

Blogging Break

I don't know what's happened to me lately. For over a year, I was pretty diligent about publishing my 5 blog posts per week, one for every weekday. Sometimes I did more, sometimes less, but rarely as few as I've been writing lately. I figured that if I were to lose enthusiasm for this blogging thing, it would have happened already and I'd be done with it. But that's not the case. I've stuck through it while being pregnant (of course it was easy to sit on my pregnant butt in the summer heat last year and blog – didn't want to do much else!), and I even caught up after having the emergency surgery and the recuperation period associated with that, also while caring for a new baby and 3 older kids. And I also caught up after spending a week in Florida with no blogging! So yes, it's something I enjoy, and something I'm going to stick to. I think I'm just going to back off a little bit for now and not publish quite as many posts as before. I still have a lot to say, and a lot of things with which to bore my readers, so have no fear!

But the weather is nice, and I have 4 kids to deliver to places around town constantly. We've had to recently make some sacrifices – I always wanted to give my kids the opportunity to be in every activity they wanted, but I'm finding out that it's just not possible with 4 kids. My oldest is in Girl Scouts, and she also wants to take piano lessons, swimming lessons, be in 4-H and be in plays. Our very-soon-to-be 5-year-old is old enough for Safety Town class this year, and we kind of wanted to get her involved with swimming lessons also. Not to mention all of the projects that Mom and Dad have volunteered to do; the list seems endless. I think our summer is jam-packed already and it's only May! Plus, we've embarked on some rather large home improvement projects that need finishing...

So don't wonder where I am or if everything's ok – it's GREAT

to be Über-Busy!

Happy Mother's Day!

Another weekend has come and gone – and quickly too, it was a busy one! And this post title is already outdated because I've been so busy I haven't had a chance to write until 2 days after Mother's Day!

Friday night saw me doing some volunteer work for a local theater board. It wasn't really work; basically it consisted of me making sure the audition process for our summer show (Joseph – my favorite!) was flowing smoothly. It was fun, though I'd be lying if I didn't express my concerns about my hubby giving his audition his best shot. More about THAT later, based upon whether he makes the show or not...

Saturday was my daughter's 5th birthday party. As usual, none of the 18 kids from her class called to RSVP, but I was tired of worrying about it – been there, done that, ever since our oldest started inviting friends to *her* birthday parties. I don't know why parents can't figure out how to RSVP. The day before the party, when we hadn't heard from anyone, I did make sure we called one friend of the birthday girl's who always attends her classmates' birthday parties, and luckily she showed up. We allowed our older daughter to invite one of her friends, just so we could be sure we'd have at least some kids joining the lame birthday party crowd of Mom, Dad, Grandma, and Uncle Bud. Thank goodness we did that, otherwise my daughter would have had NONE of her own friends show up at her own birthday party! Luckily, she was fixated on the slumber party that would take place at Grandma's hotel later that night, so she didn't really seem to mind the one-kid turnout.

Of course, the one kid that could come was a very high-maintenance kid, and she also had an accident minutes after arriving at our house. AND, in order for her to be able to come at all, she had to be dropped off at noon – 3 hours before the party was to start! But like I said, it was all worth it for our daughter to be able to have a friend at her party.

Saturday night my mom was very generous with her offer to take *all 4 kids* in her hotel room! Hubby and I ran like the wind, seizing an opportunity to go to a drive-in movie theater kid-less, even though neither of the movies sounded very intriguing. But we had never been to a drive-in together, and we found a place 45 minutes away. It was so cool; it was out in the country; basically a farm that people converted into a drive-in. A very far cry from the crowded drive-in I used to visit as a teenager in a suburb called West Chicago – not a very good area now, and even back then, there was always a squad car patrolling inside. Not the case here – we were in the middle of the country, and this place even had a little snack truck and games you could rent for free while waiting for the movie to start (cornhole – a regional favorite and some mini-golf holes). The movies – Wolverine and 12 Rounds – were not very thrilling, and the peaceful night air and late hour did us in and we both fell asleep. Well, it had been huge day and they can't even start the first movie until almost 9:30 when it gets dark enough, so no wonder. And, Jill the GPS routed us into some construction on the way back so it took us an hour to get home at 1:30 in the morning! Construction in the pitch black middle of nowhere late at night when you're SO tired can be very disorienting! We didn't have any kids all night thanks to my mom, but we had to get up early the next morning to get breakfast before church so by Sunday night, we were dragging! I should have really taken a nap, but I was having such a great Mother's Day...

