

The End Of The (Band) World As We Know It...

Our town holds the distinction of having Ohio's oldest city band – it's over 150 years old. Remarkably, this city band has had only 3 directors since 1888 – the current director has conducted the band for 48 years! But at the age of 96, this was his last year with the band – and last Wednesday's concert was his last. The turnout was incredible – for a small rural town, an audience of 1,000 was beyond expectations, I think. Usually, we can hear the band concerts from our backyard, but there was a threat of rain for this last concert of the season, so they moved it across town where they could have it under a roof. We drove over for just a little bit, and even though we stayed in the car in the parking lot (sleeping kids), it was very enjoyable to listen to the band in the night air.

I would have liked to play for the band under this band director, just to meet him and be a part of town history, but my schedule does not allow for this as a hobby right now. I guess I'll have to wait until my kids are grown and I can play under the direction of the city band's **4th** conductor since the 1800's – providing I still have the skills to play in a band, that is – I am quite rusty even now, let alone years from now! But as I was saying, the city band as we know it is about to change...

A Bridge Over Not So Troubled

Water

I received a cool picture via email the other day – a river bridging over another river! It's man-made of course, but what a feat! It bridges the River Elbe in Germany and connects two important shipping canals. The project was put on hold indefinitely when Germany was split during the last century and was finally completed in 2003. I think this is pretty cool, so I'll share it and thank fellow tangents.org blogger [Jamiahsh](#) for sending it to me. I don't know why he didn't put it on his blog, but I figure he probably would have gotten a chance by now if that's what he wanted to do with it ☐ Check it out:



For more information about the bridge, [click here.](#)

Library Update

A few blog posts ago, I made a plea to save Ohio libraries because the governor was proposing a budget plan that included a major cut in library funding. The vote went through the state legislature, and the budget was re-worked in such a way

that the libraries received less than half of the budget cut that was originally proposed, so YAY! Our voices were heard! In this economic crisis, it is understandable that funding is going to be cut on certain community resources, so let's hope that our libraries can figure out a way to continue their many services without changing too much in light of these cuts. I received an email back from one of the congressmen, so I thought I'd share it below. Not that the letter was written personally for me, but it's nice to have my efforts acknowledged. Hopefully my friends who work for the state can keep their jobs in light of the budget re-working!

Dear Ms.

Thank you for contacting me with your concerns over Governor Strickland's proposal to reduce the general revenue transfers to the Public Library fund by \$227 million over the next two years. A vital aspect of democracy is that all citizens are able to express their views, and I appreciate you taking the time to share your thoughts with me. Although I was not able to respond to you prior to the budget vote, please know that your correspondence as well as messages from across our region and the state had a major influence on my work on this bill and, ultimately, how I voted.

Due to the economic situation that the State of Ohio is encountering, all agencies and departments have been forced to absorb cuts in state funding. Fortunately, during the conference committee, an agreement was reached to reduce the Governor's proposed cut to library funds so that libraries statewide will experience only an \$84 million cut over the next two years. While I realize that this is still a considerable reduction, it is substantially lower than the \$227 million originally proposed by Governor Strickland.

Again, thank you again for contacting me with your concerns on the budget. If I may ever be of assistance in the future, please do not hesitate to write or call.

Sincerely,



Steve Buehrer

State Senator

1st Senate District

Parental Pickle

Have you heard about the controversy of Lenore Skenazy? She is the New York mom who is under fire for letting her 10-year-old son ride the subway alone. I would not put my kids on a subway alone, but us here (*taking on a sudden hickish accent...*) are country folk, after all, and even I didn't ride the subway when I was in New York three months ago. But I trust that Ms. Skenazy made the right decision for her child... why? Because I think that parents these days NEED to be trusted to make the right decisions for their children! I believe that we are in the midst of an age where we are much too over-protective of our young-uns. And those parents who aren't utterly over-protective are left to a cruel and unusual punishment of media scrutiny... If you follow and/or agree with what I'm saying, you will enjoy the writing of Lenore Skenazy:

The last word: Advice from 'America's worst mom'

A year ago, journalist Lenore Skenazy caused a media sensation when she let her 9-year-old ride New York City's subway by himself. In a new book, she explains why she has no regrets.

About a year ago, I let my 9-year-old ride the New York subway alone for the first time. I didn't do it because I was brave or reckless or seeking a book contract. I did it because I

know my son the way you know your kids. I knew he was ready, so I let him go. Then I wrote a column about it for The New York Sun. Big deal, right?

Well, the night the column ran, someone from the Today show called me at home to ask, Did I really let my son take the subway by himself?

Yes.

