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Wow – that last post was such a downer that I decided to write a little follow-up – I'm feeling better! I took forever in the shower, and my son is still napping! And the two girls have been playing together... funny how the house calms down when a certain little Kindergartner is at school. Coincidence or instigator? You tell me ☐

My little parakeet JJ likes the sound of running water, so my shower music today was supplied by a happy little bird – that was a mood lifter! I've been reaching into his cage as part of training to get him used to me, and he's been letting me touch him! So today I was touching his belly, and he started to close his eyes, and it occurred to me that we didn't have to just do training – I could pet him! So today, I would say that JJ became a REAL pet – he enjoyed my company, let me pet him, and he cheered me up!

And now I get to sit here at the computer for a few minutes, and I actually get to have my glass of water next to me since there is no one to come drop things into it (one of my son's favorite activities is the put things in water, you'd think he'd appreciate his baths more than he does). And I treated myself to a piece of chocolate. Ah, a long hot shower, chocolate, and peace and quiet... what more could I want? Sorry about the grumpy post I made before ☐

My Job Is To Make People

Miserable

My husband works from 9:30 to 5 on weekdays, which leaves me the job of holding down the fort. My kids are generally good kids, and they are adorable, so it should be a fun job. But I'm not having fun today. I've had 3 kids crying literally constantly today from 9-12:30. Taylor is 10, and she's home sick from school. She's the only one being good, but I can't give the poor kid a break because her sisters and brother are acting so crazy!! This is the 2nd Wednesday in a row that the kids have acted up – what is up with that?!? I have 5 minutes of peace right now because we got Sammie to Kindergarten and the baby is napping. I just need to blog about it because I feel like I'm going to explode!! The baby is getting over being sick, so if he's not being held, he's crying. I don't know what the deal is with 3-year-old Disney, she's usually pretty good, but today she is screaming about *everything*. And she has this loud, shrill, ear-splitting scream like you wouldn't believe. In the meantime, Sammie was provoking everyone and starting fights with all 3 of her siblings; I was trying to referee, hold the baby, clean up his messes, change dirty diapers, and make lunch all at the same time. Now that I have some "peace", I feel worse – Disney has asked me 6 questions just in the short time it's taken me to write this. I'm trying not to snap at her, but I'm in a really bad mood. It would really help if I had my dog to snuggle, but she died in December and my other dog is too smelly to snuggle. I feel like I work really hard all day, and all I do is make people miserable. How can my husband get any work done with all the screaming in the house? It adds pressure to me to try to keep a suitable work environment for him. I am looking forward to a relaxing evening. No, wait. It's youth group night, which I normally enjoy, but to go try to teach a bunch of preteens after a day like today seems daunting. Not to mention that I have an extra group tonight since a fellow teacher had back surgery yesterday. I hope it went well for her...

I would cry but then I'll get another nosebleed – my nose has been bleeding a lot lately, stress maybe? I sure wish I could figure out a fun way to wind down to give me something to look forward to tonight, but my kids have been refusing to go to bed lately, and the little guy has been waking up all night with his illness.

Ok, that's my vent, sorry to be such a downer, but I thought writing about it would help. Dunno yet if I was right... Time to make the most of the baby's nap and get the garbage out and lunch cleaned up. If I'm lucky and he sleeps long enough, I just might get a nice long hot shower – but that's probably too much to ask.

Let It Snow... Well, Just For Tonight

I am glad to be home. I've got a nice warm cup of coffee next to me as I sit at my computer... but don't let my facade of relaxation fool you. I've already changed 3 dirty diapers and broken up 4 squabbles in the past hour since I've been home, with more of both sure to come. But my errands today went even worse – one of those days where most things, even the littlest things, are going wrong – too many things to list, and I'm exhausted.

