

“It’s Kind Of Like A Kid’s Birthday Party...”

The title of this post is a quote from my favorite tv show, The Office. Now I must go on a brief tangent to find out when this awesome show starts for the season – there it is, September 17, ugh, almost two months to go! Time to add a countdown to the site...

Tangent over. Anyway, in the tv show The Office, they have an annual awards show called The Dundies. The lovable yet jerk of a boss, Michael Scott, gives (mostly silly) awards to his staff, and the workers generally are not thrilled about the Dundies. A character named Oscar Martinez says the following about Michael and his Dundies: *“The Dundies are kind of like a kid’s birthday party, and you go, and there’s really nothing for you to do there, but the kid’s having a really good time, so you’re kind of there? That’s... that’s kind of what it’s like.”* The reason I’m sharing the quote with you is because it floats through my mind every time I invite our family friends to one of my kids’ birthday parties. I have 4 kids, one born in every season, so we have a birthday party around here every few months. For the older ones, we invite their friends from school, and we invite family and a few of our adult friends to the parties for the younger ones. I really hope no one is ever bored – it is, after all, a bunch of adults sitting around at a kid’s birthday party. We don’t play “pin the tail on the donkey” or break a piñata; it’s just a reason for a bunch of us adults to get together, chat, and have some cake. This is exactly what we did this past Sunday at my son’s first birthday party. He had a really great time, and so did his sisters helping him open the presents. He turned blue from his birthday cake, which he absolutely loved, of course!



BEFORE: *(his bib says "My 1st Birthday", but he hated it and is trying to get it off in this picture)*



AFTER:

He also got lots of great presents – some adorable outfits and cool toys that actually kept him busy for more than 10 minutes! He likes his new toys so much that he's been playing with them non-stop! They've actually kept him out of trouble – well, kind of, he did have two baths out of necessity already today and he spilled a glass of water all over my computer wires, but that's nothing for him.

So thanks again to everyone who attended – he especially loved it when everyone sang 'happy birthday' to him!

A Future In The Superbowl?

Here is a commercial I had not seen until a friend sent it to me in an email forward. As I was sitting here chuckling over it, my two oldest daughters became curious and came over for a look. They loved what they saw, and I had to play it 3 more times! I don't think it's in regular circulation yet, but if it is, I haven't seen it. Of course, I never watch tv anymore! Perhaps it's waiting to be unveiled until the next round of infamous Superbowl commercials? Enjoy!

My Little Man

My son is ONE year old today – how time flies! He is starting to look like such a little man:



This picture was taken at our church for his baby Dedication ceremony we had in June.

*Jesus said "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."
Mark 10:14*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY BEEBER! WE LOVE YOU!!!

Secrets Of Traveling With

Kids

I'm smack dab in the middle (of the beginning) of raising 4 kids of all different (under 10) ages, and also their friends are around a lot, so we are constantly surrounded by young-uns! Of my many observations and trials and errors in trying to keep them all simultaneously calm and content, I have discovered a few secrets, *golden* secrets – so considered because of their miraculous success rates, at least in the under 10 set. Give me a few years (especially when the kids reach their teens), and I may have enough golden kid-contenting secrets to write a book, let's hope I learn some more anyway...

1. If you trace the roots of every kid tantrum and meltdown, you will find that most are derived from feelings of hunger, followed closely by fatigue and thirst; the latter two can be interchanged, it depends upon the kid. But the #1 reason is usually hunger. Keeping small, energy-boosting (and likable!) snacks on hand at all times can do wonders for the mood of the group.

2. Never underestimate the power of blankie. I keep those really thin blankies in my car – the ones they give you at the hospital when you're having a baby. They fold up so small, it's really not a big deal for me to keep a bag with 4 of them (1 per kid is important!) folded up and stashed under the front passenger seat. When we are returning home on a long drive or even when we're in the middle of a long day out, a sleepy (and full-stomached, see hint #1) kid can often be comforted and most often put to sleep by a blankie. Even the thin ones work like a miracle; I've seen it work for multiple ages, genders, and personalities. It's difficult for me to get used to, but I keep offering my son little stuffed animals to play with. I had 3 girl babies before him, and they all loved stuffed animals. My son could care less, unless the stuffed animal still has its tag for him to rip off. But the

blankie secret is effective even with him – he’ll pull it up against his cheek and instantly get sleepy! If you don’t have enough of the hospital blankies for each kid (and it’s important they each have their own), I highly suggest you purchase other thin blankies for the car since they’re inexpensive, especially when you consider how helpful they are. They come in packs of 4 or 5 for under \$10, I think... A key to helping this secret be effective is to make sure **you** retain control of the blankies – don’t let the kids keep them in the back of the van or like anything else, the novelty will wear off, rendering the blankie ineffective. My kids know that the car blankies are just for “blankie emergencies”, and that policy helps to make sure I can keep them somewhat clean and stashed and ready for use.

