

Could This Be... Boredom?

The word “bored” has not been in my vocabulary for years – I always have too much to do with not enough time to do it. Such is still the case, but with the kids (half of them anyway) back in school, I’m finding myself with 45 minutes to an hour of time on the weekdays when I am alone, by myself and without kids. Problem is, I don’t FEEL like doing any of the things I once thought I would do if I had spare time. I could put aside the lack of motivation, except that the household projects I want to tackle can’t be completed in an hour, so I’m reluctant to begin big projects just to have to pack up after 45 minutes so I can pick up kids at school or have one awaken from a nap. Other things I might feel like doing seem pointless or not productive enough for me to waste my time doing them.

I always thought boredom meant lack of things to do, which I don’t think will ever happen to me. But if boredom can also mean having a ton of things to do and not feeling like doing any of it, then I am actually bored!

C(hair)ity

I’ve had really long hair ever since I was a little girl. I wasn’t particularly attached to it, but I’m just a busy person, so I always liked the idea of hopping out of bed and simply running a brush through my hair if I needed to be quick and put off the shower until later in the day. About a month ago, I took my kids to the South Bend zoo to meet my mom so she could take the girls for their week with Grandma, but it was one of those 100⁰+ days, and I could not get my long hair

off of my neck. Since I had a fun trip planned days later to another zoo and an amusement park (2 long days outside!), I decided to chop off my hair.

The hairdresser made a big deal of it, asking me if my husband was going to be shocked, but I told her not really since he knew I planned to get it cut and isn't really concerned with what I do with my hair. I told her I wanted my hair cut all one length since I'm not a big fan of the reverse mullet look that seems so popular these days. But when I looked in the mirror after she was finished, she had kind of left the sides longer than the back, giving me an involuntary reverse mullet. Sure, the hairstyle looks great on most people, but I just don't see it for me. Besides, I don't want to be just another I'm-in-my-30's-I-have-4-kids-and-a-reverse-mullet-type housewife. So I told her to please even the sides out, and she (begrudgingly? did so. Is it this woman's mission to spread the reverse mullet around the world like a virus?)

But that brings me to an interesting conundrum – if you have someone really bad doing your hair, would you tell them? Probably you would – it's your hair and you are stuck with your new hairstyle every day, 24/7! What about when the hairdresser asks you, 'How does it look?' You would say, 'not so good'. So she would even it out. 'How about now?', she would ask. 'Still not really very even', you say – and still she would attempt to even out your hair, finally sticking you with that reverse mullet look that's oh-so-popular these days, even though it's a reverse mullet against your will – a reluctant reverse mullet. Worse, an untalented hairdresser could keep attempting to even out your hair until you have nothing left! Maybe you could keep quiet during the incident if you were getting a bad haircut. You could return days later for a refund and try to endure another stylist's attempt on your hair. You could also try to fix it yourself at home. Well anyway, by the time she was through with me, my hair was just a little shorter than I had intended, but in that heat, I

really didn't care. Besides, I was given a super long ponytail that I could donate to Locks of Love, a charity group that collects hair to make hairpieces for kids who lose their hair because of cancer and other medical conditions.

Better yet, when my oldest daughter returned home from her trip to Grandma's, she wanted to cut off her long hair too. Luckily for our family, my husband has gotten quite good at cutting the kids' hair, which saves us tons of money. I'm not brave enough to let him tackle my hair yet (though he might have been better in this case, but if he didn't do well, it's much better to be mad at a stranger hairstylist than my husband), but he cut off our daughter's long ponytail, giving us another donation for Locks of Love.

My daughter and I walked over to the post office one day to send our donation, and I decided to send our picture in to the local newspaper since I've seen them print pictures of Locks of Love donations before. Yesterday they printed our picture! I can't link to the actual newspaper since you have to be a subscriber to see it anyway, but here is the picture I sent:



That reminds of a question I had regarding hair donations – what would happen if someone left hair DNA evidence at a crime scene, and you became a suspect because the DNA evidence hair was somehow taken or dropped from a Locks of Love hairpiece made from your hair donation? If written well, it could be a stage play or movie... or maybe

just a far-fetched CSI episode.

SURPRISE!!!

Last weekend, we had a birthday party for my “boys”. My little guy turned 2 at the beginning of the month, and his father turned 35 in June. Since my husband had mentioned that he would like a party, I decided to tell him that we were having my son’s birthday party, but I also made it a surprise party of sorts for my husband. Having the party a month and half after his actual birthday helped to add to the surprise, though it wasn’t entirely my choice. A friend had had a party at a local park’s shelter house in May, and it was a perfect place for a party, and the rental fee was quite reasonable. The only catch was that the last Saturday in July was the only Saturday that it was free. But I booked it anyway, and we ended up getting great weather, especially for this time of year. Lots of friends came, and many helped bring stuff and to set up the party which was necessary to keep Hubby in the dark about our real plans.

