

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?!?

Here We Go Again!

Everyone who has been reading my blog since I started it in the beginning of 2008 knows my disdain for the 2-hour delay so frequently used at my daughter's school. Well, it's that time of year again – Tuesday was our first 2-hour delay of the school year. It's not like I want the buses to go out on the slippery country roads and endanger kids and drivers; it's just that the delay throws off the entire family for the whole day! If there was some way to effectively implement the delay for those who would have trouble getting to the school in poor weather conditions, I think that would be a good solution. However, it's obvious that would lead to kids falling behind other kids and such, so it's obvious why they don't do that. But 2-hour delays frustrate me nonetheless.

My 2-year-old gets frightened or crabby if we do things differently from our normal routine. So when there's a 2-hour-delay, she sleeps in until after 10 and wakes up disoriented, hungry and crabby. I guess I could wake her, but I figure if she's sleeping in then she needs the sleep – and it will pay off for me later in the day because her daily pre-naptime intensity won't be quite as demanding as usual. So Tuesday's delay was caused by snow, which meant that my 4-year-old wanted to play in it all day (no preschool today).

But of course she wants someone to play with, and I'm not comfortable letting my 2 and 4-year-olds play outside by themselves of course. And on Tuesday it was too cold to take the baby out with us... So we were all stuck inside and my middle two have a rivalry going on, which means that they fight over everything and constantly; Tuesday being no exception because why would it be? Hopefully the salt shortage there is for the roads this winter won't lead to more school delays – our first one did not go smoothly!

Walmart Saves The Day

What?!? Believe it or not, the title of my post does not have the slightest hint of sarcasm! Walmart really DID save the day for us yesterday! It almost makes me sorry for my many rants against Walmart and their shady practices designed to put small companies out of business... almost sorry, but not quite there.

It all started when we decided to take the kids over to Fort Wayne, Indiana, which is about an hour away. We pulled into a stall at the Sonic drive-thru for a light lunch and some slushies (Sonic has awesome slushies and drinks), when we realized we had forgotten my husband's wallet, which left us without money or credit cards. Luckily, we had picked up the mail before we left the house and brought it in the car with us. And luckily², we had gotten a commission check in the mail. So we braved the 'big city' Walmart customer service line on the Saturday after Thanksgiving to see if they would take pity on us and cash the check even without my husband's ID. We were gifted with even more luck when they accepted my driver's license to cash my husband's check, and we were able to eat lunch. Except now it had gotten really late and we

were all really hungry, so we decided to skip Sonic and go to the Golden Corral that was in the Walmart outlot instead. If you braved my posts about our vacation diary, then you know how much we like Golden Corral. And I'd say that the one in Fort Wayne is of the best quality out of any of the others we've been to. After lunch, we took the kids to a McDonald's Playland, but it had only one little tunnel and one small slide; prompting our 4-year-old to proclaim, "Dad, this is *boring!*" But our 2-year-old loved it, and soon there were more kids to play with and everybody had lots of fun – including mom and dad since there was also a foosball table. When we left the McDonald's, we noticed there was a Burger King across the street (when isn't there?), and that Burger King had a 3-story play area! Oh, well, we had fun where we went and we can remember the BK for next time. We quenched our thirst with drinks from Sonic, and there was a cool looking car wash next door, so we treated the kids to a car wash also -they love watching the soap, brushes, and water cascading off the car. The second we pulled out of the wash –*ding ding* – our low fuel bell rang – uhoh. My husband and I just looked at each other because it wasn't like we had unlimited money with us. In fact, we had spent the last of the check money at the car wash. Thank goodness gas prices are decent these days because with the change we were able to scrape together from my wallet and the car, we had enough to get us gas to get home... whew! Perhaps it can even be considered a blessing in disguise. When you compare the variety of shopping Fort Wayne offers to our hometown choice of Super Walmart and... well, just the Super Walmart, unleashing us in a larger city with all those shopping varieties could have been disasterous to our bank account!

And by the way, the Walmart customer service line wasn't too bad, all things considered. Most of the line consisted of a family who had 6 kids and one on the way -wow. And I thought I had a lot of kids!

Thanks To The Paper Fairy

It began yesterday – my daily newspaper arrived on my doorstep by 3:30 pm. Were the kids off school today? That was my first thought since our paper is never at our house before 4:30, even when the paper boy doesn't have school. But I've talked to some friends, and whenever their paper kids are off school, they get their paper much earlier than usual. So once I determined the kids were not off school, I was excited to think that we might have a new paper kid, especially when today's paper was here by **2:00pm** – unheard of. So what is going on?