So just remember, snacks and blankies can usually get you out of most kid-pinches, sometimes even calming kids who pinch, ha. At the very least, if you find yourself in charge of some crazy kids, plan ahead and do some light packing – these hints will buy you some time to think of a better plan!

Teaching Is Probably Not My Forte

Another tangents.org blogger, who is also a very good friend of mine, blogs about his (mis)adventures concerning substitute teaching. He has posted a poll or two about what subjects and ages his readers would like to teach if they could choose. I never really took the questions seriously since I could never picture myself in the situation to teach. After all, you need a degree to teach most anything these days, and I stopped college short of a degree to get married, which is one of the

best decisions I ever made, no regrets. So I would answer those polls, and I would say I'd like to teach zoology or animal behavior or something like that because I love animals. And I guessed that I would like to teach kids younger than high school, because I was a kid once, and I remember how older kids treat their substitute teachers... But again, until a few weeks ago, I never thought I'd find myself in a position to actually teach a class...

At our family's church, childcare is provided. Over the summer, understandably there are many childcare volunteers who need a break, so they ask parents to volunteer. My husband and I quickly signed up – after all, we have 4 kids in childcare there every week, so it was time to give back. We didn't state an age nor gender preference of our students; we just noted that we didn't want to be in the 4-year-old nor 2-year-old classes since that's where our two daughters are who would have a chance of being clingy with Mom and Dad volunteering in their class. Basically, it was the luck of the draw – and our “luck” dictated that we were to be in the 3rd-5th grade boys class. Ok, no problem. I've seen the tail-end of those Brownies meetings while waiting to pick up my daughter – 9 or 10 tween girls running around; screaming, giggling, gossiping, sometimes somehow doing all 3 of those things at once... So um, no thanks, boys will be just fine for Sunday school. So I thought...

We got our “lesson plans”, and there were not fewer than 10 pages of instructions to follow for our 1 hour and 5 minute class. Well, add-in the arrival games and we were in charge for about an hour and 15 minutes. But I haven't seen time crawl by that slowly since before I had kids; it was the longest hour I've had in a long time! Not that I wasn't having fun, because I was – A LOT of fun, actually. So anyway, all week, my husband and I have been poring over these lesson plans; I was committed to go in there today knowing exactly what I was doing and determined to keep control over

those boys.

So we arrive, and the helpful leader tells us to grab snacks for the kids ahead of their arrival, but we don't know how many we'll be expecting, so in her words, "10 should be plenty". We get to the classroom, she explains a few things, and kids begin to arrive. From the beginning, it was clear we were going to have to keep one eye on a rambunctious and mischievous (though intelligent) little boy named Avery. In fact, the very minute after I made a mental note to watch Avery very closely, I looked up and he was *gone*. I had no choice but to leave my poor defenseless husband in the clutches of the growing number of 8-10 year-old-boys while I literally **ran** after the wayward Avery. The Kid's Kingdom building of our church is still somewhat of a maze to me, so it was pure luck that I got out into the hallway just in time to see the back of Avery disappearing through a set of double doors. "I've got you now, sucker" I thought as I ran through the gym after him. I chased him right up to the kids' check-in desk, where I, the newbie, had to explain to the staff person why I was chasing a kid who had escaped from my classroom. Luckily for me, she seemed to know Avery and to be familiar with his escapades, and she was grateful that I had chased him down. Turns out, he had decided to get himself a name tag (which he is supposed to do *before* class but evidently did not), so he decided to leave the classroom to do so without telling anyone, which of course is a big no-no.