There were a few bumps in the road before the surprise was unveiled though; especially Saturday morning which had me vowing to not do another surprise party for a long time..

A few days before the party, I slipped and told my husband that he couldn’t plan anything for Saturday “because of your party”. He knew that it was our son’s birthday party, but I had said “YOUR party”. I agonized over that one for a few days – sure that he had caught on and didn’t ask me what I meant because he didn’t want to let on that he knew about the surprise because he didn’t want to ruin it. But after the party, we talked about it, and it turns out that he had no

idea that the party was also for him! It went well, and it was a fun party, but I was frustrated Saturday morning – I awoke to the sound of the front door slamming, so I ran downstairs and started waving like a lunatic at our car which was pulling out of the driveway. Turns out, my husband was going to let me sleep in, and he was going to take the kids to Walmart to pick up snacks for the party. I had been mulling this over Friday night – perhaps I planned the party TOO well, and maybe I was having my secret party preparer (thanks Jamiahsh) doing too much of the work. Turns out, I was right – Hubby was not suspicious, but he was thinking that we wouldn't have enough food (we did), so he figured he'd pick up some snacks and even pick up the cake while he was at it. In my half-asleep stupor, I thought about Hubby's helpful nature and realized that he just might be leaving the house to go get the cake – the cake with HIS name on it next to our son's! Luckily I caught my family in the driveway, and tired as I was, we enjoyed a morning out together – even though I had to tell Hubby that someone ELSE was picking up the cake, and I also had to start putting on the rush when I realized that we just might run into said secret party preparer / cake picker-upper. WHEW!!!

Oh, and then there was the party guest who calls my cell phone 10 minutes before we were supposed to be there and says simply, "Where are you guys?" I did not know how to answer that, and the call thoroughly confused my husband. He thought maybe I had told the guests the wrong time, which I guess I did, in a way – it really depends on what the "right" time was – when the party started or when the birthday boys arrived! So I kind of stammered at my friend on the phone, and I resorted to lying to Hubby about what time the party started (I am ashamed) – which is another reason why I probably won't do the whole surprise thing again; lying to Hubby was awful. But when we got to the party, he didn't recognize anyone's car, and when we walked into the shelter house, everyone was gathered in there and shouted out SURPRISE!!! That was fun,

but it was also kind of funny because again, my husband was confused – he knew that it was our son’s party, and he was thinking that my son wouldn’t understand a surprise party... We sorted it out and the fun commenced and that reminds me, there was one other bump in the road to the surprise: my daughter had been trying to get ahold of her friend to have her come over, and I knew that her mother was bringing their family to the party. So I let my daughter in on the secret, but when she called her friend, my husband decided for some reason to stay on the line and listen to the phone call – which is when he heard my daughter’s friend’s mother tell my daughter that their family was coming to the party. The simple thing to do would have been for me to just admit that I invited them to our son’s party, but I’m not really fast on my feet sometimes, so instead I just acted confused (I’m good at acting confused) about the “mis-communication”. Sneaky, huh?

But my boys had a good party, and that’s what counts. Thanks to everyone who helped with everything, and thanks to those who were able to come celebrate with us!

Part 2 Of The Whew That Was The First Part Of July

So we pull into our driveway after our 4 hour drive back from Nashville Indiana (not going to waste time with a recap, these posts are long enough! See my previous post if you want to know what I’m talking about), and my husband’s aunt’s truck is parked in front of our house. We had agreed (or so I thought) to meet them at their hotel (which was a safe distance of 10-15 miles away) for some dinner and swimming – after just getting back from being out of town for a few days, which was

preceded by constant activities for my family for the 4th of July, I wanted some time to make the house presentable. Much to my dismay, that did not happen. We pulled up to our house and see that their truck is there – I could not believe it. Luckily, they were no where in sight, turns out they had gone shopping downtown. So hubby and I bribed the kids to all go play together upstairs, we unpack the car as fast as we can, and we quickly run around the house doing some very fast spot-cleaning. It worked out, but I get really stressed about stuff like that – it would have been better if they had just adhered to the original plan.

So they come over (they called first, so they get bonus points for that), and my mother-in-law mentions giving my aunt-in-law a tour of my house multiple times. Under normal circumstances, I would be more than happy to do so – personally, I love to see the different layouts of people's houses, and I'm always excited to take a tour if one is offered. But when I haven't had the time to clean my house in a few weeks, I'm a bit apprehensive about giving my aunt-in-law (who has never seen the house) a tour... but I think it's about time I get over some of my hang-ups, so I oblige and give the tour through the dirty house – and we all survived and came out alive.

