want to know the facts of the case. They are both taking notes, but probably most surprising to us is the absence of laptop computers – these FBI guys (from the cyber crimes division) are taking notes with pens on Steno pads, and that's not even a joke. But it is hilarious.

The entire day had a Men in Black-like feel... If you've seen the movie, then you remember the part where Will Smith is recruited to be a man in black – he goes to this bland looking government building that turns out to be very sci-fi on the inside with all the security measures and things like that. Such was the case here – lots of doors, signs about authorization, keypads, things like that, very sci-fi, and my husband told the agent so at the end of the interview. Mr. X seemed to chuckle (we wondered on the way home, are FBI agents trained to drain themselves of personality?), and he told us that we could just take the elevator back downstairs, no special code needed – thanks for the advice.

All in all, a very interesting trip. Made me want to do things like see Salt (a movie about the FBI) or read [Special Agent: My Life on the Front Lines as a Woman in the FBI](#) again. Did the FBI interview do any good for my husband's business? We don't know yet. It depends if they catch the people who are doing it. The FBI disclaimed several times that it doesn't seem as if the damages the business has incurred will be recovered, and we of course are praying otherwise. Whatever happens, this is part of learning to trust God's plan for us, isn't it? Easier said than done. I'm really hoping that the stress on my husband dissipates soon...

And oh yeah, a little souvenir from the FBI (the property we gave them was received and not seized, in case you are

wondering):



Mars, Venus, Whatever You Call It

It seems like men and women can be from different planets at times. During a series at youth group called “Lovesick”, we were shown the following videos, and they illustrate the differences between the opposite sexes hilariously – Enjoy!

[cartoonconversation-outtoeat.mp4](#)

[cartoonconversation-pant.mp4](#)

Goodbye To Ron Santo

People who don't pay much attention to baseball and the MLB, particularly the Chicago Cubs, might not realize who Ron Santo is or that he is gone.



Ron Santo, legendary Chicago Cubs supporter, has passed away at the age of 70. Gaining popularity first as a player then as an outspoken sportscaster, Ron Santo became the voice and face of the Chicago Cubs in recent years. Always saying what was on his mind, Santo's gravelly voice was the easiest way to find that Cubs game on WGN radio 720 in a hurry. As a Cubs fan, I will miss it.

Sadly, Ron Santo did not live to see himself inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame, nor did he see his beloved Cubbies win the World Series. If you'd like to read more about Ron Santo or about his crusade against juvenile diabetes, [here is an article](#) in the suburban Chicago newspaper, The Daily Herald.

Condolences and prayers to the Santo family.

Thanksgiving Traditions

Another holiday, come and gone... seems like yesterday when I told my husband that I would be on board to put up the Christmas decorations early. Had we not done it then, they would be late now; how fast time flies. Our Thanksgiving holiday was great, as always, and in this glorious season, I'm making sure to take the time to truly appreciate our

blessings, thank God for everything, and to savor the family traditions and memories we've been creating.

From the **delicious** spread on Thanksgiving Day (thank you to Hubby!) shared with great friends to the joyous 'Welcome Santa!' parade we enjoy annually in our small town the day after Thanksgiving (though a tad bit nippy at the parade this year, but fun as ever!); with Black Friday bargains (Hubby took a few kids Black Friday shopping early in the morning this year while I slept in – always fun!) and a long, lazy vacation with the kids while they enjoy a break from school, our Thanksgiving weekend was happy, prayerful, relaxing, and full of traditions that I hope will last for years to come.

Hope your Thanksgiving was happy, safe, wondrous, and that you were able to have some time to relax and reflect upon your blessings... may the rest of your 2010 holidays hold the same.

JJ

My little parakeet JJ passed away some time during the night last night. Not much of a surprise there; he has been sick for a while, and even though he began looking well again a few weeks ago, he took a turn for the worse in the last few days. He looked so awful yesterday that I knew he wouldn't make it through the night. But there was always hope that I was wrong. He had been on what I called "death watch" before and made it through the night, so the hope was there.