Just abandoned him in the middle of the city and told him to find his way home?

Well, abandoned is kind of a strong word, but ... yes, I did leave him at Bloomingdale's.

In this day and age?

No, in Ladies' Handbags.

Oh, she loved that. Would I be willing to come on the air and talk about it?

Sure, why not?

I had no idea what was about to hit me.

A day later, there across from me was Ann Curry looking outrageously pretty and slightly alarmed, because her next guest (the one right before George Clooney) just might be criminally insane. By way of introduction, she turned to the camera and asked, "Is she an enlightened mom or a really bad one?"

The shot widened to reveal ... me. And my son Izzy. And some "parenting expert" perched on that famous couch right next to us, who, I soon learned, was there to Teach Us a Lesson.

I quickly told the story about how Izzy, the 9-year-old, had been begging me to let him try to find his way home on his own from someplace, anyplace, by subway.

I know that may sound a little scary, but it's not. Here in New York, families are on the subway all the time. It's extremely, even statistically, safe. Whatever subterranean terror you see Will Smith battling in the movies goes home when the filming stops—probably to New Jersey. Our city's murder rate is back to where it was in 1963. And, by the way, it's probably down wherever you live, too.

That's why letting Izzy find his way home alone seemed like a fine idea. Not dangerous. Not crazy. Not even very hard. My husband and I talked about it and agreed that our boy was ready. So on that sunny Sunday when I took him to that big, bright store, I said those words we don't say much anymore.

"Bye-bye! Have fun!"

I didn't leave him defenseless, of course. I gave him a subway map, a transit card, \$20 in case of emergencies, and some quarters to make a call. But, no, I did not give him a cell phone. Because although I very much trusted him to get himself home, I was a lot less sure he'd get the phone there.

And remember: He had quarters.

Anyway, it all turned out fine. One subway ride, one bus ride, and one hour or so later, my son was back home, proud as a peacock (who happens to take public transportation). I only wrote about his little adventure because when I told the other fourth-grade moms at the schoolyard about it, they all said the same thing.

You let him WHAT?

The more polite said things like, "Well that's fine, and I'll let my son do that, too ... when he's in college."

So—back to the Today show. After Izzy tells Ann how easy the whole thing was, she turns to the Parenting Expert—a breed that seems to exist only to tell us parents what we're doing

wrong and why this will warp our kids forever.

This one is appalled at what I've done. She looks like I just asked her to smell my socks. She says that I could have given my son the exact same experience of independence, but in a much "safer" way—if only I had followed him or insisted he ride with a group of friends.

"Well, how is that the 'exact same experience' if it's different?" I demanded. "Besides, he was safe! That's why I let him go, you fear-mongering hypocrite, preaching independence while warning against it!"

Well, I didn't get all of that out, exactly, but I did get out a very cogent, "Gee, um ... " Anyway, it didn't even matter, because as soon as we left the set, my phone rang. It was MSNBC. Could I be there in an hour?

Then Fox News called. Could I be there with Izzy that afternoon? MSNBC called back: If I did the show today, would I still promise to come back with Izzy to do it again over the weekend, same place, same story?

And suddenly, weirdly, I found myself in that place you always hear about: the center of a media storm. It was kind of fun, but also kind of terrifying—because everyone was weighing in on my parenting skills. Reporters queried from China, Israel, Australia, Malta. The English wanted to know, "Are we wrapping our children in cotton wool?" To which I boldly replied, "What the heck is cotton wool?" (Turns out to be the kind of cotton in cotton balls.)

The media dubbed me "America's Worst Mom." (Go ahead—Google it.) But that's not what I am.

I really think I'm a parent who is afraid of some things (bears, cars) and less afraid of others (subways, strangers). But mostly I'm afraid that I, too, have been swept up in the impossible obsession of our era: total safety for our children

every second of every day. The idea that we should provide it and actually could provide it. It's as if we don't believe in fate anymore, or good luck or bad luck. No, it's all up to us.

Childhood really has changed since today's parents were kids, and not just in the United States. Australian children get stared at when they ride the bus alone. Canadian kids stay inside playing videogames. After I started a blog called *Free Range Kids*, I heard from a dad in Ireland who lets his 11-year-old play in the local park, unsupervised, and now a mom down the street won't let her son go to their house. She thinks the dad is reckless.

What has changed in the English-speaking world that has made childhood independence taboo? The ground has not gradually gotten harder under the jungle gym. The bus stops have not crept farther from home. Crime is actually lower than it was when most of us were growing up. So there is no reality-based reason that children today should be treated as more helpless and vulnerable than we were when we were young.