And it's snowing, which made everything I did today more difficult. It depends upon the news outlet of choice; the radio says we are to get 2-4" of snow today with another possible inch tomorrow. I am also a fan of weather.com, who says my area is due for a possible 3-5" today, and another 1-3" at night. Basically the same forecast, but I know they

weren't exaggerating this time – there are already at least 3" of snow on the ground. I know because I had to trudge through it, both on foot and in the car. The roads are terrible, but walking is a breeze thanks to the boots I got a few months ago. Well, it would be a breeze if it weren't for all the little ones I have to bundle and re-bundle and lift out of the car at every stop. I had so many stops to make and was so sick of the snow today that I decided to not go to the library and pick up the second Harry Potter book. I know, it sounds great to be snowed in with a good book, especially because hubby is working all night, but it's difficult to imagine that I will achieve any kid-less time. I just couldn't bring myself to make that extra stop, especially when the day's other errands had already gone so awry. Some of it was just plain bad luck and some had to do with the fact that all 4 kids – well, ok, 3 of them, but I'm not mentioning any names – have been terribly behaved lately.

In what has turned into a ranting blog post of complaints, where was I?

My husband had a major issue with his work in December, so he needs to work basically whenever he's awake to get our family back on track. I lost my other best friend in this house in December, and it feels kind of lonely when the people you hang out with all day do nothing but poop, cry, or argue, sometimes all doing all 3 things at once. And I started today on such a good note; where on earth would I be right now if I hadn't? I stayed positive this morning while I cleaned the poop out of the bathtub, and I even smiled when my son pooped again on the floor and slid on it like it was a banana peel – disgusting, that's obvious, but you have to admit that it makes for a humorous mental picture (no one was hurt, unless you count my bathroom floor).

The trip to Walmart today went surprisingly well, even though I didn't leave myself enough time for lunch. But then the kids lost it as I was loading the groceries into the car, and

between the yelling and the snow, I realized I was not really IN the drive-thru at McDonald's – I was kind of taking up the drive-thru lane AND the drive-past lane simultaneously. It was too late for me to move over, at least not until the car in front of me moved, and sure enough, there came someone *squeezing* past me... I turned my head, ready for the dirty look I knew I was about to receive, and the driver did not disappoint. He glared at me, and that's when I saw it was a county sheriff, and I sank low in my seat – how embarrassing. And great – I feel sorry for the other red vans that get pulled over if this guy is looking to get revenge on me; he looked awfully perturbed at my ignorance.

So then I get home, and my little boy has fallen asleep (only took 15 minutes of crying in the car), so I put him in his crib and venture back out into the snowstorm because I forgot milk – a morning requirement in this house o' kids. But because it was today, and because anything that could go wrong **was** going wrong (remember that I've left out still most of the gory details), the first store I check is completely *out of milk*. So I go to another place, and they do have milk, but there I run into an acquaintance with whom I am forced to make chit-chat. Normally, I'd be ok because I like most people I meet, but there are a select few (usually those afflicted with [P.A.S.](#)) who really get on my nerves. Enter this guy, today, one of "those days". But I'm nice, I'm still in a positive mood, I've got my milk, and I'm on my way home. When I slide into my driveway (reminding me it has to be shoveled later), I want to sit at my computer with my cup of coffee and relax, but I decide instead to play a game of Dora Candyland with my 3-year-old because it's something we can't do when her brother is around and wreaking havoc. No sooner do we get out the Candyland than her brother wakes up – great, so all I accomplished during his nap today was getting milk! No "me" time and worse yet, no quality one-on-one time with my daughter – just errands, UGH!

Well enough ranting for now, let's just say that I did end up with my cup of coffee and my quiet time. But if you think the kids relented and gave me this on their own, you should read more of my blog posts because that is SO not the case. My husband had to take a break from work and spend it with the kids. So now it's my turn, and my quiet time is over. But let it snow – we don't have anywhere to be because Girl Scouts was canceled this evening due to snow. Maybe we can counteract some of today's unpleasantness by spending some quality family time together tonight while we're snowed in... but please, not another day off school for the kids – after today, I don't think I could handle a snow day!

Nothing To Say...

Another fog day, so the kids are off school. They're playing with each other right now, so I have a few minutes... why bother to start cleaning when I know that they'll be "momming" me any second? The house is a disaster, and it needs a good few hours of attention at least. Why bother starting laundry? The bird will only scream at me and rile up the kids who are otherwise being good.