After that, we went out to dinner and swimming at their hotel, and that was a lot of fun until we made the mistake of letting our little 2-year-old boy out of his floatie. He began to run around and do other brave things, like get onto the pool ladder and act like he was going to jump in, all of which terrified me and compounded my exhaustion from the week before – so I had had enough; it was time to go. The next day, we left it up to our guests where to eat lunch, and they chose our local circa 1950's diner, which has a cute atmosphere but I warned them that the food is not so great. I hadn't eaten there in probably about a year though, and my Philly cheese steak sandwich wasn't too bad, although it left me hungry. After the diner, we decided to play tourist in our hometown

some more and went on the “Lolly Trolley” at the Dum Dum factory – you know Dum Dums, and don’t try to tell me you didn’t save up your wrappers when you were little to send them in for various bits of Dum Dum treasure.



The Lolly Trolley was fun, much more fun than I had expected given the factory’s disclaimers of how we weren’t going to be able to see the kitchen where the candy is actually made. We also spotted our good friends’ son on the job as he is an employee of the factory, so that was fun. After our tour, we went swimming again in the hotel pool, and someone had a marvelous last minute idea for dinner – let’s go to Walmart, pick up some ingredients, and have my husband’s mother cook us dinner! She is a brilliant cook, I might add. So she made us some kind of delicious baked chicken breasts on a bed of croutons with swiss cheese on top, and the house smelled almost as good as dinner tasted... until my son was left unattended for literally only 2 minutes, when he used that opportunity to produce one of the dirtiest diapers he’s ever had. I will spare details, but let’s just say that the mess did not stay in his diaper (not an accident, either), and the upstairs carpet was one of the victims of this disaster. Luckily, Hubby is great at fast clean-ups, so he helped me quickly clean up the mess and our son before any additional guests arrived for our game night.

Game night with my mother-in-law was extra fun, even if she did sabotage herself in a game of Mafia by talking out loud and accidentally revealing her position – it just added to the fun for the rest of us. We also played other game night favorites, and people stayed too late as usual – not that I ever mind because it was fun, as tired as I was on Saturday.

Saturday we took the family to the produce tent and the local pizza buffet for lunch, and then we just sat around the living room and chatted for the afternoon while my son napped, learning more about my husband's cousins' hobbies (his 16-year-old cousin is really into air-softing, something I hadn't heard of, but I was glad to hear him provide a little more info – getting pictures in my email of this boy I've basically watched grow up wearing camouflage and brandishing a gun was a bit alarming, so I appreciated hearing the details about his sport). They left for home a little after 4, leaving us just enough time to get to a dear friend's retirement party. We were a tad late, but we overcompensated by staying way past the time the party was supposed to end and had a lot of fun meeting her family and celebrating her accomplishment.

Sunday was my little guy's actual 2nd birthday, so we took him to the Mexican restaurant where the staff sang to the birthday boy, who was frightened by all the attention being paid to him and jumped out of his highchair, burying his face into Dad's shoulder. We returned home for a day of some much needed r and r, and here it is Tuesday, and I'm STILL recovering! But in this family, busyness is the norm and while summer provides us a break from school, youth group, and other obligations, we always find plenty more to do – besides, would we be able to survive boredom? I think not!!

He's Not Half The Man He Used To Be...

Our little puppy Gizmo is now about 6 months old, and we've been marveling at what a handsome young man he's become. But yesterday, he had his appointment for his, um, fixing.

He handled it like a trouper, and we haven't noticed any behavior changes, positive nor negative. We're happy the little guy is ok, and he doesn't even seem to need his prescribed pain meds. I've always had girl dogs before him, and it seems to be a bigger ordeal for females since the incision is larger. Yesterday when we picked Gizmo up from the vet, he seemed happy to see us but still a little dazed:



And while we were waiting for the um, procedure to be complete, we had a few hours to kill, so we began at Meijer where the kids rode the 1¢ electronic horse. We also learned that our almost 2-year-old son knows how to say 'pop tart' since he loves the treats:

And then we went over to a nice scenic place on the Maumee River called Independence dam, but we had some unwanted excitement and had to call [our friend Mary](#) at work. Nothing bad, at least we don't think, but no one was hurt, if that's what you're thinking (Mary is a 911 dispatcher). The water level was very high due to all the rain in the area recently, and the current was swift around the falls from the dam. And we kept seeing something suspicious bobbing to the surface – some tires, some large beige objects, and a few other strange looking items that just weren't moving right. My first thought was that it was an ATV, and that someone had been 4-wheeling and went into the river. After a few more bobs, we saw that the wheels must have belonged to a full-size vehicle since we could still see the tires' rims. The kids' imaginations began working overtime, and soon they began to see heads and hands reaching out of the water. My husband and I saw nothing of the sort, but it was an odd sight, and we figured better safe than sorry so we called Mary's work number – 911 – and apologized for the non-emergency nature of the call. The officer that was sent to talk with us was very nice and completely understanding about why we had called, and as it turns out, he is head of the Sheriff's Department dive team. At first, he seemed to think that nothing was amiss, but as he watched the bobbing debris, he seemed to become increasingly interested. He told us he'd keep an eye on it, and we drove further into the park to turn around, and when we came back, there were more officers in the park. I'm curious to know what was found, if anything... perhaps our tip helped them locate a minivan that's been missing since it went down in the ice 2 years ago or something else useful. If anyone hears anything, let me know!