We went out to breakfast Sunday morning, and then my mom and

uncle stayed to check out our church. It was a lot of fun for the kids to show them around, and I loved Sunday's message about motherhood. It was punctuated by a few wonderful videos, and the pastor took a break from our 'Fearless' series to focus on mothers and our special day – I really enjoyed it. Especially the surprise Willie Nelson song they played at the beginning of service! The pastor made sure to mention how difficult Mother's Day must be for those who have lost children or for those who can't have children, and I couldn't help but wonder about the people whose mothers have passed on – must be an extremely difficult day for them too. I have a few friends in that position; including one who lost her mother not more than a few months ago. So as much as I was enjoying my Mother's Day, my thoughts and prayers were also with those who didn't find the day a cause for celebration. Here's hoping you had a great Mother's Day in 2009 with many more to come!

EUREKA!

There's been a lot of buzz around here about a few new restaurants that are to be opening soon in our county. One is a replacement for a restaurant that closed due to the tough economic times. The old place had good food, but their prices were kind of high for the area, and their service was always very slow – perhaps two reasons that led to their demise? I don't know much about their replacement, except that it's to be called 'Union Street Grille' and will open in May sometime. Hmm, grille. Does that mean burgers and the like?

Next we will have a Sonic drive-in. For those of you who aren't familiar, Sonic is a fast food place, with burgers, french fries, chicken sandwiches and the like, but they also

have outdoor booths where you can sit in your car and eat after your food is delivered to you. I try not to eat too much fast food, but I do enjoy Sonic from time to time, and they have excellent slushies, ocean water, and especially flavored iced tea – YUM! And Sonic has a Happy Hour from 2-4 when their drinks are half-price, so I'll be there...

The other new restaurant in the area is a place called '4 Seasons' and it's about 20 minutes away. They have (among other things) Greek food – my favorite! Not a full spread, but enough to make me happy! Their gyros are great (awesome tzatziki sauce), and they even have homemade hollandaise sauce for eggs benedict. I think I've already rambled on in a few blog posts how important it is for good eggs benedict to have homemade hollandaise. My husband and I have searched many states for good hollandaise sauce, and many places will say their sauce is homemade even if it isn't. I guess to a lot of people, "homemade" means that they've mixed the powder into the water. But not to us – you can really taste the (ew) difference if there is powder involved. The other night, we ate at 4 Seasons, and I made a comment – now we just have to ask them when they're getting Saganaki (one of my favorite Greek dishes – it involves goat or sheep cheese, whiskey, fire, and yelling OPA! Good stuff). So my husband asked the waitress about it, and that's when we found out that they HAVE it! Of course – we find out when we're way too full to even consider trying it, and on the eve of one of the busiest weekends we've had in a long time. We will be up there to try it soon – no doubt! Before that lovely piece of news, we thought the nearest Saganaki was Toledo or South Bend, Indiana!

Anyway, 3 new restaurants opening up within miles of my house is a big deal for us – especially for one to have THREE of our favorite dishes! We eat out a lot, partly because the prices are reasonable in our area, partly because we're very busy people and I'm not home a lot to cook, and partly because it's

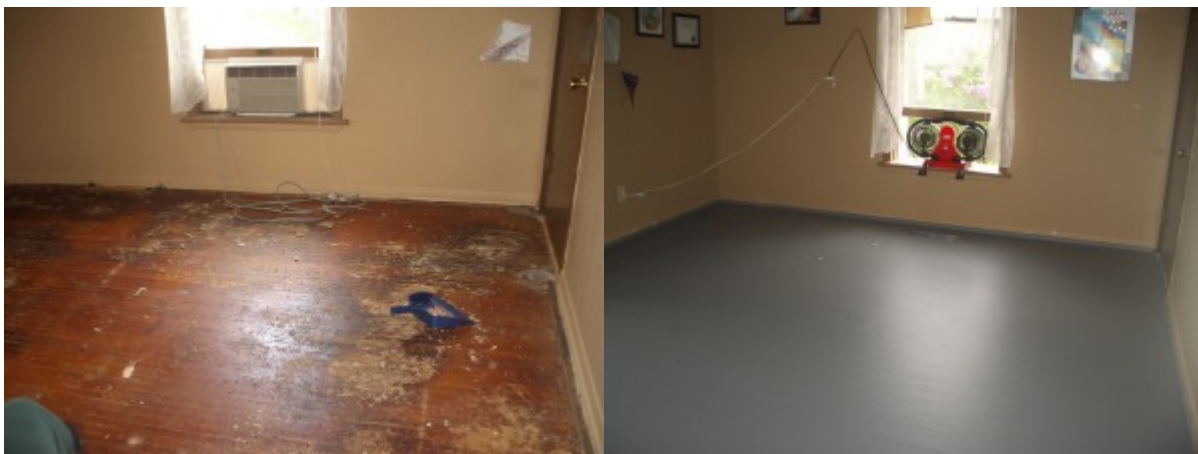
really difficult to cook with 8 extra little feet in the kitchen to trip over! Maybe some day I'll have the time and the patience to cook more often, but until then, new restaurants opening in our area to give us more variety is a cause for celebration! EUREKA!