A fellow tangents blogger recently wrote about the grey days of winter, and I guess I'm feeling that now. It's too cold to bundle up the kids and take them anywhere, and we're really trying to watch our pennies anyway – taking them out costs money, even if just the gas in the car, it's still more expensive than staying home. Can't walk anywhere because it's too cold. So, we're staying home, trying to keep all 5 of us out of the way of my husband, who works at home and is, of course, working all day.

No need to bring you up to speed on the current happenings in my life – just every day stuff, laced with a little bad luck. Nothing to spread any “cheer” about.

We’ve watched a few movies recently; saw Star Wars for the first time as an adult. Growing up in the 80’s, I saw clips of the most famous parts as a kid. My husband and I both had the stomach flu last week, and we couldn’t sleep, so we stayed up and watched Star Wars. It was entertaining; not my kind of movie, but perhaps eventually I will watch the other movies in the series. Here’s a question for Star Wars fans: I know that they re-released the movie with digital enhancements, including the scene with Jabba the Hut. So did they film that as new footage for the re-release? Harrison Ford did look like he could be decades older...

And speaking of series, I have begun to read the Harry Potter series. I’m about 50 pages away from finishing the first book, and I’m really enjoying it. I was really excited to watch the movie when I was finished with the book, but then I started thinking that I might want to keep my own vision of Hogwarts. Might the movie ruin the picture I have in my head? Using imagination is fun; I don’t want to take that away from myself or lose motivation to finish reading the series. Then again, I’ve never heard any Potter fans complain that the movies didn’t do the books justice; I hear they are very good. I’m just wondering if I should wait until I’m done with or at least a little further in the series to watch the movies.

Then again, it’s not like we have a lot of time to watch movies, anyway. With my husband back on full time and us still fulfilling our youth group and other obligations, as well as caring for our 4 kids (who don’t sleep a lot!), by the time we put in a movie for “us” time, we are both dozing and can’t get through an entire one anyway. Sigh. Well, not to be negative, but the grey days of winter are here. Can’t wait until spring!!! GO CUBS! Maybe THIS year...

Bad Things Come In Threes

Ok, so no one in the family has bad health (at least not yet, we'll see what happens in a few weeks after the stress from the holidays and everything I'm about to unload takes its toll) and for that I am very grateful, but we have been hit by some bad luck in the past few days.

First was worst – my husband's hard drive went *kaput*. No warning; he just went to work Monday and found that virtually everything he had worked upon for the past 5 years or so is **gone**. Software he had written, info for clients that are now going to be extremely unhappy – **everything**. There are few options; everything he read on the internet about this problem raises little hope. He can send the hard drive away to a company with special equipment, but it's doubtful they can fix it, plus the price tag would be \$1500-2000. Basically there is no hope for the hard drive, and it's essentially as if he was laid off from his job less than a month before Christmas.

As if that wasn't enough, we noticed the other day that we no longer have a metal flap guarding our van's gas tank. We have no idea what happened to it, but now that it's missing, we are going through gas about twice as fast as we should be. Of course the car is no longer under warranty, so it will cost who-knows-how-much to fix it. The glove box broke months ago, and the tires are getting pretty bald (all 4 of course). We were going to get everything taken care of at the same time, but with no income now, that won't be happening.

And for #3 – our mortgage company decided to buy us extra disaster insurance for our house. Except it's not their treat – we have to pay for it. What happened is that we switched

insurance companies about a month ago, trying to save money. Apparently there was some sort of mix-up, and everything was not transferred smoothly, leaving us lacking in the disaster area of the insurance. So the mortgage company got us some of their own choosing, added \$300 to our monthly bill, and sent us a letter about it after it was too late to avoid paying this monthly fee. I hate insurance companies!!!

Don't mean to complain, like I said earlier, at least no one is ill and we do still have our health – that is the most important thing. And if it's really true that bad things happen in threes, then we should be done with the bad news for at least a little while, right?