The Irony...

First, in honor of Memorial Day, I'd like to begin with a special thanks to all of our vets – thank you for all your sacrifice, no matter how high the price you paid while serving our country.

My family had an action-packed super-fun weekend planned starting the Friday night before Memorial Day. It lived up to its expectations, but not quite in the way I expected. It began with a Friday night plan to go to the last home game (Fort Wayne Indiana is the closest) of the CIFL – arena football. But we got a call on Friday afternoon from the Memorial Coliseum saying that the game had been canceled due to the fact that the opponent's team – the Marion Mayhem – had folded on Wednesday. That's right, the team went out of business. And they didn't tell us ticket holders until two days later, which was the day of the event. And we had had so much fun at the first arena football game we attended that we had invited and planned for a large group of 11 to go with us this time... including some last minute emergency babysitter finagling when our regular one had to cancel days before. So anyway, I was not going to cancel on our new babysitter, so after much searching (there was NOTHING else going on in Fort Wayne Friday night!), we ending up finding a (cheap!) movie theater that still had a great movie playign though it's an old one for the theaters: Book of Eli. A fun time, though not quite as fun as arena football, and I can't help but feel that the entire league is going to fold also, so that's the end of that kind of fun, I guess... But it was just ironic that we had told everyone how fun it was, then I planned this big outing only to find out mere hours before that it was canceled! Ironic.

Saturday and Sunday saw mucha fiesta as our friend [Derek](#) was able to visit from Illinois, and I will save on the detail since I am EXHAUSTED. All 3 of the little kids have been in

challenging stages lately, and my mornings have been beginning at 6am; waking up to screaming and fighting between the middle two, which is constant and does not stop until well after 10pm. I was seriously considering going to bed at 9pm Tuesday night, but we got home around 8:30 and found that our daughter's rat had passed away. We knew it was coming; he had been sick for a while. But we had to find a "coffin" (dog biscuit box) and have a burial, no matter how late it was or how many mosquitoes there were. And of course it was the best rat we had, and the one that belonged to our most responsible, well-behaved daughter. Ironic.

But the weekend involved a super-fun game night, a really great graduation party, some go-carting, movies, and just good old-fashioned catching up with friends. Hopefully I can catch up on my sleep soon, and hopefully the kids won't drive me too crazy being home all day, every day – today is their last day of school. Thanks to those of you who helped to make the weekend awesome!!

RIP
BOBBY JACK
12/6/2008 – 6/1/2010

Some Might Have Called It A Disaster...

... but not me. I'm talking about my hugely busy, albeit super-fun weekend. It began Friday night when we took the kids to the Fort Wayne Tin Caps (minor league baseball) game. We decided to go mainly because we needed to get to a Ticketmaster outlet to buy tickets for an upcoming arena

football game. Since we live in a rural area, the nearest Ticketmaster is an hour away, but the drive to the city to get tickets was still cheaper than all of the service fees Ticketmaster wanted to tack on for phone or internet orders. So we decided while we were in the city, why not take the kids somewhere fun, so we decided upon the baseball game. The only problem is that we found out just as we were leaving (at 4:10) that Ticketmaster closed at 5 – we live more than an hour away, especially at rush hour on a Friday evening. It was a big deal because we had already bought our baseball tickets, and the only reason we decided to go to the baseball game with such a busy weekend ahead was because we were going to use the money that we were going to save buying the football tickets at Ticketmaster – except now we weren't going to make it by 5 (did I mention that Ticketmaster's website said they were open until 6? So this really wasn't our fault...) Long story short, we arrived there at 5:20, and the people at the Memorial Coliseum in Fort Wayne were very accommodating. We got our arena football tickets at the original price without the crazy sur-charges – YAY! So on to the baseball game... It was fun, though we had barely sat down on our lawn seats when my almost 2-year-old son took a tumble and was one dad-catching-his-shirttail away from falling from a 3-foot-high ledge onto cement and cracking his head open. We promptly moved seats, and after my son ran around for a bit, we were actually able to watch some of the game, even though our team lost.