So I collar Avery, and we return to the classroom, and there are now kids everywhere who all had apparently arrived during the chase scene! There was one teeny-tiny little girl who stuck out like a sore thumb in a room full of all boys years older than her, so I went over to her and offered to walk her to the girls' class – and that's how I found out that she was a guest of one of the kids in the class, who turned out to be one of the pastor's sons. Actually, he was the son of the pastor who was our friend before we chose this church, so

seeing him was a bit of a relief – for that moment anyway. I thought for sure he would be a nice, helpful boy... but more on that later. We did a head count, and we discovered in our classroom, we had 14 boys + 1 little girl + 2 freshman teachers with 0 experience = fun times ahead!

We played the activity that was slated for play while the kids were arriving, and it was a worksheet where the kids matched words with the fears they represent, like arachnophobia=the fear of spiders, felinaphobia=the fear of cats, etc. It went pretty well, despite disappearing pens (one guess – yes, Avery. Though I countered his pen trick well. When he said that he **ate** the pens, I said, well, you won't be needing snack then, and the pens were automatically recovered). Finally it was time to line up to go to large group.

Once in the large group room, also known as The Warehouse, our responsibilities diminished as the leader took over and we relished a break of sorts. We got to see a few of the kids act things out, which was neat, and we also got to see our oldest daughter who had come over from her class. Let me tell you, she was a pro at their songs and dances! She just performed them without even giving a glance over to Mom and Dad, which is so the way we wanted it and exactly what we were afraid of when declining to volunteer in any of our kids' classrooms. But her section of the room was also eerily quiet, and I kind of regretted the decision to stay away from teaching our kids' classrooms as I envied their parent volunteer with her *four* quiet girls versus our *fourteen* borderline obnoxious boys (and one little girl). Large group was uneventful, crisis-wise anyway. I tried some of the dances and my husband made fun of me... but the kids don't want to see some grumpy-looking adult standing there, not having fun, right? My job was to encourage them to participate, and I figured step one would be to participate myself!

So at 11:30, after Large Group, it was time to go back to the classrooms until 12:05. And that's when time began to creep

in a way it hasn't for us since our engagement. We began class with one of the suggested games; a relay race involving cups of water. The instructions said it was "great for boys", so without really giving it thought, we learned the rules of that game and one other. The relay involved carrying a cup of water on the back of one's hand down a "balance beam" (tape line on the floor) and back again. This was fun, but as you can imagine, there were more than a few spills. And a note: Avery chose to get himself kicked out of this one – kudos to my husband for putting his foot down! Of course, by then all the boys were getting really rowdy (the pastor's son was one of the tricksters; here I thought he'd be a big help), so we shut the door and passed out the snack. But if you remember, earlier I said that we had only brought 10 snacks to the classroom, which "should be plenty" but alas, were not nearly enough for 15 hungry kids. Luckily, there were other snacks leftover from the previous session, and we didn't bother letting them choose which of the two snacks they would get, so snack time was very peaceful thanks to my husband's brilliant "you-get-what-you-get" snack tactic. I maintain from my many observations of kids that the #1 cause of **all** kid meltdowns is lack of food. That is free advice ☐

So then we sat at the table in the classroom, and it was time for a coin tossing game. Everyone got a partner (including me – a well-behaved boy named Brandon, thank goodness), chose a side and each team flipped the coin – the person whose side was flipped answered the first question (something relating to the verse lesson and what was shown in the play during large group). The game continued with asking questions of each partner, and the kids began to have some fun with it and come up with silly answers. It was a fun game, but we finished and there were still at least 10 minutes until dismissal! Again, my husband saved the day, and rather than trying to look over the instructions for another game and potentially losing control of the classroom while we did that, he made up an activity, so we went around the table discussing our

fears. And I've complimented him enough so far because he did an awesome job with the kids, but here's where it gets ugly – my husband chose this moment to share my fear of frogs with 14 little boys. If I were a regular teacher, I would be terrified and would probably move from my house and my hometown. But as a one-time substitute Sunday school teacher, I think I'm safe from any horrid pranks involving amphibians. So back to the game, according to their creativity, one boy's fear was of "cinderblocks", while a few of the students answered honestly that they were afraid of the dark. Quickly looking for our lesson plans to determine the next activity, we found them to be missing... "Avery" we said simultaneously, and like magic, there were the lesson plans, right in front of Avery's chair. But it was finally almost time to line up at the door for dismissal, and again, Hubby saved the day with another game – this one killed two birds with one stone by producing quiet AND spending time. The boys had to be quiet while my husband counted to 20 or else he would start over. We only had to reset twice, believe it or not! Once for (who else) Avery, and once for two other boys wrestling each other to the floor. And then it was over.