Rehabbing

Where have I been all week, you ask? Ok, maybe you didn't ask (actually [Mare Mare](#) asked in her blog, but ironically, that was after I had started this post!), so I'm going to tell you anyway. My husband and I have embarked on our first major self-done home improvement project! We are now almost finished, and I think it's safe to say that it went well!

We had a spare room on the first floor that we made into a craft room. We put a bunch of arts and crafts in there for the kids, along with a big table. They used it a lot, almost every day, but they would never clean up after themselves. So, it became a storage room; which really means a place to toss junk and clutter. Complicating the problem was the fact that our elderly dog was having accidents in there, so it smelled so bad no one even *wanted* to go in there. So we ripped out the carpet, got on our hands and knees to pull out the nails the carpet left behind, scrubbed the floor, primed it and painted it. Viola! No more stench! It was a lot of hard work, but it was fun, and now we have a brand new room for our family! What to do with the new room? We began with the idea that it was going to be a playroom for the kids, but then we realized that they don't really need a play room – all their toys fit in their bedrooms or in the living room. Plus, after all that work, we kind of want the room to ourselves.

So now the idea is to reward ourselves by re-po-ing the room (we did save ourselves over \$700 by avoiding the carpet installation!), and we're thinking we're going to make it a theater room. We got some theater chairs last week on clearance from our Kmart going out of business, and my husband is going to see about getting a projector and screen. I think we'll also have room for a table and our storage bins so the kids can still have their place for crafts and homework. And, the room has a huge closet – so the plan is to move our famous game closet over to that room since our game collecting addiction has outgrown its current home. All this means more work ahead, of course, but nothing can be as bad as crawling around on our hands and knees on the cruddy old floor – everything from here on out is the fun part! Before and after:



...And Back Again

(continued from the previous post – To Hellinois...)

So FINALLY, after yet another GPS debacle orchestrated by Jill (might be time to change the persona of the GPS again and fire Jill!) we arrived in Aurora, and it's the first time I've seen

my parents' dogs in years. Loopy is looking a little bit gray in the muzzle, but also much slimmer since last time I saw her. And Happy... well, Happy is herself, I guess – hyper and happy to see my kids, I wouldn't expect any less! We visited with my mom for a little while, and then it was off to lunch, which my husband and I had carefully orchestrated. My mom was nice enough to watch our girls so that we could enjoy a little time out with just the baby, and after all that driving + the morning's (more than) two hour tantrum, boy, did we need some time to ourselves! So we went to Sweet Tomatoes – a restaurant that specializes in an ultra-fresh salad buffet, my husband's favorite, and I don't think he was disappointed! They also have 6 kinds of soup and 3 kinds fresh hand-tossed pasta – YUM! We drove around for a few minutes after lunch searching for a dollar store or two – next to zoos and cuisine, “exotic” dollar stores are my favorite things to see while in different areas, but we couldn't find one, so we went to a Petland instead. So I put aside my opinions that Petland is a leading trader in puppy mill pups, and we went for a visit. And this Petland had LOTS of animals with very nice habitats. They did have a huge bunch of puppies though, and almost all of their “getting to know you” puppy rooms were taken (let me just vent real quick by saying – why can't more people consider shelter dogs so we can reduce the amount of homeless pets in the country!!!) And I asked the staff members a few questions – some to learn things but most to test their knowledge on subjects – and they passed. They no longer sell seahorses because they require ultra-clean water and exceptionally large tanks. I was glad to see that Petland was no longer putting the lives of seahorses in jeopardy just to make a quick buck, but they lost me when they offered to order me some – oh well. There were the cutest little Robinsky hamsters – about the size of a silver dollar – and they were in constant motion. They are so fast that they kept flipping each other over in the hamster wheel and making each other go upside down! They were adorable, but how anyone could handle having such a busy pet is beyond me – you

couldn't even pick them up since they were so fast! Here is a picture of someone who actually got one of these things in their hand:



So then it was on to my nephew's first birthday party – he is only 2½ months older than my son, and the two of them together were SO cute! My son is on the left, birthday boy on the right:



The party was lots of fun, and it was nice getting to spend time with my family and my sister's in-laws, who we don't see very often. We had to leave a little bit early to try to get on the road at a decent hour, but before we left, my kids did a good job of trashing my sister's house. One of them clogged the toilet, one of them crumbled their birthday cake all over the floor (requiring my brother-in-law to haul out his Shop-Vac!), and one of them had too much cake and ice cream and spit up all over Grandma and the floor. I bet they're glad we don't come over very often! Just kidding, I'm sure it was

understood that with 8 kids at one party, something was bound to get messed up – but why did all the messes have to be traced back to *my* kids?

After the party, I dropped my husband off at a Walgreens for some clearance shopping – his favorite! – cuz I wanted to stop by [White Castle](#) and get a case of slyders to bring home. White Castle is an institution in Chicagoland, and one of the things I miss that we don't have here. For those of you who aren't familiar, slyders are what locals call the little hamburgers that White Castle sells – the secret to the awesome flavor is steamed onions. My hubby must love me a lot to put up with the smell of steamed onions for the 4 hour drive home! And no, the frozen ones they sell at Walmart are not the same as the ones you can buy at the restaurants – which is why I try to bring home a case every time I go! But on Sunday, I kept getting behind slow drivers (what happened to the drivers in Illinois? I swear, during this trip **I** was the most aggressive driver I ran into, what's happened to all the a**holes that used to be on the road over there? Could it be the red-light cameras?), and then they took forever at White Castle. And what do I do? I drive off with only my drinks, forgetting my cheeseburgers. So I get back in line, and of course I'm behind the slowest lady in the world – I was in line for 20 minutes, just to get food I had forgotten! By the time I got back to Walgreens, my husband was ready to put out an APB on our van. And of course the baby cried the whole time because he was tired and wanted his bottle, and I couldn't reach the spot in the car where he had thrown it. So I was flustered by the time we finally started for home. Luckily for me, we achieved a quadruple pass out though, so the drive home was peaceful. We got home around 1 am, and much to our surprise, our pet sitter and great friend Carol was still in our house! The kids started to wake up, so we rudely hushed Carol and brought the crying kids upstairs. Luckily we only had one straggler who stayed up for a little while, and I apologized to Carol for my rudeness (and my

stench of coming off a 4-hour drive sitting next to steamed onions with baby spit-up on me). We were more than happy to share the White Castle bounty, and my husband drove poor Carol home since her car had died and she was trapped at our house – I felt badly getting in so late! I was so tired that I forgot to call my mom to tell her we made it safely – I don't think that's ever happened, oops!

Sunday we somehow got up for church, and we got to see some people get baptized which was a neat experience. The sermon was about Moses and the parting of the Red Sea, which interested me because I don't have much religious background and didn't know the story. But I learned some useful tools that I think might help me during this ultra-trying time that Samantha has been putting us through lately. After church, they had a program they call KidStuff – they have it twice a year – and Sunday's KidStuff was about obedience – perfect! Just the message we need to drill into our kids' heads lately! It was a really cute skit about how it's important to be obedient, and I thought it was very well done. There was lots of physical comedy for the kids, goofy characters, an air horn (kids love noisy things!), and they stressed the importance of obedience repeatedly. And, they gave us an orange "O" to put on our fridge to remind the kids about being obedient! I was so excited to get home and apply these lessons to real life! But alas, after the pizza lunch at church for KidStuff, Sammie had to rub it in how much she DIDN'T learn from the skit – our friend is a professional photographer and met us at the park to get some Spring pics of the kids. But our family picture is minus one – Sammie refused to participate in the picture taking. Even seeing a robin's nest up close didn't soften her enough to be cooperative. So all my hopes about her learning something, even a little bit, from the obedience skit flew out the window. But the baby robin was adorable – there were two eggs and one that had hatched, couldn't have been more than a day old. I've never seen one so little, it barely had any

feathers or baby bird peach fuzz! Awww!