Saturday was my daughter's birthday party, and we ended up with about 10 kids (this is a guesstimate – they were never still enough to count them all!). Thankfully, the weather was nice, so we decided to keep all the kids outside for the entire party. The kids started to get rambunctious, and it was difficult to keep so many kids entertained and out of trouble for so long (note to self – next year, an hour is plenty long for a kids' birthday party) – we had the parents coming 2½ hours after the party started on Saturday, which

was WAY TOO LONG! Everything was going ok though, until one of the party guests opened the gate while playing hide n' go seek. Suddenly, we had 2 dogs loose and roaming the neighborhood. 2 of the adults fanned out to go catch the dogs, and I was left to control the 10 kids (AND my son and his cousin who are around 2 years old). Some of the kids were scared for the dogs, some were bored by being outside, some were whining for cake, and others just stood there, looking as shell-shocked as I felt. Then the phone rang, and it was a neighbor on the next street over (whom I've never met) saying that they have our dogs. Thinking my husband was still around, I followed my mom and oldest daughter with some leashes to capture the dogs. Somewhere in the melee, it became apparent that my husband was just on his way back from looking for the dogs, and he comes back to the entire birthday party which he thought was unattended (though I was leaving as he was coming), but in the meantime, my daughter had decided to lead her guests into the house, like some sort of catastrophic parade. We got to the neighbors house, but they only had one dog by this time, so my mom and my daughter went to find the other one while I returned the puppy to the house. When I got back, we were still missing a few adults who were out looking for the dogs, and my daughter the birthday girl is begging for her cake. Eventually, my mom and my daughter returned with the dog, everyone was fine, but we were still missing some adults who were still out looking for the lost-now-found dogs. We found everyone, and tried to relax, even though there was still an entire hour left of the party – WHEW! For the most part, the kids were good, but there was one little girl who was not a very good listener. She seemed to rub off on the other kids too. Is it a coincidence that this is the same little girl who had opened the gate in the first place? For the rest of the party, she was obsessed with the puppy. She wanted to hug him, squeeze him, and hold him every second. After his romp around the neighborhood, he was quite tired and made an easy mark to catch, but he was still a good sport – good thing he's great

with kids. I asked her to leave the puppy alone at least 4 times, and I heard my mom doing the same, and later my husband said he also tried, especially when he saw her dragging the puppy by his collar. She reminded me of the character Elmyra from the cartoon Tiny Toon Adventures. For those of you who aren't familiar, I had fun finding the following clip – picture this little girl at our birthday party leading the pack of 10 kids, and you'll wonder how we survived. Starting at the 35 second mark, this could have been a scene from our house on Saturday:

After the fiasco of a party (the kids had fun, so I wouldn't call it a disaster, even if it was stressful at times), my family took the kids to their hotel for a party, and Hubby and I got some alone time. The problem was, after the busy week we'd had, we were too tired to do much of anything. We hastily chose a Redbox movie, and it was terrible. To my husband's credit, he wanted to just forget it after seeing the small selection, but I pushed for [Meadowoods](#) since it was the only horror movie available and it was just \$1 and we had already waited in line at the Redbox – I didn't want it to be for nothing. But it was a complete waste of time (movie-wise I mean, for any time with Hubby is well-spent); we would have been better off watching someone's youtube videos for 88 minutes instead, that would have been far more interesting. If only Redbox had an imdb link at the Redbox units – perhaps Meadowoods' 3.1 rating would have made me just want to forget it too...

Sunday our church service ran late (of all days), and so we were running late for the entire day... But we had a nice brunch with our family before seeing them off back to Illinois. We then picked up my daughter's friend for a playdate, and I was off to my MOPs (Mothers of Preschoolers) group get-together a little late because I had to finish up my thank-you notes and my appetizer. I had decided upon little smokies in the crock pot instead of picking up a 7-layer dip as I had originally planned because I didn't want to be even later after having to stop at the store to get the dip. Everything was well-planned, and the appetizer actually tasted good... but I forgot to drive gently on the way there – I was already late and in a hurry. I wasn't even out of town before I had to hit the brakes and make a hard stop, sending the crock pot flying, leaving me with a huge pool of barbeque sauce on the front passenger-side floor. I pulled over and cleaned it up best I could – I am so thankful I had a roll of paper towels and extra plastic bags in the car! But when I got to my friend's house, my smokie appetizer in my crock pot

had NO sauce left... oh well, what could I do? There was plenty of other great food, and I ate too much. I think I was the only one to take the food they brought home with them, but I can't really blame anyone for not wanting seconds on the sauceless smokies. To add injury to insult, the crock pot tipped again on the way home (what is WITH my driving?), and I had smokies on the floor of my car this time. Did I mention that Hubby and I spent an hour cleaning out the car last week? But I guess it worked out since if we hadn't cleaned out the car, the BBQ sauce would have spilled all over the junk that was in the car – this way I just ruined the floor of the car and the floor mat – and luckily for me, I have 4 kids and therefore don't put too much stock into the car's appearance or condition. Besides, talk about built-in air freshener... if anyone accuses our car of stinking like anything but BBQ sauce for a long time, I will certainly be surprised!