If parents all around us are clutching their children close, it's easy to understand why: It's what pop culture is telling us to do. Stories of kidnappings swamp the news. Go online, and you can find a map of local sex offenders as easily as the local *Victoria's Secret* (possibly in the same place). Meantime, if you do summon the courage to put your kids on a bus or a bench or a bike, other parents keep butting in: An unwatched child is a tragedy waiting to happen.

Here's a typical letter addressed to me at *Free Range Kids*:

"I understand that you probably don't want your children to grow up afraid and not able to survive as independent adults," she wrote. "On the other hand, I think you're also teaching them that there is nothing to fear, and that isn't correct. It's survival of the fittest, and if they don't know who/what the enemy is, how will they avoid it? There are many, many

dangers to protect them from, and it does take work—that's what parenting is. If you want them to run wild and stay out of your hair, you shouldn't have had them."

I agree that it makes sense to teach your kids about danger and how best to avoid it. Just like you want to teach them to stop, drop, and roll if they're ever in a fire. But then? Then you have to let them out again, because the writer is wrong when she says, "There are many, many dangers to protect them from."

There are not. Mostly, the world is safe. Mostly, people are good. To emphasize the opposite is to live in the world of tabloid TV. A world filled with worst-case scenarios, not the world we actually live in, which is factually, statistically, and, luckily for us, one of the safest periods for children in the history of the world.

Like the housewives of the 1950s, today's children need to be liberated. Unlike the housewives of the '50s, the children can't do it themselves. Though I'd love to see hordes of kids gathering for meetings, staging protests, and burning their baby kneepads—and maybe they will—it is really up to us parents to start re-normalizing childhood. That begins with us realizing how scared we've gotten, even of ridiculously remote dangers.

We have to be less afraid of nature and more willing to embrace the idea that some rashes and bites are a fair price to pay in exchange for appreciating the wonder of a cool-looking rock or an unforgettable fern.

When we watch TV, we have to remind ourselves that its job is to terrify and disgust us so that we'll keep watching in horror. It is doing an excellent job on both fronts.

We have to learn to remind the other parents who think we're being careless when we loosen our grip that we are actually trying to teach our children how to get along in the world,

and that we believe this is our job. A child who can fend for himself is a lot safer than one forever coddled, because the coddled child will not have Mom or Dad around all the time. Adults once knew what we have forgotten today. Kids are competent. Kids are capable. Kids deserve freedom, responsibility, and a chance to be part of the world.

I have to be honest, though: I write all this in a kind of shaky mood because I just got a call from the police. This morning, I put Izzy, now 10, on a half-hour train ride out to his friend's house. It sounds like I'm a recidivist, but really: His friend's family was waiting at the other end to pick him up, and he's done this a dozen times already. It is a straight shot on a commuter railroad. This particular time, however, the conductor found it outrageous that a 10-year-old should be traveling alone, and summoned the police, who arrived as my son disembarked.

When the officer phoned me at home, I told him the truth (while my heart stood still): We had actually inquired of the railroad what age a child can travel alone and were told there was no specific regulation about this.

Later I looked up the official rules: A child only has to be 8 to ride alone on the railroad or subway. Good rule.

*(From the book *Free Range Kids* by Lenore Skenazy. © 2009 by Lenore Skenazy. Reprinted with permission of the publisher, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.)*

Please Help My Family

Something interesting happened weeks ago, and I haven't had the time to blog about it until now...

My husband and I were driving down a main drag in our small town, kid-less because it was date night, when we came across a guy standing on the corner across from Walgreens with a sign saying "Please help my family". Our movie didn't start for awhile, so we pulled over to talk to the guy who looked to be about our age. We asked him about his circumstances, and what brought him to our town. We learned that he was the father of two who had just been laid off from a factory job and couldn't provide for his two children or for his wife who had also lost her job. He had come to our town in hopes of finding work or resources to help his family. We learned that he had a daughter, just a little bit older than our oldest daughter, and a younger son, so we went home to gather things he said his family needed – clothes and food. We told him we would be just a few minutes, and we went home and gathered up what we thought would be a treasure trove for someone in need who has kids: coats (brand-new, donated from my husband's wholesale business), food, clothes for his daughter, even some clothes we could scrounge up for his son. We returned in less than 10 minutes with the items, but the man was gone!

I still can't figure out what went wrong! Perhaps he was lying about the needs of his family, and he really wanted cash instead for something else, possibly drugs (this is why I always try to avoid giving cash to those in need but rather try to find necessary resources for them instead). I hate to be skeptical, but I have read a bunch of stories in the news about panhandlers who try to swindle and deceive, mostly for the purpose of supporting drug or alcohol habits and not seeking for their own well-being or that of their families.