I don't really know what happened – he was only about a year old, and I had had him since January, not even a year. He started showing signs of illness about 2 months ago. I gave him medicine and TLC, and he began to do better, but like I said, I guess it just wasn't enough.

He was “just a parakeet”, but I loved his company. I was so excited to see what kind of bird he would become; how he would look and act as an adult and who he would be when he felt healthy, but now I won’t know. Honestly, taking care of animals is one of my favorite things in the whole world, so why do I have to be so bad at it? A few months ago, JJ was so happy when we moved his cage into the living room so he had company all day rather than living in the solitude (or was it protection?) of our bedroom upstairs. We kept him right near the Halogen lamp, could there have been a smell or the heat or something that made him sick? On the rare occasion that a bug would fly into the Halogen, yuck, what a smell that made. We tried to get rid of Teflon pans and things like that, but JJ’s new home in the living room wasn’t too far from the kitchen – maybe cooking smells did him in? He was a fraidy-bird, so I couldn’t really take apart his cage to clean it out; maybe it got too dirty? A dozen why’s and what-if’s, but no more parakeet. At least he is not suffering anymore – it was getting really difficult to see him in his cage looking so miserable and worse for the wear. Poor JJ. Even if he was just a caged bird, I miss him already. Ugh, and the cold weather is back today... fitting somehow, just feels like a miserable day all around – time to make the best of it.

If Cats Ran The World

Because my family and friends know that I’m an animal lover, they’re always sending me emails with pictures and articles about cute animal-related topics. All of them are adorable, but this one stands out as something to share – a man built an entire feline-sized village for homeless cats! Kind of sounds like something I’d like to do with some extra free time, money, and if only I didn’t have the darn cat allergy that’s

always getting in the way...

Below are some pictures of his creation. For the entire story, [click here](#). And to visit the cat village online, The Caboodle Ranch, [click here](#).



Poor Paul The Psychic Octopus

No play on words necessary for this blog post – there really was a Psychic Octopus named Paul who lived in Germany, and he recently passed away at the ripe old age (for an octopus) of $2\frac{1}{2}$ years.

In his lifetime, however short it seems to us humans, [Paul made himself famous](#) with his uncanny ability to predict World Cup game winners correctly! Before games, Paul would receive 2 boxes of mussels, one each with a flag of the countries of the two teams who would be facing off in the World Cup. The country whose box was eaten out of by [Paul](#) first was declared Paul's pick as the winner of that match, and he predicted correctly an astounding 100% of the time (8/8) for his World Cup predictions, and 86% (12/14) overall.

RIP • Paul the Octopus • 2008-2010



Preschool or Politics? Bonus Episode

November Election Day 2010 – it's come and gone; everyone is ecstatic to be freed from being forced to absorb those scathing campaign ads. In the wake of Election Day, one Chicago 'burb emerged with a history-making result. Buffalo Grove, Illinois citizens voted upon and passed a successful recall vote of a village trustee for the first time ever. You might have [read my previous post](#) about Lisa Stone, the *tenacious* (polite word) village trustee who helped make Buffalo Grove village council meetings look like too-good-to-be-real-for-reality-tv. She would do things like nit-pick, interrupt, refuse to take order; many times single-handedly being responsible for meetings lasting into the following morning! Lisa Stone and the Village President Elliott Hartstein would butt heads at every meeting until he was so frustrated he looked ready to burst. Well, the votes were counted, and Ms. Stone has to leave office. And if you think that Village President Hartstein was happy about this, check out this little video of him impersonating (complete with wig) the thorn, uh, Stone in his side:

Yes, it was a horrible political decision, and a public apology was issued promptly. A guy's gotta vent, but he should have known better. Just when we thought the reality show was canceled, a bonus episode appears. [For the whole story, click here.](#)

***It's come to my attention that the video is no longer available – bummmmer!! It was too funny! Well, there's nothing I can do about that, so here's the next best thing: pictures.