After everything that went wrong this weekend, some might classify it as a disaster, but we call it FUN!! ☐

Stopping For A Breath In May

The month of May for our family has been booked solid for months. Now that we are in the midst of this wonderful month, there is literally ONE day on our calender for the whole month that remains empty. But I have to say, when busyness such as this used to stress me out just a few years ago, I have since learned to embrace it and enjoy these good times. I've been able to find a healthy balance between planning ahead and making myself crazy worrying about every little detail; a compromise between taking one day at a time and also being organized enough to think ahead (but not too much to be

stressed).

This coming weekend is just an example of the busyness of every weekend in May: Friday night we are going to Fort Wayne to see a minor league baseball game, Saturday we are double-booked with an event for our youth group (which we will unfortunately have to skip) and my daughter's 6th birthday party. We are expecting family from Illinois and almost 10 kids to attend; my kids are so excited! The kids (mine, not all the party guests!) will spend the night at Grandma's hotel, and Hubby and I have been tempted to go to the drive-in, which is SO much more relaxing without kids. The problem is, the drive-ins are about an hour away from our house, and since they show double-features that don't begin until sundown, we can't expect to get home until after 2am Saturday night – not sure if that's doable in the middle of this busy weekend on top of me being already extremely tired. I haven't gotten a good night's sleep in about a week since our 3-year-old has been coming into our room in the middle of the night and also waking up early in the morning. But the drive-in sounds like too much fun to pass up, so we'll see.

We have to rest up for Sunday, another big day. We will begin by going to early church, then brunch with family, and then our oldest daughter has a playdate, our almost-6-year-old has a birthday party to attend, and I have a get-together for my mom's group. I'm looking forward to it, but somewhere in all of this I have to find time to prepare an appetizer, write thank-you notes, and get and wrap a birthday present for my daughter's friend. Plus I have to figure out how to do the play date and get my daughter to the birthday party when I am going to take the car to a neighboring town all day, leaving my husband with errands, all the kids and no car. Sounds stressful, but amazingly, I am relaxed and ready for FUN!! I just wish I wasn't so tired...

Zoo Snoozin' – Part 2 – And Then Some

Bright and early at 7am last Friday at the Toledo Zoo, we were gently awakened by one of our guides (or not-so-gently awakened at 5am by the screaming parrots if you were in the Michigan group sleeping in Nature's Neighborhood) after hitting the pillows at 1am just hours earlier. No problem, what better motivation could I have to get out of bed than already being IN the zoo? We got dressed and packed up our gear and headed to the Carnivore Cafe for a generous breakfast of bagels, cereal, yogurt, applesauce, juice, and coffee (thank goodness for that, and I chugged two cups for fuel). Oh yeah, if you're not a regular reader and happened upon this post unintentionally, then you probably don't know that I'm talking about the Zoo Snooze my daughters and I went to last week – [see installment one here](#).

After breakfast, we headed over to the gorilla exhibit, but we got stopped halfway there because there was mis-communication – we were supposed to be at the primate exhibit instead. So we did an about-face, and headed over to the primates to watch them play with our tubes we had made the night before. THEN we headed over to the gorilla exhibit, and we had to take the long way since they were re-doing the sidewalk between the primate and gorilla exhibits. For those of you who aren't familiar with the Toledo Zoo, there is A LOT of walking. Not as much walking between exhibits as other zoos, such as Brookfield Zoo near Chicago, but still a lot of walking. As frequent visitors to the Toledo Zoo, we've found ways of cutting down the mileage, especially when pushing the double stroller. But on the second day of the Zoo Snooze, we were all over the place. And I loved it. It was a nice day. My

kids were tired, but I was rarin' to go, so I didn't even mind any of the detours. So we watched the gorillas play and tussle over their enrichment treats, and we listened to the gorilla keeper tell us about their personalities. The gorilla troupe of Toledo holds a special place in my heart – their silverback (male gorilla leader) Kwisha, was born at Brookfield Zoo in 1988 – right about the time when I was a frequent visitor there as a child. I remember ogling the gorillas and especially the babies in the (then) new Tropic World exhibit, and it's quite probable that I admired Kwisha (who is the youngest and last son of Samson, a famous Brookfield silverback) way back when he was a gorilla tot.

After the gorillas, we had to walk across the zoo to the elephant exhibit (the long way, remember, because of the construction) to watch Louie play with our enrichment treats. Louie is the zoo's baby elephant – well, not so much anymore... he was celebrating his 7th birthday last week when we were there. I have a video of Louie popping our treat bags into his mouth – whole thing, bag and all without even opening it – but I put that in my previous post, so refer to the link above if you'd like to see it. And then it was time for the Zoo Snooze to end, and the gates to open and let the real visitors come into the zoo.