I've come to the conclusion that there must be a 'paper fairy' – someone who is delivering me a paper other than my regular delivery boy. I made this deduction when I returned home this evening to find another newspaper on the doorstep, in addition to the one that arrived before 2 when I went out and discovered it. So who is the kind soul who is doing this? Where are they getting the extra paper? Is the newspaper office making a mistake and they have me down for double delivery? Are they charging me for two? Did my delivery kid go off the deep end? I have been extra vocal in my complaints about the delivery kid lately – maybe someone just wanted to shut me up. The last straw was when the kid delivered my paper in a plastic bag on a rainy day last week, and the paper still got soaked somehow. I hate to call the office and complain since he's just a kid, but that day I thought about it.

So anyway, I thought if the paper fairy is reading my blog, at least I'd thank him or her – I do appreciate your efforts. It's been nice to participate in conversations about the paper since for the past two days, I've had time to glance at the

headlines before I go out for the evening. And if the double delivery continues, chances are between my *two* daily papers, on rainy days at least one will be dry!

Trickle-Down Crabonomics

Sunday is usually my favorite day of the week, but our last one ranks low on a list of my favorites. First, the kids started out the day by being terrible. Our 4-year-old Sammie was excited to see the snow – all 20 flakes of it that fell that morning – and she asked her still-half-asleep parents if we could go sledding. My husband groggily mumbled yes, apparently thinking she was saying something else. Later when we were up and about, I told him what he had agreed to, and so we then had to find something else comparable in my daughter's mind to sledding. Giving them an outside toy, we bundled the 3 oldest kids and sent them outside, the oldest of whom wanted to stay inside – which began *her* downward spiral. She went outside reluctantly, but as soon as she came in, she threw a major tantrum about who-knows-what. This set off the other two – our toddler was upset because her almost-9-year-old sister was acting totally out of her mind, and our 4-year-old... well, I guess it's just that she never misses an opportunity to act like a nut. My husband dryly called it "Trickle-Down Crabonomics", which I find the perfect term to describe the volatile cause-and-effect relationship between siblings in a large family.

Somehow, we were ready to leave the house for our favorite Sunday brunch, and we were only 7 minutes past schedule, not bad. The kids cheered up in the car, and they were good during the entire meal, but unfortunately, I can't say the same for the quality of the food. It seems our favorite

brunch has gone down a few steps in quality, to say the least. They used to feature an all-you-can-eat brunch buffet with delicious selections that varied from the usual scrambled eggs and bacon usually featured at these things. They even had a little table with chicken nuggets, peanut butter and jelly, and pizza for the kids. They had a make-your-own-omlette bar, which had a variety of ingredients, from spinach and feta cheese to onion and green peppers. Our favorite was the pasta bar – the chef makes fresh pasta right in front of you, and the alfredo is simply delicious – something even all the kids agreed upon. We've been visiting this brunch for about a year now, and slowly over time, there's been a downgrade in quality. At first it wasn't that noticeable – cloth napkins going to paper, the end of the kids' table, little things here and there. But now, it's down to a line of silver servers containing things like scrambled eggs, bacon, biscuits and gravy and a make-your-own omelet bar with about 4 ingredients: one kind of cheese, bacon, mushrooms, salsa. No more onion, no spinach, no feta... and certainly no pasta bar, our favorite part. And I never even got to try the marinara. Well, anyway, that's enough about that – another victim of this economy, I guess. I know their menu is based upon the number of reservations they get, so maybe if the reservations somehow increase, so will the quality of the food again.

So after the disappointing buffet – which usually means I don't have to worry about cooking the rest of the day since we're all so full, this was not the case today – it was time to watch one of the biggest Chicago Bears games in recent years. It was for first place and against their rivals, the Green Bay Packers. The Packers scored more than 12 times as many points as the Bears did, and my kids weren't very good during the game, so it was difficult for their father to even watch the slaughter. Our 2-year-old fell asleep early, which we thought was a good thing, but she was woken up by her oldest sister during the battle we had about her cleaning the

bathroom that was trashed during the sleepover she had had Friday night. So now we had a late-napping toddler, and we spent the rest of the day fighting about the bathroom with our oldest. Next thing I know, it's time for bed for everyone, and we never even got any parent-alone-time, ugh.