Ms. Lisa Stone herself:



And Village President Elliott Hartstein dressed as Lisa Stone:



Halloween Fun (Was Had)

It's officially mid-November already, and Halloween is over. Because Halloween is one of our family's favorite holidays, we try to take advantage of doing every Halloween-related activity we can, which often stretches the season. We began on the Tuesday before Halloween at the mall. They held a weather-proof (good thing too, the weather on Tuesday was so awful our tornado sirens were activated) trick-or-treat event in the mall, with costumed kids going from store to store receiving candy. Our kids had a blast, and our little guy got the hang of trick-or-treating REALLY quickly! He would receive his candy, and his way of saying 'thank you' was to give a little wave – it was adorable – see for yourself! He's the one in the Blue's Clues costume:

At first he was afraid of some of the scary masks, but he was quickly over that too. The rest of the week stayed relatively Halloween-free, until Friday, when we had planned a Halloween-themed game night. We requested guests to wear costumes (any excuse to dress up in a costume for Halloween – I really like to participate as much as I can!!), and we had quite a variety: from an escaped inmate (Hubby) to Flo the Progressive Insurance nurse, a nerd, a couple of hippies, a professor, a zookeeper on safari (me) – even a few members of the “real” Mafia made an appearance (we frequently play a game called ‘Mafia’ at game night and it’s tons of fun! A few of the regular game nighters decided to dress up as Mafia as a shout-out to the game). Fun was had, and we were able to rest up for Saturday, which was the annual community Halloween party. My kids loved the hayride, complete with monsters that jump out of the brush and chase the wagon, and we rode 3 times. There are all kinds of things to do at the community party, and it’s all free: from gourmet slushes (best wild berry slush ever!), cotton candy, hot dogs, and popcorn to carnival games, bouncy castles, and a maze for the kids, it’s all so much fun!

After that was time for Trick or Treating, and we had fun even if Hubby wasn’t feeling so well (he is better now – thanks for your thoughts and prayers!). Let’s see... don’t think I mentioned the kids’ costumes: my oldest (almost 11 already!) was a cowgirl, 6-year-old Sammie was a princess, 4-year-old Disney was a witch at the mall who switched to Dora for Saturdays’ events, and 2-year-old Christopher was Blue from Blue’s Clues. We had fun Trick or Treating, and Hubby and I chose an old favorite movie of ours to watch afterward: The Uninvited – not totally scary (we usually try to watch a scary movie together on Halloween), but we both felt like a great thriller more than a horror movie this year. Here is my little boy dressed as Blue:



Sunday saw church, and we had a blast in Sunday school as usual – except that poor Hubby had to stay home. Also, we were very tired on Saturday after trick or treating, so we didn't get a chance to get our annual picture of the kids in their costumes sitting on the couch. But we got one of all 4 of them in the mall, so here it is:



Overall, a very fun 2010 Halloween, one that I can't believe came and went so quickly – SO quickly in fact, that it's already been over for weeks! Unbelievable!! Hope your Halloween was safe, fun, and happy, and that your Thanksgiving will be the same!!

CMA Time Already!!

It's that time of year again! Dust off your cowboy hat, put it on, and get ready for a rootin' tootin' time watching the

44th annual Country Music Association Awards!!



I'm going to try something different this year – I'm not going to watch it.

Not that I don't want to, because I really do, especially when I [go to the website](#) and see all the stuff about live streaming comments and things like that. It wasn't too many years ago when I made my own blog of live streaming comments, and I had fun doing it. But I won't be able to watch the CMAs this year because I have something much more important to do: I lead a small group of 6th grade girls at our church's youth group on Wednesday nights. I'm not about to put a tv show above those girls, and I certainly wouldn't be prepared to tell them the reason for my absence was because of the CMA awards – that would not be acceptable. If one of my own kids was sick and I stayed home for that reason (as it happened last year on CMA night), that would be a different story, but it's a great thing that everyone is healthy enough for me to have to miss one of my two most favorite tv events of the year (not including a year the Chicago Cubs would make it into MLB playoffs, but that hasn't been anything I need to concern myself with in quite some time, Grrrr – my other favorite tv event is the other big country music awards show, the ACMs in the spring).