Parenting Pickle

My almost 10-year-old daughter has a friend I'll call Kathy. Kathy has been over to our house to play with my daughter for years, and we've never really had much of a problem. We've noticed lately that Kathy isn't as well behaved as our daughter's other friends, and she also is not as tolerant of my daughter's younger siblings. Yesterday, Kathy spent about 6 hours with our family, and it was a fun yet tiring day. It was one of the few times we've had an extra kid around and I've noticed extra chaos and strife; usually the extra kid(s) blend right in and sometimes even help out with the little ones. We took Kathy to the mall which is about 20 miles away, and we ate a Mexican buffet, bought the kids candy at the \$ store, and took the kids to the pet store.

Kathy's mother was supposed to come at 6, and since the kids had a late lunch, we were waiting to feed our kids until Kathy was picked up. Kathy's mother was late, and the kids got

hungry, so we tried to stretch our planned dinner for 4 kids into one for 5. It didn't really work, there was some squabbling about food, and Kathy's mother finally showed up around 6:25. On her way out, I called to Kathy who has asthma, "Do you have everything? Do you have your inhaler?" To which she responded, "I still haven't found my inhaler." (like she had told me she was missing it, but she hadn't!) I unlocked the car for her to look in there, and I went up to her mother's car and explained that this is the first I had heard about the missing inhaler. Her mother was extremely rude to me. We didn't find the inhaler, and they left, and I vented to my husband because I don't like when people are upset with me! He was sure that I had misunderstood; that Kathy's mom was upset with Kathy for losing her inhaler. After all, if her mother had told me at any time that Kathy has a tendency to lose her inhaler, she could have asked me to keep a special eye on it, and I would have! But not one word was said – I only know about the inhaler because I've seen her carry it; it was never explained to me.

So then today, our cell phone had some missed calls, and they were Kathy's mom. When my husband called her back, he was sure she had called because they had found the inhaler. No such luck. The frantic phone calls were Kathy's mom asking if we had found it yet and informing us (quite rudely) that if we did not find it, we would owe her \$47 for a new one. So my husband, now knowing that I had NOT overreacted to the rudeness last night, calls the mexican restaurant, and sure enough, they have it. He called Kathy's mom, who basically told us we would have to drive back out the twenty miles each way to get it. But it's Thanksgiving week, we have 4 kids, and my husband works during the day. So she hung up on my husband, and now I'm upset and writing a blog post about it. Here's the pickle:

Kathy is the real victim here. Her mother is mad at her and her friends and their family, and her mother's erratic

behavior is going to isolate her daughter. As it is, Kathy calls our house about 20 times every weekend and is pushy about being invited over – it's hard not to feel like our house might be the only place to where she gets invited. But as a parent, I did not like the negative influence I saw Kathy having on my younger children yesterday, and that was *before* any conflict was had with her mother. My daughter's birthday party is coming up, and I feel badly for both Kathy and my daughter if she isn't invited. On the other hand, I feel this is more than just a parental conflict that can be overlooked for the sake of the kids. I feel a little bit taken advantage of – after all, we invited Kathy to spend the day with our family, and her presence did incur some minor costs. Nothing I would have thought twice about, until I was given flak about our fun day... and I'm 95% sure we told her mother we'd be heading out to the mall ahead of time also, so it wasn't as if it came out of left field! Also, my husband and I are concerned about what Kathy's mom might hold us liable for should we have any further incidents with Kathy at our house or in our care.

So do I let my daughter invite her to the birthday party? Should I say anything to my daughter about this conflict? Do I pay any bills I might get from Kathy's mom for gas, etc? It's just a shame this had to happen; my daughter has plenty of friends whose parents are on the same page with us; we take their kids out all the time without incident, and they even usually say 'thank you!'. I honestly don't feel like we did anything out of the ordinary here... Should I have gotten a babysitter and driven the 40 miles to get the inhaler myself? Honestly, if I had done that though, I might have THROWN it at her when I got back!