And then we got our beautiful oldest daughter back, and she is so good and obedient. And our other three, they were happy to see us as well, and us them, and things were going great until we pulled out of the parking lot and our 5-year-old noticed her older sister's new ring she had earned at church... and so began the fighting. And the making up. And the familial bonding which involves a beautiful process that also makes me want to tear my hair out at times.

I am looking forward to volunteering in Kid's Kingdom again. But maybe next time, changing diapers for an hour would be easier!

Cuteness To Get You Through The Weekend



Above is a picture of our second oldest, 5-year-old Sammie and her almost 1-year-old brother Christopher. He is the only boy in our family, and also the only sibling with which Sammie doesn't fight. It seems like the natives (kids) have been restless lately. Our oldest, Taylor, it back to her snotty tween "I'm-better-than-everyone-else-so-why-do-they-get-more-than-me" attitude, so she is constantly yelling at and fighting with her sisters. Disney is 2 and has been really sensitive, demanding, and impatient lately. Needless to say, our house has been very loud as of late. But in between the arguments, the kids still find time to be cute. Here is a picture of Disney actually sharing the activity table with her baby brother (whose looks seemingly aged months after he got his new haircut):



Utter Chaos – The Good Kind

The school year is winding down... my third-grader's last day of third grade is today! When I was a kid, we always went to school into the month of June – never ended in May. Well, except senior year when we graduated on May 31 – but the seniors always finished early. I don't understand Ohio and their strange school schedules (what with fog days and stuff, which are unheard of in Chicagoland where I went to school), but I do like them. My third-grader is a HUGE help around the house, and I'm excited to have another pair of hands and someone to talk to during the day.

So anyway, yesterday was my 4 5-year-old's end of the year picnic for her school, rain or shine. And rain it did. Even though we arrived right on time, all of the sheltered picnic tables were taken. So, we had to slosh the double-stroller through the puddles and the mud to sit in the rain with 3 little kids and eat our lunch. Luckily it was only drizzling, but the picnic table and bench were all wet – note to self to start keeping a towel in the car. After lunch, they started to set up the large bouncy castles and my husband wisely took our 5 and 2-year-olds (Sammie and Disney) over to get in

line. Judging by the huge turnout for this event, we didn't want to wait in line all day, especially if the drizzle turned into a downpour. My kids were first in line, but Disney chickened out, so Sammie bounced without her sister on the regular bouncy castle. Then it was time to check out the MEGA-bouncy! It began with a crawl-thru maze, followed by a ladder up a vertical wall and finished with a steep slide, and it was total chaos! There were kids everywhere! The adults were scrambling to regulate how many kids went inside, but somehow kids were getting stuck... next thing you know, there were kids crying and yelling and adults couldn't get to them because they were in the crazy maze of this gigantic bouncy! My daughter Sammie emerged from the maze, and she climbed the steep ladder like a pro. Matter of fact, Sammie was thru the entire bouncy obstacle course 3 times before most kids got through once – she is a very good climber and couldn't care less about the pile of kids at the beginning which is where most of them freaked out for their parents. Disney kept saying she wanted to try it, and normally we like our kids to try new things, but the huge bouncy was littered with kids of all types and sizes: crying kids, climbing kids, big kids, screaming kids – I was sure my sweet little 2-year-old would get eaten alive in there. So she watched for awhile and decided she still wanted to go in it, and we found a side entrance that bypassed the crazy maze of kid-doom. To our surprise, Disney climbed the ladder (with help from big sis Sammie) and went down the slide – and she had fun! And Sammie loved seeing all her friends and her teachers and having fun with them. Chaotic as it was, it was all worth it because it was for Sammie – and she loved it! This is Sammie helping Disney up that huge ladder:



Misc Kid Updates

My 10 month old's physical appearance is about to change dramatically. Well, first, let me start here – he's been suffering from lethargy, crabbiness, diarrhea, and diaper rash lately. You seasoned parents out there know what I'm talking about – teething! Sure enough, the other day when we were playing and he was upside-down, I saw not one, not two, but THREE little tooth buds on his top gums. Poor little guy. So pretty soon, he will have a *mouthful* of teeth! I just hope that's the end of his awful diaper rash – he's been taking about 3 baths a day; it's one of the things that helps his sore little bottom. And being 10 months old, he's been doing all sorts of other things: climbing stairs, pulling things down, pulling himself up on everything... they grow so fast and it seems that his trouble is just beginning!