This happened probably over a month ago now, and we haven't seen the guy since... If I did, I would probably pull over again, but this time it would be to ask him what it is he REALLY wants!

How To Murder A Ferrari

Have you ever seen the 80's movie responsible for Matthew Broderick's big break called [Ferris Bueller's Day Off](#)? I'm sure it was popular everywhere, but growing up in the 'burbs of Chicago, we watched this movie over and over recognizing new locales each time since it was filmed in our backyards. If you've seen the movie, then you are most likely familiar with the scene where Ferris' friend, Cameron Fry, has a major meltdown and pushes his dad's Ferrari out of the glass wall of his garage. This scene was filmed at an actual house in the upscale Chicago suburb of Highland Park, and the [house is now for sale](#). For a cool \$2,300,000, you can buy the house and reenact the famous "Ferrari Murder" scene from Ferris Bueller's Day Off. Even if you don't have that kind of money or don't want to live in Highland Park (your neighbors would be Michael Jordan, Gary Sinise, and Harold Ramis), it's still kind of cool to check out the real estate listing which has details and other pictures of the house besides this:



When Squatters Go Bad...

SQUATTER [skwot-er] – *a person who settles on land under government regulation, in order to acquire title.*

Well, ok, so the official definition isn't exactly what I'm talking about. You may have heard the story that was in the news a month ago about the elderly man who couldn't get the stranger out of his garage. If you're wondering how such a thing could happen in our wonderful country, [read for yourself.](#)

Apparently occupancy rights laws suck. My dear friend is currently going through a situation as well. I will spare the details, but the reason I'm writing this is because I desperately want to help and I don't know how. I find it amazing that there are other such stories in the news right now ([click here for another one](#)) – a side effect of the horrible economy, maybe? It's not so much the laws that are failing my friend, more likely it's the fact that she is too nice and generous and doesn't want to kick people out even if they are taking advantage of her generosity. I actually haven't talked to her about it in awhile, so hopefully the situation has improved – here's hoping!

You Have Now Entered... THE TWILIGHT ZONE!

It's unusual for me to blog twice in one day, but hey, today itself has been unusual. First, the swine flu has officially spread to Chicago. Why does that affect me? Because we were planning a trip there this weekend for my nephew's first

birthday party. We were up in the air about going for financial reasons, but we decided to go ahead and do it because we really wanted to. Plus, my grandparents live there, and they are elderly and housebound, so going to Illinois is the only way I can see them and the only way they can see my kids. I hated leaving everyone up in the air until the last minute about our visit (we were waiting to hear about my husband's business deal – no word yet!), so we just decided to bite the bullet and commit to going. So I called my Grandma and my sister yesterday, and I told my daughter and emailed my mom this morning, and everyone is ecstatic. But now I see that this dreaded swine flu has hit Illinois – especially the counties where we are going to be visiting. I don't know how big of a deal this is – I mean, it seems as if it will be here in NW Ohio in no time as well, but I don't know that I want to be the family that brings it! Ok, I shouldn't joke about it. But with 4 little kids, it is an issue that makes me reconsider our decision. I guess all we can do is wait and see where things with this are on Friday or Saturday when we plan to leave. Darn swine flu!

There were a few other weird things that happened today (surprise 99¢ / gallon milk at Walgreens, for one!), but they are just little things, too many and too little to mention. Add them all up, and that's why I'm making a second post of the day. The other major weird event is this – I got a mysterious letter in the mail today, and I have to say, it scared me. I think I've been watching too many stalker movies (blogging about that tomorrow). But this letter had my name on it – just my name, not my husband's name or The _____ Family or anything – just MY name. And it seems to be typewritten, not even printed on a computer – *typewritten*. Seeing a letter in a security envelope with your name and address typewritten on it without a return address is enough to give anyone pause, I think – but I am also a paranoid person. If I had gotten this letter in 2001 during the Anthrax attacks (someone was sending the deadly material

Anthrax through the mail, and people were killed), I definitely wouldn't have opened it. So anyway, I opened the mysterious letter I got today, and guess what was inside? A thick green piece of paper that turned out to be blank – weird. Even more strange was that there was a Meijer gift card wrapped in the green paper. An *activated* gift card – the TO and FROM are blank.

So who sent this? Is it a joke? An anonymous good deed? A scary stalker? I just don't know... I do appreciate it, if the generous gifter is reading this, I want you to know that I'm thankful, but I'm also a little bit freaked out. It's just a very strange thing to happen, and I hope to get to the bottom of it, at least so the person can get their deserved "thanks!". If you or someone you know sent it, maybe drop me a hint... I am thoroughly confused!