Oh, well, just because the day wasn't all I was looking forward to still doesn't make it a "bad day". It was a weekend, which means family day, and I don't think those could ever be bad... not like yesterday when I got to Walmart, unloaded two little kids, did some shopping and realized I forgot my credit card. Had to set my stuff aside, bundle up the kids and go out to the car, but it wasn't there either – it was at home. So after re-loading the kids, going home, and re-unloading the kids at Walmart, I was more than a little irritated, not to mention *extremely* rushed now because I had to get to the school to pick up my oldest. So no, I didn't get all the shopping done, I was late to pick up my daughter, but at least I got her to Brownies on time. Then I went to my meeting for 20 minutes, then left for a Brownie patches ceremony, then back to my meeting, kid in tow... it was a hectic day, and I'm glad today is date night so I can spend some quality time alone with my husband and unwind. Only problem there is that no housework gets done on date night, so big surprise, I'm behind yet again, sigh... But then again, you probably guessed that based upon my lack of blog posting!

Bad Luck Turns Good!

We've been hit with some bad luck lately in our household. First, our beloved family dog of almost 11 years was diagnosed last week with a few potentially life-threatening illnesses. Aside from our obvious concerns about our dog's health, this

has also incurred large vet bills. Next, we lost our expensive digital camera while trick-or-treating, and it contained priceless family photos, including the kids in their Halloween costumes. Finally (hopefully!) our car decided to conk out – engine wouldn't turn over. My husband did some research online and found that it was most likely the pass-key system, which can be quite costly to fix. While we were trying to jump start the car to fix it ourselves, the keys got locked in, which also stalled our efforts to fix it.

However, the bad luck is slowly changing to good, an unheard of phenomenon for us as people who have experienced more than an average person's amount of bad luck, I'd guess. For a few years, we really got dumped upon, one horrible thing after another, but we've also had more than our fair share of good luck in life as well, especially lately, and we count our blessings every day. But rarely has our bad luck turned good like this. Yesterday, as I was walking my daughter to school (no car, remember?), I found a \$10 bill on the sidewalk. I immediately felt guilty and thought about how much I would like the person who found our digital camera to turn it in, so we called the police – again – and asked if anyone reported it missing. So far, they haven't, which means I get to keep it. The police must be getting sick of us by now since we've called about 10 times in the last few days looking for our camera and trying to get into our locked car... but oh well, in a sleepy rural town such as ours, I'm sure they're just happy to have *something* to do. So anyway, I find the \$10, and I think I get to keep it, and then I walked to the local car dealer yesterday, and they gave me a key to get into my car for only \$2.50 when we thought it would be at least \$35 for a locksmith! So we find money, save money getting into our locked car, and then today we find out that our car is still under warranty, so the expensive pass-key replacement system will be covered!!! HOOORAY!!! And get this – we are under warranty for **only 24 more miles!** What a blessing of a coincidence, although it makes me afraid to drive the car for

fear that something else will go wrong and next time, it won't be covered!

But anyway, besides the vet bills, as far as the car goes, I think we actually came out ahead on the whole deal. We saved \$ on gas these past two days when I had to do all errands on foot, I found the \$10, and there's no charge for repairs, so yeah, we're actually \$10+ ahead! Hopefully everything will go ok with the car repairs so that we can still make it to the early Christmas celebrations we had planned for this weekend in Illinois. And they say bad things happen in sets of three, so hopefully this is it for at least a little while anyway...

Stress

I feel like I can barely keep my head above water these days – I'm so incredibly overwhelmed with things to do! To top it all off, our dog had a huge swollen lump on her face that just kept getting worse so we had to take her to the vet. It's an abscess tooth, and the vet also found a few other problems. In short, we have to decide how much we can afford to fix. This dog is like one of our kids; we got her before we were even married, and at the time, we had trouble adopting a dog because we were so young and lived in an apartment, so shelters wouldn't let us adopt. But finally, we found Charity, and they let us adopt her, and she was the most terrible puppy you can imagine. We stuck through her puppy years, and by age 2 she was the best dog ever. She is now almost 11 yrs old and a major part of our family, to say the least. So anyway, she needs some treatment at the vet and at home, which will increase our busyness considerably. Add to that some household stuff I've been backed up with for months (still haven't unpacked all my hospital stuff from when the

baby was born in July!), and it just keeps getting worse. It's really hard to do all the laundry and meal preparation and cleaning up after a family of 6 when I have two little kids to watch all day! Thank goodness the other two are in school, but between errands, feedings, diaper changes, cleaning up spills and messes, and playing, I don't have enough time left over for household duties, much less stuff I'm backed up on... And forget about hobbies; which is why I might have to let my blog go. I really don't want to; I enjoy writing on it; especially cuz it gives me a nice way to preserve memories for our family. But right now, it's a source of stress as it's just another thing I'm trying to work in. I wish I could be more passive about housework and laundry and stuff like that, but it just bugs the heck out of me when I let stuff go. And for good reason – I never have the time to catch up on stuff that's put off until later! But enough of that, I'm just venting my stress, and also warning you that my blog posts are going to become even more infrequent. It's a shame too... I have a lot left of our trip to FL to share that I'd also like to record in my diary... might not be able to write about it until 2009!