Overall, a great weekend. I call it Hellinois, but I'm (half) joking. You couldn't pay me to live there, but there are worse places we could have to visit! I think we might be going back sometime soon for a very exciting, awesomely fun event – more on that later!!!

A College Student Could Have Done Better

Recently a fellow blogger mentioned a dorm fire at the university where his youngest daughter is to attend. While I'm sure that much was learned from that particular tragedy in order to safeguard future students, it gave me a flashback to my own college days when there was a fire in the dorm where my friends lived. That particular dorm building was 28 stories high, and I was hanging out somewhere around the 25th floor on the night when the fire alarm went off. Obviously, we couldn't use the elevators to evacuate the rather large building, so we had to use the stairwells. I remember that after descending flight after flight of stairs, the monotony of the flights started to mess with my head a little bit, and by the end, it became difficult to even move my legs in the motion to go down the stairs – maybe a testament to just one of the challenges faced by those in the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001? Luckily in our case, however, the fire was not threatening to our welfare, and we all made it out of the building safely. When we got out, we gathered around to watch the flames being extinguished – and much to our surprise, the flames were licking the part of the building where some of my best friends lived. Turns out, the fire had

started in my friends' room (not where I was hanging out that particular night) and demolished it. The couch where I had crashed many a night had turned to just ash and a metal frame. I found it interesting that the firemen gave us a walk-thru of the room afterward – apparently something they do on college campuses? They taught us about the 'flashpoint', where the fire must have started and how hot it was there, and they also pointed out various objects from around the room and explained the temperatures it must have been in the room for the fire to have that effect upon that particular object, etc. – very informative! So anyway, the point of this post is **that** building – it's called Watterson Towers, and it's located at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois. Not the pertiest thing, ain't it?



First off, the thing is HUGE; it houses 2200 students. Illinois State University is a college campus located amongst farm fields in central Illinois – a far cry from Chicago – and Watterson Towers is the highest building between St. Louis and Chicago – a distance of nearly 300 miles. Also, the design of the structure is... well, it's bizarre – for lack of a better adjective. I think a college student could have done better at designing a building, hence the title of my blog post. It has been rumored that the [designer of Watterson Towers committed suicide](#), but I'm not sure if this is true or not. Click on the link I supplied above to read more about this – someone asked if the designer committed suicide because he

thought the towers would eventually collapse, and the person who asked the question mentions that firefighters told them that if there were a fire at Watterson, students wouldn't make it out alive – go figure since I and hundreds of others are proof that that theory didn't pan out – thank goodness! Obviously those rumors are overblown, at least some of them, cuz I can't find any info about the designer or his fate. But the bottom line is, it **is** a very strange design for a building, especially one that is to house college students. Sadly, more than a few students have jumped from the windows of Watterson over the years to escape the pressure that college students often needlessly feel.

More than a decade after residing in Watterson, it's still interesting for me to research the building and its design. It's amazing to me to remember that college kids used to get up early to stand in a line reminiscent of heavily-sought after concert tickets to get a room in Watterson. Seems like any of the other dorms on campus would have been much safer and cheaper, for that matter... But Watterson was where it was at – at least when I was in school. It was the most centrally located dorm, and it had the largest rooms by far. I can understand how space would be an issue when you are rooming with someone (or multiple people, as could be the case in Watterson's huge rooms) you might never have met. So anyway, here is the breakdown of the design of Watterson – it is almost maze-like when you're inside, and I still think a college student could do better at the design part! Just imagine Move- In day! 2200 students, all their stuff, and their parents! And remember, it's a 28-story building, but there are only FIVE elevator stops – and if your student does not reside on an “elevator floor”, you must carry their stuff up or down flights of stairs to reach their rooms! To those who are uninformed of Watterson's design, Moving Day must play out like a cruel joke!

From Wikipedia.com:

Watterson is composed of 10 houses, each considered its own residence hall. The houses are named after the first ten men to hold the office of United States Secretary of State. The entire building is divided into two towers. Each tower is divided into five houses. Each house is divided into five floors. Each floor divided into four suites, except on the third floor, which is divided into two suites for elevator access. In the North Tower, the houses, from bottom to top, are Jefferson House, Randolph House, Pickering House, Marshall House and Madison House. In the South Tower, bottom to top, the houses are Smith House, Monroe House, Adams House, Clay House, and Van Buren House. The houses are located across from each other, joined by a breezeway only on the third floor of the houses.

