

Counting my Blessings...

This December has definitely been one of the most difficult times in my adult life. It's one of those times where one is tempted to feel "I just can't get a break. Why am I being picked on?"

However, that makes it extra important for me to count some of my many blessings.

1. My Amazing Family

I can't say enough about my family. I have a loving and supportive wife who is always there to share in my joy and accomplishments and lift me up when my chin is down. She also keeps me grounded and focused when I start to feel sorry for myself or am tempted to make a decision that is poorly thought out or based on selfish ambition. And a wife who has also helped raise with me 4 delightful kids. Kids who are every bit the troublemakers they need to be to keep me from getting complacent and to keep our family from over-swelling with pride. But who are also very loving, affectionate, caring, generous, thoughtful, and adorable. God has placed the perfect family in my life to help round me out as a person and to fill my life with joy.

2. My Supportive Friends

I have friends who don't just fill my life with empty flattery and mindless conversation. They also don't only show their faces when I have something to offer. They are there when I need someone to listen, when we (our family) needs assistance, when I need a kick in the pants, and when I need to laugh and forget about the stress in life... God has gifted me with friendships that warm my heart and keep me moving forward. Between my family and friends alone I have been given so much to be thankful for – no matter what my circumstances.

3. Our Success and Opportunity

Even though I hit a rough patch every now and then, my life has been filled with nothing but opportunity and reward. Lisa and I often marvel at how much we have been **given** in terms of success. The ability to work from home for so many years and to rarely hunger. To be born into a country where we are free to peruse our desires, dreams, and passions. To be able to have an influence in our community and to be able to use the creative gifts God has entrusted in us... The list goes on and on.

I have counted three blessings which I just feel I need to share. However, the list of blessings only start there... It is mind blowing to me how much I have been given especially compared to how much I have given back. One Bible passage that always sticks in my head is from Luke 12:48:

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

I have been given so, so much. So when times are tough, like they are this December, it is not time for me to get down and demand more out of my Creator. It is time to **give praise** and ask the Almighty God *what more I can do? What more can I give? What more is to be demanded of me? How can I submit and offer my body up as a living sacrifice?*

Because there can be no doubt; I have been given much. Much will be demanded. And, I welcome it... Just as any loving son would welcome the demands of his loving, supporting, and life-giving Father.

Go See... Oh Wait, It's Much Too Late And So Am I

Big surprise, time got away from me. How did that happen? Couldn't be that it's Christmas time and I have a million things to do. Honestly, I always try to refrain from sending Christmas cards, but sometimes I feel so badly when we get cards from others and I'm not sending any back. So then I start sending some – just to my MOPs (Mothers of Preschoolers) group, I'll say. But next thing I know, I've decided to send Christmas cards to “a few” select groups of people, and that's when I realize that I'm just sending Christmas cards anyway even though I wasn't going to! Well, this that and the other stuff; Christmas cards are just one extra check on my holiday time to-do list, but that's a tangent...

My point was busyness. I was so busy that a few weeks ago when I wrote another newspaper review for one of our community theater groups, I forgot to post it on my blog. I usually like to post my reviews in my blog – since I'm doing the work to write them anyway, I might as well post them here to try to remind some friends and readers to go see the show. But now it's too late, for the show I saw and reviewed has finished its run. Oh well, such things happen; hopefully my review as it was printed in the paper made some people want to come see the cute show. For fun, here is a copy of the review:

Pageant Shines This Season

Early December finds many people preoccupied with the hustle and bustle of the approaching holiday season, so what better way to unwind from holiday stress than to see a live show?

A play guaranteed to inspire Yuletide spirit, The Best Christmas Pageant Ever is being performed by The Williams County Community Theatre in the playhouse at 501 S. East

Avenue in Montpelier during these chilly December weekends between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

This festive show provides fun for the entire family. The audience can spend a wintery evening or an afternoon matinee getting to know the Bradley clan (cohesively played by Jake McAfee, Mary Valdez, Allie Boyer, and Logan Psurny) as their normally normal life erupts into chaos. Thoughtfully narrated by young Beth Bradley (a cute and concise Allie Boyer), a heartwarming story unfolds, and the audience is a captive witness to the events leading up to what everyone hopes will be The Best Christmas Pageant Ever.

When Bradley mom Grace (a funny, flustered Mary Valdez) is chosen to replace Mrs. Armstrong (an amusing character played by Nicki Bassett) as director of the church's annual Christmas Pageant, all seems well until the Herdman family (outrageously played by Lance Day, Jessica Valdez / Sunny Bowman, Mason Bassett, Elliot Bowman, Isaiah Valdez, Jamison Grime, and Katie Taylor / Zara McNalley) slips into the scene. The Bradleys' seemingly picture-perfect world is turned upside-down when the six trouble-maker Herdman kids come to Sunday school. Even the reason why they began attending in the first place is hilarious (Logan Psurny takes the heat as Charlie Bradley). Poor Grace just wants to tell the story of Mary and Baby Jesus in the Pageant, but rehearsals are tough with a zany assortment of characters (brought to life by Amy Boyer, Jenna Bowman, Kyla Huband, Jake McAfee, Abby Ledyard, Makayah Long / Alisa Parsons, Kayden Long, Anna Valdez / Carolyn Rychener, Brook Ward / Bailey Ward, Taylor Brown, Amari Blanco, Tatum Grime, Savannah Kleinhen, Ethan Psurny, Hailey Tressler, Hannah Tressler) who just don't seem to like the idea of giving the Herdman kids a chance. Will it all come together in time to be The Best Christmas Pageant Ever?