Cold

It's a strange sensation; something I haven't experienced for about a year. Last winter I was pregnant, and due to the fact that pregnant women have 2/3 more blood coursing through their bodies than non-pregnant people, they rarely get cold. Then I had the baby in the middle of summer, went to Florida, and now that we're back in NW Ohio, it's cold! The older I get, the more I dislike the cold weather. Not only do I dislike bundling everyone up, including myself, but I especially dislike the winter gas bills. We have a humongous furnace

that increases our gas bill by 144% in the winter months, which is why I opt to freeze a few months out of the year. I just can't bring myself to turn on that huge furnace for the season yet. Every year when we get our first winter-sized gas bill, we vow to winterize the house and we talk about getting a new furnace, but somehow, we never get around to doing anything. Maybe this year will be different, but in the meantime, I'm going to try to hold out until at least November 1. Maybe I should check the weather forecast before I say that...

Silent Politicians

What an oxymoron this post title presents, doesn't it? Silent politicians... is there such a thing? The proof was sighted in NW Ohio last weekend – here it is:



That's Obama on the left and McCain on the right – true to real life politics. Hillary is in the middle... the display must have been designed months ago...

More Recipes

I sent some recipes to my sister and since I had to type them into the computer anyway, I will post them on my blog. The first two are great for Thanksgiving, and the last one is a yummy version of lasagna that is great for moms to make because you can do the preparation while the kids are napping or eating lunch, and then it will cook all day in the crock pot. Also, you make it with cottage cheese instead of ricotta cheese which can be expensive. Enjoy!

Pearl Onions in Cream Sauce

1 – 10 oz pkg red or white pearl onions, peeled according to package directions

3 TBL butter or margerine

3 TBL flour

1 1/2 cups milk, heated almost to boiling point

2 TBL cream sherry (optional)

1 drop tabasco sauce

dash ground nutmeg

white pepper and salt to taste

chopped parsley for garnish

To cook pearl onions, drop peeled onions into boiling water. Cook for 10 mins. and drain. To make cream sauce, melt butter or margerine over medium-high heat. When melted, add flour, stirring constantly with wire wisk, until all butter is absorbed. Turn heat to low and add milk slowly (make sure to continue stirring with the wire wisk). Add sherry, tabasco sauce, nutmeg, pepper and salt. Fold-in cooked onions and mix well. Before serving, garnish with parsley. Variations: When folding cooked pearl onions into cream sauce, add 3/4 cup cooked green peas. Makes 4-6 side dish servings.

Sweet Potatoes With Blue Cheese and Pecans

4 lbs sweet potatoes
3 TBL olive oil
6 sprigs thyme or 1/2 tsp dried
1 cup pecans
1 cup blue cheese

Combine sweet potatoes and oil in a roasting pan, sprinkle with thyme. Roast for 30-45 min at 425 or until tender. Transfer the sweet potatoes to a serving bowl. Gently toss with pecans and cheese. Salt and pepper to taste. Garnish with remaining thyme. Serves 6.

Crock Pot Lasagna

1 lb lean ground beef
1 onion, chopped
2 garlic cloves, smashed
1 – 28 oz can tomato sauce
1 – 6 oz can of tomato paste
1 tsp dried oregano
1 tsp salt (approx.)
12 oz uncooked lasagna noodles
12 oz cottage cheese
1 cup parmesan cheese (approx.)
16 oz shredded mozzarella cheese

In a skillet, cook ground beef, onion and garlic until beef is browned. Add tomato sauce, tomato paste, oregano and salt. When sauce is thoroughly warmed, spoon a layer of the meat sauce into the bottom of the crock pot. Add a double layer of uncooked lasagna noodles, breaking to fit if necessary. Top with a layer of each of the cheeses. Repeat process until sauce, noodles, and cheeses are gone. Cover and cook on low for 4-5 hrs. NOTE: My lasagna began to overcook a little before 4 hrs in the crock pot!