The building's unique design prevents it from having full elevator service. Of the 8 elevators that operate in the building, there is a maximum of nine stops, eight of which students have access to (maintenance level is for staff only): Service Level, Formal (Lobby) Level, Smith-Jefferson Breezeway, Monroe-Randolph Breezeway, Adams-Pickering Breezeway, Marshall-Clay Breezeway, Madison-Van Buren Breezeway and the Informal Level. Each breezeway level is the third floor of each house. A resident who lived on Clay 4 would stop at the Marshall-Clay Breezeway and then need to walk up one flight of stairs to reach his room.

And that's the simplest of the directions... if a student was assigned to Randolph 1, he or she would have to get off at the Monroe-Randolph elevator stop, then walk the breezeway, then descend the two flights of stairs until they got to Randolph 1... it seems that ISU should have offered a degree just for those who figured out the navigation of Watterson Towers! And oh yeah, I forgot to mention that Watterson's elevators were notorious for breaking down! In the two years that I attended Illinois State, I got stuck in the Watterson elevators twice myself and heard of **many** others who met the same fate! I

wonder if they've fixed any of the problems plaguing that building in the last 10-15 years?

ALS Is An Awful Disease

Well, ok, what disease is NOT awful? But ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease) robs a person of his or her motor skills and leaves their mind intact. So essentially, ALS victims are imprisoned in their own body. And ALS often strikes at a young age, and most people struggle with it for less than 3 years before it takes their life. We watched my husband's father struggle with it for over 2 years. We watched as it robbed him of his ability to walk, talk, eat and pretty much everything else. He passed away very peacefully, a week before Christmas. We were all in the room with him, and a hospital volunteer was playing Silent Night on the harp as he passed. It was beautiful, but it's still hard for me to hear that song. The reason I'm bringing this up is because the most famous victim of ALS, besides Lou Gehrig himself, is Stephen Hawking, and I was sorry to read in the news today that he is very ill.

Stephen Hawking is a brilliant scientist and an inspirational man – he has lived with ALS for over 40 years. Lou Gehrig had it for nearly two years before he died at the age of 37. Gehrig's was a New York Yankees player, and he was forced to retire when he was diagnosed with ALS. His record of most career grand slams still holds at 23 today! We watched *The Pride of the Yankees* (which tells the story of Lou Gehrig) with my father-in-law after his diagnosis, and that was tough. Same thing with *Tuesdays With Morrie*... why did my father-in-law want to do that to himself? To get a better grip on what was happening to him, maybe? I don't know.

My father-in-law was a remarkable man. He had the biggest heart of anyone I've ever known, second only to my husband. He was kind, generous, smart, and funny. He knew a lot about everything; especially movies and religion – he had the Bible practically memorized. One of my favorite memories of him was when we took him to the zoo. It was after the ALS had already taken hold of his body, but his humor was still intact. As we were wheeling his wheelchair over a bumpy bridge at the zoo, he said, “Ahhhh” – not because the ALS had taken away his speech (it hadn't yet) but because it was a bumpy ride and he was jokingly letting the bumps affect his voice. He was taken from us too soon; I wonder what he would have thought of having 7 grandchildren? He's been gone longer than I knew him now – over 8 years. His funeral was on our oldest daughter's first birthday. But anyway... I don't know why I'm going into all of this now. Let's pray for Stephen Hawking. ALS is a terrible disease.

I'm Grounded

I will spare you the details, but apparently I've caught some sort of stomach virus (and it causes stomach pain – OUCH!). Of course, I can't call in sick to my job as a SAHM (stay at home mom), and just my luck that my husband has work today, so I'm stuck with the two little ones. Actually, they're stuck with me – I don't feel well enough to go to Walmart or to take them anywhere else, so I can't even kill time that way – I'm grounded. And I do need to go to Walmart – I've already endured one tantrum about our lack of fruit loops. I don't think I could handle another one. Is there fruit loops delivery? I actually *want* to go to Walmart – like I said, it would kill the time anyway. At least I can blog like a maniac right now while the baby is napping. When he wakes up, I will

be at his mercy. He gets really bored around the house and wants to be held all the time. But when I hold him, he just wants to grab things he shouldn't and bang on my computer keyboard. I guess I might say I'm bored. It's not that I have nothing to do; there are always blog posts to write (I'm sitting on 14 drafts right now!), newspapers from weeks ago to read, thank you notes and birthday party invitations to write, a messy house to clean, laundry to do, an anniversary photo album to put together... it's just that I don't feel like doing any of that. Or feel like doing much of anything, for that matter. I guess I'll sit here and watch Dora the Explorer all day. I'm getting hungry, but I'm scared to eat anything because of my stomach. I have a meeting I'd really like to get to later... sigh. Being sick sucks. I hope I feel better for date day tomorrow!!!