Wonder Woman

Probably a year ago now, I received one of those email forwards about getting to know your friends. You know the type – you read your friends' answers to some strange and random questions and then you answer them, getting to know more about your friends and yourself. One of the questions was something about choosing a fictional character that best describes your friend, and my friend wrote "Wonder Woman" about me. I thought that was awesome because I don't feel like a wonder woman, but it's fun that someone else thinks that about me, so it's kind of stuck with me... Especially in these recent days where I am one of the last ones in our family standing as the others are flu-stricken. It's been kind of a mantra I say to myself as I walk around our barren wastelands of a living room, tending the ailing... *"I am a wonder woman, I will not get the flu."*

If I were a sort of flu wonder woman, I would carry holsters for my tools of trade: bottle of disinfectant, antibacterial soap, hand sanitizer, Hall's Defense lozenges, antibacterial wipes, tissues... I've washed my hands raw in the past week.

This is all very strange, maybe the flu has infected my brain. I've also taken on what seem like really weird habits lately, like swallowing garlic cloves and onion petals like pills with my dinner. I'm not going to say anything about how I smell lately, but hey, I'm one of the last ones around here who hasn't gotten sick. So far, our two youngest kids and myself remain healthy. I can't believe we haven't gotten it, and it feels strange to live life feeling like a sitting duck. This thing is so nasty and contagious, it's really only a matter of time...

Our oldest daughter came home last Friday night and stayed in bed until Tuesday when she also finally starting talking and eating again. Our second oldest daughter had a bad fever

Tuesday and slept for awhile and then she was fine. My husband has felt terrible for 3 days now. It's affecting everyone differently, and it's completely unpredictable. I had to go into the middle school to get my daughter's homework, and that's where I found out that half the 4th grade came down with it Friday night. I also learned of the "8 day" theory – some people have thought that their families were sick and over it, only to have other members of the household come down with it 8 days later. Sounds like a horror movie, feels like a sci-fi movie. Pretty much everyone I know who has kids has H1N1 in their families. I'm especially worried about our friends whose diabetic daughter was sent home from school with a blood sugar reading of over 300. Her mother also has a chronic illness and her medication includes steroids, so both of them are high risk for H1N1 complications.

We had a busy week planned this week and had to cancel most obligations. It's really difficult to live our busy lives without being able to commit to anything, not knowing whether we'll be sick or healthy. I hope everyone else is doing ok... is the outbreak especially bad in our small community, or is this just the reality of the 2009 flu outbreak? *I am a wonder woman, I will not get the flu...*

So what's that tickle in my throat?

IT Is HERE

It's official – there is a flu wreaking havoc in our house. I don't know if it's H1N1, but all the signs are there. Our middle-schooler came down with it Friday night, and she's been in bed ever since. She had to miss a birthday party and

church this weekend, and she won't be going to school tomorrow. Today our 5-year-old and 1-year-old starting showing symptoms, and tonight our 3-year-old looks like she might be starting to get it. And oh yeah – why would you think this one skipped Hubby, who gets EVERYTHING that comes around? Looks like it's making an appearance in him tonight. As usual, (except for the flu season when I was pregnant and was sick from Thanksgiving until Christmas – one bug after another) I remain the last one standing, as yet untouched by the virus (crossing fingers, knocking wood...)

So up goes this post, and down goes our family – I think a flu outbreak is a good reason to go to bed at 10, don't you? Here's hoping and praying that it doesn't hit us too hard and also that I may stay well enough to care for my family. We are going to have to quarantine ourselves this week, which is a shame since we had plans for every single night. Tomorrow will see a slew of phone calls made and emails sent to cancel everything. Health comes first, of course. Best wishes to readers for staying healthy!!!

Just A Friendly Reminder

Take care of yourself this flu season!



Fun AND Free!

What's super fun for kids and free for parents? Well, free for parents who live in most parts of the country, anyway...

AUTUMN LEAVES! Last week my kids had a blast playing with the leaves in the back yard. It might cost time and money to dispose of the once beautiful fallen leaves, but before they become a nuisance, there's no reason why they can't provide hours of family fun!