His 2-year-old sister, Disney has gotten a Dora the Explorer obsession from somewhere. She wants to watch Dora constantly, and it's so cute to hear her talk back to Dora on the tv – she is even learning Spanish as a result!

And today is their sister Sammie's birthday! She is

officially 5! We already had her birthday party, but I think we will take her out to dinner and maybe to the store. She has been a little better behaved lately, but still not as great as she was a few months ago – her behavior comes in waves, I guess. At least we're not stuck in horrible-acting Sammie-ness as a constant any longer – there have been glimmers of hope! She is getting ready for Kindergarten in the fall and has been practicing writing her name. A note about this – she would have aced the writing her name part already if we had just named her "Maps", a word she writes over and over!

Taylor is 9 and almost ready to go to middle school next year. You read that right – where we live, kids go to the middle school for 4th-8th grades. She is VERY responsible with her school work and also when it comes to taking care of their 4 pet rats, so I think she'll do well in middle school. We have noticed an increase in her displaying a poor attitude – typical tween stuff, but I wish my child was somehow exempt. Is there an exemption card I can get for this?

So anyway, there's just been a lot going on with the kids lately, and I wanted to share some things before time passed me by and they moved out of the house before I had a chance to blog it. TIME FLIES!

HAPPY BIRTHDAY SAMMIE!!!!!!

He Just Got Too Tired...

... to even eat his lunch!



Thrice Upon A Potty

Yesterday saw the official beginning of potty-training for our 2-year-old. She has used the potty a few times before, but now it's official – we went out and bought the toddler sized potty. She was excited about using it and has done so twice yesterday and once today! I just worry about the time it takes to stay consistent. She still needs reminding and accompaniment, and those things might become impossible to do at times depending on what her baby brother is doing at the moment. But for now, we're really excited about her progress, and maybe we can build up some consistency so that she can tend to her own needs in case baby brother is running me too ragged to help.

There are MANY methods of potty-training. There's the famous video/book set, *Once Upon a Potty*, but that is a bit graphic (I don't think it's important at this age to learn WHERE the poo-poo comes from), and I don't know about your kids, but mine find it difficult to relate to a little girl named Prudence. The "diaper free infant" method of potty-training is becoming increasingly popular. This entails holding the newborn baby over the toilet and not letting him wear

diapers. I'm not one to complain about other people's parenting methods, but 'diaper free infant' parents seem like lunatics. The average newborn baby needs his diapers changed 8-10 times per day, and I don't even know how they determine what a 'day' is when referring to newborns since they are often up all night, needing their diapers changed in the middle of the night as well. Who is going to hold a newborn baby over a toilet 8-10 times a day and all throughout the night? A lunatic. But seriously, as I said, the popularity of this method is increasing, so I guess some people are having success with it. Personally, I wait until the kid is old enough to understand. She understands that older people and especially older kids use the potty and don't wear diapers. She's old enough to not like getting messy anymore, and she's old enough to understand rewards. We had a very hard time potty-training our oldest daughter. The daycare she went to at the time gave us a suggestion that finally worked – sprinkles. When a kid successfully uses the potty, give them sprinkles (the kind you put on cookies, not the kind they're putting into the toilet). Once the sprinkles came into the picture, our oldest was potty-trained almost immediately after months of trying everything else. Our second daughter was a snap to potty-train, well, ok, first we had to wait for her to get out of her "painting with poop" phase, but again, I wait until they're old enough to understand things. During the "painting with poop" phase, she wasn't even 2 years old yet, and so it was really difficult to explain to her why the poop should go in the potty rather than being artistically displayed upon the walls, her crib, her toys, and even her face... YUCK!

Ok, this post has taken a turn for the worst, so I will take that as my cue to sign off. The point is, CONGRATS to Disney for doing such a good job on the potty!