Busiest Weekend EVER! Part Two

(continued from a previous blog post)

So here's a recap of Sunday – church, brunch, Hannah Montana movie – and that is where I left off.

So we get to the Hannah Montana movie, and of course our 9-month-old son wakes up from his nap just in time for the movie (couldn't be awake to play at church, couldn't be awake to indulge in brunch, alas – that's always the way when you have kids – they sleep thru everything good, and I swear it's a rule – they always wake when the irony is thick!) But, because the Hannah Montana movie is a musical, our 3 youngest were kept too busy to perform their usual awful antics at the

movie theater. It was a girly movie, especially with a double love story plot, but our little boy is only 9-months-old, so he didn't notice the girlishness. Instead he loved the musical interludes, and he clapped to each one enthusiastically. For some reason, and I've written about this before, the movie theater turns our normally sweet 2-year-old into a little stripper. Luckily, by the time the idea to take her clothes off occurred to her today, it was near the end of the movie, so she only got as far as taking off her socks and shoes – although she did make sure to note (yell) while doing so, “Don't look at me – I take clothes off!” Ok, Disney, if you don't want people looking, why are you taking your clothes off? Such is the logic of a 2-year-old, I guess.

We had no major spills this time (I'm referring to our last experience when we saw Monsters Vs. Aliens and we somehow dumped an entire soft drink into the lady's purse who was sitting behind us – major oops!), and today our baby was on his best behavior as well because of all the music in the movie – something that I think saved us as far as our 3 youngest kids' behavior at the movies today. As for the movie itself, I enjoyed it more than I did Monsters Vs. Aliens, probably because I actually got to watch this one. But an extra nice surprise for me was the country music add-ins – surprise performances from Taylor Swift and my favorite group, Rascal Flatts. They sang one of their best songs acoustically as if they were relatives just sitting around jamming at a family get-together (can this be MY family get-together?), and it was thoroughly enjoyable. Miley Cyrus even showed her country roots in a song which attempts to revive line-dancing; I guess kids these days (now I sound like I'm 80 – GREAT, when did THAT happen!?) have a dance they do to this song, but whatever, I kind of liked the song. Overall, I truly enjoyed the country theme that was abundant in this movie – groovin' country music, gorgeous farm fields, cowboys ropin' horses... what's not to like? There was also a surprise (for me) appearance by Jan Levinson Gould from the tv

show, The Office. Of course in this movie, she wasn't Jan – she was some southern belle who played Miley's dad's love interest – almost as far away from Jan as one could be, but I still enjoyed the Office reference. Also, keep in mind that this is a Disney film, so there are LOTS of prat-fallish types of humor, as well as recurring movie themes. For example, 'lobster trouble' (ala Splash, circa 1984), 'switching identities for different dinner dates' (ala Mrs. Doubtfire, circa 1993), 'major celebrity comes in to save a town' (ala Wayne's World 2, circa 1993 or ala Mystery, Alaska circa 1999), it's always best to be yourself' (ala... wow, WAY TOO MANY TO MENTION – take your pick...)

So anyway, I have to (reluctantly) admit that I was pleasantly surprised with the Hannah Montana movie – plenty of stuff in this one for the parents as well as the tweens and even the stripping two-year-olds. But the movie wasn't as plot-less as I had hoped – in other words, we didn't get home until 2:55 – just 20 short minutes before we had to leave for a class we had signed up for through church. So for the next 20 minutes we scrambled around – letting dogs out, repacking diaper bags, changing diapers, etc. We arrived at our class pretty much on time, though a bit exhausted, thank you very much!

The class was great! We learned a lot about our church – their beliefs, their history, as well as their foundations for building a relationship with Christ – a very well-spent 3 hours. And we got to meet other couples at our table too – which is memorable for me because they were surprised to learn we had 4 kids – and I quote, "You don't look old enough to have 4 kids!" NICE!