So we hiked back to the car, and we got many a strange look from regular zoo-goers who were wondering why we were carrying sleeping bags and backpacks and pillows. We stashed our stuff and spent some time in the gift shop, which is not normally something I do on zoo trips, but it was a nice change of pace. Besides, I was missing my little ones so much, and I had that zoo membership card burning a hole in my pocket – I just had to buy them something. At this point, it was starting to get rather warm outside, and my kids were exhausted. The rest of the group was going quite well, but my kids kept asking if we had to go back into the zoo. Keep in mind that we come often, so they were old hats at the zoo who

were extremely tired. I patiently explained that we were going to do whatever the people who we were riding with were going to do, and that was that. As it was though, everyone was exhausted and the people we rode with seemed to be asking us for permission to **not** go back into the zoo. FINE with us! I explained – not because I had had enough of the zoo – that would never happen, no matter how little sleep I'd had... but I wanted to be on their schedule, plus I had the potential for two very tired and crabby kids on my hands AND a trip to Illinois scheduled for the next day. We ended up staying on the side of the zoo where our car was parked (Toledo Zoo straddles the Anthony Wayne Trail – a major thoroughfare, and the zoo has a walkway above it. But it requires a lot of walking to get from side to side, and most of the exhibits are located on the opposite side of the parking lot), so stayed on the one side and still got to see the Polar Bears, Wolves (who were passed out because of the heat), giraffes, and zebras. And then it was time to go.

During the entire Zoo Snooze, I had planned on napping the whole way home, but I found myself having an intriguing conversation with our drivers instead. We arrived home about 5pm, and I unpacked and then I re-packed for the trip to Illinois the next day and made up some lost time with my little ones. By the end of the night, I was seeing things and not making much sense because I was so tired, but it was well worth it!

We awoke bright and early Saturday morning and left at 8am headed for Chicago, and wouldn't you know it – a traffic snarl. It was too early for the kids to nap, and they were awesome in the car – at least until we hit stop and go traffic just outside the Loop. An hour and 4 miles later (yes, you read that right – it took us an **hour** to go **four** miles!), we discovered the reason for our delay – a bridge had begun to crumble, so they had to close down 2 lanes to repair it, which left all the traffic to merge into ONE lane.

Ah, Chicago traffic, don't you love it? NOT!!!

The kids were pretty great during all of this, as was I for running on fumes – I think I was still high off my Zoo Snooze. They did start to lose it a little, but luckily I had some powdered donuts packed, so between those and the Veggie Tales dvds I put into the car's player, we managed to not kill each other. We arrived at my mother-in-law's house 55 minutes late, even after Jill the GPS had predicted us getting there an hour early all morning. This would have been fine, except that my mother-in-law had previous plans, so we got to see her for a whopping 15-minute-hi-goodbye-here's-this-here's-that-I-love-you-hug-kiss-goodbye session while my husband's sister and brother-in-law managed to avoid us completely... long story, there's bad blood there, but I thought we were over it by now. Guess not. Whatever. We moved on to a local Chicago beef place (NOTE to non-Chicagoans – just because you call it Chicago Beef, **a French Dip IS NOT CHICAGO BEEF** no matter how hard you try!!) where we shared great food and even better conversation with a friend from way back, Derek – SO glad he called us and that the traffic jam didn't ruin this part of our trip!

Our next stop was my Grandpa's nursing home, and that was awesome. It's pretty much on the way from my husband's family's house to my family's house, and I wouldn't dream of going to Illinois without seeing him, especially since my grandparents do not travel and have never been to our home in Ohio. Going to ~~Hellinois~~ Illinois is the only way I can see them and so every time I'm in the area, I make sure to stop by and let our kids have a visit with their great-grandparents. My little boy, who will be 2 in July, had a special buddy in my grandmother; it was really sweet, and I don't even know why. But we were there for over an hour, and the whole time, he kept saying "Grandma! Grandma!" making sure that she was doing everything right along side him. My grandpa made me a bet – will the Chicago Cubs (my team – he is a St. Louis

Cardinals fan) or the Chicago Bears (a football team, also a favorite of his and my husband's, for that matter) win their respective championship first – World Series or Superbowl? Stay tuned to find out... ☐

Next it was on to my sister's house, where there was a birthday party for my nephews who both have April birthdays - they turned 2 and 7 this year. It was a great party; a wonderful chance to see family; immediate and also my sister's in-laws who are very nice and interesting people to chat with. My sister's nephew is my oldest daughter's age (10), and he has been interested in the weather since he was about 3 years old. His hero is Tom Skilling, a local Chicago WGN weatherman, one whom I've always liked also. Tom always teaches about the weather and its systems and patterns rather than just simply forecasting it. But anyway, my sister's nephew has his own weekly weather newsletter that he writes and send electronically himself, so I put myself on his mailing list. When I got the newsletter this week, I was impressed – just as I was when talking to the little guy and being dwarfed by his weather knowledge. As is usual, my kids had such a wonderful time with their cousins that they hid when it was time to leave, and we had to dig them out, this time out from under my sister's bed. I'm done with being embarrassed about this; especially since my sister dug up some memories of us hiding from our parents while playing with our cousins! I don't remember this, but I'll take her word for it...