If you watch the CMA awards, HAVE FUN!! I'm hoping that whatever recording device my husband has in mind to record these will work – we often have bad luck with recording

devices. Part of me will miss being a part of the event, reading the live commentary and providing my own, and part of me was ready to move on anyway – seems I've become increasingly disconnected with today's country music scene (now I just sound old). I'll still give my picks, but they are guesses at best because I really haven't been following the genre lately. I didn't even know until I looked last night to find out what time the awards came on that Gwyneth Paltrow, the movie star, has a hit song on country radio right now. I'm actually more into Christian music than ever before; there is some pretty good stuff out there. And listening to Christian music gives me a chance to practice my dances I have on Sunday mornings with the 1st graders ☐ But all of that leaves less time to listen and keep up with country music.

But what the hey, I've had fun trying to pick the winners every year so here goes. My picks are in **green** with random thoughts in *itallics*:

♦♦**Entertainer of the Year** – **Brad Paisley**, Lady Antebellum, Keith Urban, Miranda Lambert, Zac Brown Band (*What?!? No Kenny Chesney?? That's great news for those of us who aren't big fans... now, who to choose to take his place?*)

Female Vocalist – **Miranda Lambert**, Martina McBride, Reba McEntire, **Taylor Swift**, Carrie Underwood (*So great to see 2 of my favorites (Martina and Reba) back in the game! I don't think Martina will win, but I SO WANTED to choose her!! Carrie Underwood is great too – I'm not a big fan of Taylor Swift, but unfortunately, I think she will win this one*)

♦♦**Male Vocalist** – Dierks Bentley, Brad Paisley, **Blake Shelton**, George Strait, Keith Urban

New Artist – Luke Bryan, **Easton Corbin**, Jerrod Nieman, Chris Young, **Zac Brown Band** (*Explain to me how Zac Brown Band is still considered "new"? They have some great music and have proven themselves, as I would think being a nominee for*

Entertainer of the Year would prove!)

Vocal Group – Lady Antebellum, Little Big Town, Rascall Flatts, The Band Perry, Zac Brown Band (*Let's be honest, I think Lady Antebellum will take it. But I just love the music of Rascall Flatts, and can't bear to vote against them. I'm not trying to get 2 votes in – officially, my pick is Rascall Flatts*)

Vocal Duo – Brooks and Dunn, Joey + Rory, Montgomery Gentry, Steel Magnolia, Sugarland (*The last year for Brooks and Dunn, and I don't think they'll pull a GARTH Brooks and pull out of retirement, so this powerful duo gets my vote – they are so talented, so they deserve it anyway. I was lucky enough to see them in concert 3 times, and they did not disappoint once!)*

♦♦**Single** – A Little More Country Than That by Easton Corbin, Hillbilly Bone by Blake Shelton featuring Trace Adkins, Need You Now by Lady Antebellum, The House That Built Me by Miranda Lambert, White Liar by Miranda Lambert

♦♦**Song** – A Little More Country Than That, Need You Now, The House That Built Me, Toes, White Liar

♦♦**Musical Event** – Bad Angel by Dierks Bentley feat. Miranda Lambert & Jamey Johnson, Can't You See by Zac Brown Band feat. Kid Rock, Hillbilly Bone by Blake Shelton feat. Trace Adkins, I'm Alive by Kenny Chesney with Dave Matthews, Till The End by Alan Jackson with Lee Ann Womack

Music Video – Hillbilly Bone by Blake Shelton feat. Trace Adkins, Need You Now Lady Antebellum, The House That Built Me by Miranda Lambert, Water by Brad Paisley, White Liar by Miranda Lambert

Musician – Paul Franklin – Steel Guitar, Dann Huff – Guitar, Brent Mason – Guitar, Mac McAnally – Guitar, Randy Scruggs – Guitar

Hmm, 5 correct of the 11 I guessed... not too great. Oh well,
it was a good show and fun to watch!