Following the class was a great dinner of homemade pasta provided by a local chef. Following the delicious dinner was a tour of the north campus of our church – we worship in the south campus, so it was nice to learn the ins and outs of the north campus – so awesome! Our oldest daughter was so excited to show us where her Sunday school was held, and their rooms

for youth were VERY impressive! There was a room with a stage for youth productions, and it even had backstage areas, which is almost more than I can say for one of our community theater's stages, haha! Also, there was a game room with multiple foosball tables and 'carpet ball' – something new to me, but a game I'd definitely like to try! One of the youth rooms had state-of-the-art stage lights and restaurant-style booths for kids to 'hang out' in... Overall, it was a fun evening, and I learned a lot. But, as became common for today, we had to rush from the church class in order to be home in time for the community theater's play reading committee meeting and my much anticipated Cubs game. I was looking forward to this game for days. It was a long series (most are 3 game, some are 2 game, this one was 4 game) against the Cubs rival – the St. Louis Cardinals, with whom the Cubs are vying for first place. The game was at night, which is rare for a Sunday, so I was VERY excited about rounding out my weekend with such a game. But alas, the darn rain had its way, and the game was postponed. So only play reading meeting to look forward to for me – at least I didn't have to rush the meeting and kick people too hard to leave my house since there was no Cub's game! And for once, I think we actually achieved a lot at the play reading committee meeting. Probably because of the fact that there were only 4 of us in attendance – but hey, maybe that 's what needs to be done in order to achieve something... too many people get in each others way, I guess. It will be interesting to see what the absent members think of the decisions the four of us made while they were absent – I hope the decisions stick!

In summary, a great, if extremely exhausting weekend. Come on now, would I have it any other way?

Busiest Weekend EVER!

Whew!!! It's Sunday night – the finale of what just might be our busiest weekend ever!

Friday night we stayed up late to tie up loose ends and organize our film shoot scheduled for Saturday. Christopher, our 9-month-old, has decided to start waking up in the middle of the night again, so despite our best efforts (and going to bed early didn't work out either since there was SO much work to do for the film shoot), we did not achieve the much-needed good night's sleep on Friday night after not getting very much sleep Thursday night either. Saturday we were up bright and early to take the kids 20 miles into the country to their new babysitter – our regular babysitter had stopped doing weekends some time ago, and it finally became time to find a weekend babysitter. I know what you're thinking – a new babysitter in a different town = scary! But of course we had met with her beforehand, and we liked what we saw. Not only that, but she lives in a very small town, and her husband's a teacher (so he had an established reputation, and also would need to protect it) AND she is a friend of a very good friend – ie, she had awesome references that checked out, and when it was all said and done, the kids had a GREAT time over there. As for us, we had a VERY busy day trying to shoot our “short” film. I put ‘short’ into quotes because the short film took so LONG to film – at least in some of the cast members' opinions. I actually thought the shoot went quite well, considering certain factors. But the bottom line is, it was a heck of a lot different than doing live theater (how didn't some of us see THAT coming – it seems obvious that film and stage would be like comparing apples and oranges), and we did not wrap all of the scenes in one day. So guess what we're doing next Saturday? No complaints out of me, as long as attitudes stay positive...

Saturday night after the shoot we were exhausted. We were

going to take the kids to the park, but it started to sprinkle, and so we were able to catch an AWESOME Cubs game on tv instead. This entire series with the St. Louis Cardinals has been so great to watch, even though I've actually only caught *parts* of two of the games – more on that later. Saturday night saw us staying up too late again because it took awhile to settle down the kids after their big day. And, lo and behold, Christopher was up all night again. Right when we flopped into bed, he sat up in his crib. I pretended like I was sleeping for a few minutes so I could be a fly on the wall and see what he did to entertain himself. I almost giggled as he sat up and clapped his hands to himself – it was adorable! I must have fallen asleep though because the next thing I knew (after a few hazy awakenings throughout the night when kids were crying), it was morning and time to get up and get ready for church.

Church this morning was entertaining (I always find it entertaining and enlightening, but I really do need to get some more sleep – I SO don't want to be known as the lady who dozes in church!) as always, although our usual pastor did not give the sermon. I liked the sermon, but not as much as when our usual pastor does it... oh well. After church, we went to our usual brunch and there we decided to take the kids to the Hannah Montana movie. Except that once we decided, we had only 20 minutes to finish eating, get to the theater, and find a row of seats – what it takes to hold our family at the movie theater nowadays.

Come to think of it, it was such a busy weekend, and Sunday was busiest of all, so I think I'll end the post here and make it a two-parter. My regular readers can consider this a cliff-hanger because they know that any time we take all 4 kids to the movie theater, it's nothing short of an adventure... Until part two...