This Economy Stinks!

A few weeks ago, we found out that one of our favorite summer activities will not be an option this year. [The Fun Spot Amusement Park](#) in Angola, Indiana will not be opening in 2009. This park was absolutely perfect for a family with kids the ages ours will be this summer: 9, 5, 2, and 1. They have (had) lots of rides for the little ones, as well as zoo animals like tigers, lions, parrots, and deer. They also had a few awesome coasters for Mom and Dad, and we were planning on bringing along a friend or a Manny (man who is a nanny; see some of my previous posts) so we could indulge in some coaster action together, a rarity for us. But alas – Fun Spot is a victim of this bad economy. The message on the home page of their website says it all: "Due to the Economy, Fun Spot Park and Zoo Will Not Be Open For The 2009 Season".

Where is President Obama? I thought his campaign promises entailed the repairing of the economy? The Fun Spot in Angola was perfect for our family – it was only about 45 minutes away, the price was right – it was only \$56 for our entire family to see the zoo and ride the rides and even the waterslides all day. And that was before using any coupons that were always available (they would even offer good grade discounts that allowed our oldest FREE admission!) Compare these prices to Cedar Point, which is 2 hours away AND would cost our entire family \$128 for one day, not to mention that Cedar Point is much less targeted to young kids – plus Cedar Point has long lines in which to wait, something that wasn't a concern at Fun Spot. I can only hope Fun Spot will re-open in 2010 or at least before my kids grow up – we have some amazing family memories of Fun Spot, and I can only hope there will be more to come!

Adding to my angst about losing Fun Spot, I just found out yesterday that Ball Quest in Defiance, Ohio will not be open this season either. Ball Quest had a mini-golf course, a driving range, and batting cages. We had lots of fun there last summer as well, and it was a place we visited often with friends. We even had some batting cage tokens left over! But the sign on the gate of Ball Quest says, "Not open due to increased taxes. Thank County Commissioner Kime". Ouch – a little bitterness, it seems? Ball Quest was a small family owned business. My friend once showed me the "tea room" they had decorated beautifully in a Victorian motif. I wonder what will happen to gorgeous room and its antique furniture, complete with an antique wooden high chair? I really loved min-golfing at Ball Quest – the course went up a small hill that overlooked beautiful NW Ohio farm fields... and I'm not sure if there are other batting cages nearby! Yet another source of family entertainment – GONE! If they keep going at this rate, we'll be left with nothing in no time! People complain all the time that families just don't do as much together as they used to and as they should, but if family

entertainment keeps getting shut down, that trend will only continue and increase! Here is a picture of my girls having a blast at Fun Spot last year – their baby brother was to be born only two weeks later. It was over 85° that day, and I was physically miserable, but we all still had SO much fun!



This Swine Flu Business

I've been a bit of a hypochondriac for as long as I can remember. My parents had a big thick medical book at their house when I was growing up – that's where I learned about a condition called Black Hairy Tongue, and the book had a photo of it, it's self-explanatory. I would always look through this medical book, mostly to use the self-diagnosis charts. As a kid, I diagnosed myself with everything from thrombosis to cancer. So it really shouldn't come as a surprise that I'm pondering the illness I had last week as a case of the "it" illness of the moment – the swine flu. Never mind that no cases have been reported in my state yet; I think I may have had the swine flu. I've never had a stomach illness that lasted 6 days before last week (those are usually 24-48 hour deals), and it was accompanied by a sore throat, runny nose, body aches and a scratchy voice (though I did enjoy singing

with my scratchy voice – it gave me a whole new sound). I thought I got hit with two viruses at the same time, but maybe it was all one nasty thing. I'm half-joking here, I don't really think I had the swine flu – but it did cross my mind. I don't understand though why it's been all over the media lately. What makes this flu any different or worse than the others? I do know that it's spreading at a rapid rate – this morning there were 20 confirmed cases in the United States, and now we're at 40 as I write this. But then again, can't it be said that most cases of the flu are extremely contagious? The media is treating this swine flu as if it's the next Bubonic Plague. Remember the bird flu and SARS? Those are two illnesses that were expected to be pandemics, but I don't think either one was nearly as bad as the media was making them out to be.

Whatever it was that I had last week, I'm happy to report that I'm over it, and I think I got the worst of it pertaining to my other family members. My stomach hurt so bad; I couldn't imagine my poor little babies dealing with that! And hey, if it was the swine flu I had, then that means that I am now immune to it since I've already had it, right?