Anyway, time got away from us, and we left my sister's house at 9pm – which was 10pm Ohio time. Arrived home at 2:30 in the morning and had two crazy dogs and some kids to put to bed, and we begrudgingly gave up our church dreams for Sunday. But lo and behold, we were all up and ready for church on Sunday, so we went, and almost one busy week later, I'm still catching up on sleep as I write this, no surprise there. But thanks for reading my rambling, and may this

Mother's Day find you blessed, happy, and healthy – hope you have a good one!!

A Trip To Walmart That Made Me... Happy?!?

It's been awhile since I've posted a venting complaint post about Walmart. It seemed like every time I went there, they were changing around their prices in some way that added to their profits from my pocket – it was aggravating. I got used to it, and I haven't noticed anything new (or let it get to me anyway) for awhile. Today after a very long day, I had to go to Walmart, and I actually left happy about THREE things!

1. They had my shoes back!! The black Brahma Bravos they haven't carried for a year! It was enough to put a smile on my face and for me to give my cashier an earful about my quest for shoes. I've been toiling over my [shoe issue](#) for about a year, and now I found the exact ones I wanted, for the price I wanted – YAY!!! So tempted to buy two pair, just to put one away in case they decide to shoe-starve me again, but that would just be a waste of money...

2. The whole reason I went to Walmart in the first place was to find a snack for my daughter's Kindergarten class. Our turn to bring snack is tomorrow, and you are supposed to bring a snack that coincides with the letter they are learning about that week. Our letter? X – quite possibly the most difficult letter in the alphabet! I've been pondering this one for a few weeks ever since the snack list came home, and I came up with nothing. That's why I had to make the last-minute trip to Walmart today, exhausted as I was. So I went up and down a few aisles, searching for X snacks – I had long since decided

to settle on a snack with an X in it instead of one that started with X, so that made it a bit easier. Trying to also be budget conscious (there are about 20 kids in my daughter's class), I boiled it down to 3 choices: Trix, Chex Mix, or Stax potato chips. Hmm, tough decision. Of those, the cereal seemed the most healthy, although the Chex Mix had a double-x... I could not decide. But then again, I was up at 6:30 this morning to get to the middle school to attend a puberty talk with my daughter. More on that later, aren't you excited? So I called my husband about the X snack – I was so tired, I just couldn't figure it out. He said to go with the Stax based on how much the kids would like it and the fact that it was the best value. Fine. No one ever said these had to be healthy snacks.

3. I found a booster seat for under \$15. Ohio is one of the last states to pass that booster seat law – you know, the one where kids under 8 years old or shorter than 4'9" have to be in a booster seat? Well, that would include two of our kids, and we had only 1 booster seat. I think it's a dumb law; sure they say it's safer, but who funded the studies -Graco et al.? I'm from the 80's – you know, the era where we kids lay sprawling in the backs of the station wagons, free as birds, feeling safe as can be while our parents braved the Chicago expressways... Me and everyone I played with in the back of our parents' station wagons made it into adulthood just fine... not that I'm saying it was safe, but I just spent \$13 on a booster seat, so I deserve to go off a little. But I expected to pay much more, so I was happy. Besides, like I told Hubby, \$13 is a heck of a lot cheaper than the \$100+ ticket it would have cost had our kids not been in the booster. And I have a question – what about adults who are under 4'9"? Do they have to ride in a booster seat in Ohio? You know what, I won't go there – it's rude ☐

So, yeah. Three reasons Walmart made me happy today; that's unusual. Maybe they're messing with my brain – I had 5 items on my list and came out with a \$60 bill; how could that make

me happy unless they're brainwashing me? That must be it...

Or maybe I'm just excited to have gotten out of the puberty talk at the middle school unscathed. My husband (bless his heart) was the only male in the room. We asked our daughter last night if she wanted both of us, just me, or none of us to go, and she chose both. I won't go into detail, but it was kind of a reality check. Man, kids sure don't stay little for long, do they? Luckily for us, the talk was given by the school nurse, who is also a friend of the family from our church. She handled it wonderfully, primitive sketch and all. And that's all I have to say about that. 1 (puberty talk at school) down, 3 to go...