It's the perfect time of year for this touching show, and WCCT's The Best Christmas Pageant Ever will have you flooded with Christmas spirit. Whether you simply come for the holiday

fun, to see the joyously decorated theatre, or to watch the adorable children in the cast put on their Pageant, this show will tug at your heartstrings, chase away holiday blues, and leave you humming Christmas carols with a glow and a grin!

“After all, It’s almost Christmas!”, so come out to the theater and join the fun!

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever can be seen on the Montpelier stage on Friday and Saturday nights at 8 pm on December 3,4, 10, and 11 and Thursday night December 9, and Sunday afternoon December 12 at 2:30 pm. Some of the roles are split between multiple actors, which is just one reason to see this show more than once. Reservations are recommended, but not required. Please call the WCCT Office for reservations and more info: 1-888-569-9228.

Taylhis has experience in community theatre that spans multiple decades. Ms. Taylhis has been on the stage as an actor, as well as behind-the-scenes doing production work like assistant-directing, producing, and stage-managing. As an enthusiastic supporter of the arts in Northwest Ohio, she has also enjoyed serving administratively on the boards of various local community theatre groups.

Voyaging Through The Winter Wonderland

Yes, yesterday found our first major storm of (the not even started) winter. Saturday night’s forecast said not to expect any white stuff until the afternoon. Well... as I was walking to work at 7:50 AM, there was already a dusting and more falling. After work at 2, I walked home and spent the

afternoon watching some holiday classic specials which have been DVRing faithfully awaiting the time when we could share in their viewing. Later, we watched one of Mom's favorite holiday movies, *White Christmas*. Old sentimental fluff but I must admit that it puts me in the holiday mood every year.

Tidbit... several people think that the immortal Irving Berlin tune originated in this movie. However, it really debuted in an earlier Bing Crosby classic, *Holiday Inn*.

Today, since schools were all closed (and even delayed last night), my brother decided to take his kids to the third *Chronicles of Narnia* feature, *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*.

Since a more local multiplex did not have a matinee, we decided to brave the blowing blanket of white for the big city. Until we got on the Interstate, the going was rather rough.

The movie itself was wonderful. I have it on good authority that it the movie is once again very faithful to the novel.

The seven Narnia books are each quite a bit shorter than the Harry Potter installments so I was not really surprised. The thing which surprised me was the switch from Walt Disney to Fox 2000 studios. Apparently, the last film in the series (*Prince Caspian*) fell quite short in box office expectations and the Mouse House backed out of the remainder of the movies.

I have not read the book for some time so I did not know fully what to expect. I knew the basic plot but little of the details. But it was very good! I can't say what my favorite is because it is a series and definitely cannot stand on its own. If you have seen or read any of the installments, you know that the series is a thrilling allegory. Yet you do not have to be a devout Christian to appreciate the story. Just going in and expecting a thrilling adventure is really all you need. Growing up reading and re-reading all of the books, I did not take the time to note every Christian symbol. I could spend hours detailing C.S. Lewis' theological mind... but I won't.

Hope everyone enjoyed and was safe during the first winter storm of the season.

I Needed To Smile Today



A Bear-y Rockin' Holiday

AH... the holiday programs continue. Last night, my first grade niece, Alyssa, and fifth grade nephew, Alex had their Elementary Christmas Program. Unlike Elizabeth's production of *Seussical, Jr.* last weekend, every student in grades K-5 were involved. However, the evening was divided into 2 (or three if you count the 6th grade guitar class) musical extravaganzas.

The youngest 3 classes presented *A Bear-Merry Holiday* in which the Kindergartners were dressed in brown as Grizzly Bears.

The first grade group as white Polar Bears. The second graders transformed into either Black or Panda Bears. Some of the highlights of this show were the angry, rapping grizzlies who promised to "be good." However, when they thought they were not being watched, returned to their rappin' ways.

"Panda-monium" found a group of pandas chasing each other in a

circle... not much room on the stage and one nearly fell down; however, I think this might have been slightly intentional as the near stumble looked a bit choreographed.

After two intermissions (after the K-2 were finished and following the guitarists), it was time for the big kids to present *Santa's Rockin' Christmas Eve*. The televised variety show featured an array of musical talent everything from a 60s Motown girls group, to a bluesy Mrs. Claus, to a Beatles-esque fivesome (ok, the Beatles were the fab 4) who made the girls swoon and faint.

There were more individual character roles in this production and I would have to say that my favorite was the quick talking, frequently "ad-libbing" emcee Swingle Kringle (brother of the guy in the red suit who everyone was waiting to make a surprise appearance) who was often admonished for his penchant for going off the cue cards.

When Santa finally arrived, he did not come alone. He and his back-up group performed the traditional holiday Disco hit, "S.A.N.T.A." I think the costumes could have been a bit more creative for that number. Perhaps not the traditional garb of a police officer, construction worker, Native American, biker dude, and military guy but a little more than just the jolly old elf in his polyester suit.

After the performance, we came home for our annual viewing of the 1938 version of *A Christmas Carol*. One tidbit gathered from the pre-show introduction: Scrooge was originally supposed to be played by Lionel Barrymore who had for years performed the role over the radio and was the original choice.

However, just before filming was to begin, Mr. Barrymore took a nasty fall and was unable to be in the film. He would create a role just as curmudgeonly (love that word) some eight years later, Mr. Henry F. Potter, himself. Tonight, the Muppet's take on the Carol is on. Haven't seen that one in years!

Another fun-filled holiday extravaganza. Monday night (weather permitting) I will take in my final concert at the glorious Huber... weather permitting of course. We could be in for a bit MORE of the white tonight into Sunday.

Nothing Worse...

Than having to care for sick kids when you are a sick parent. Ok, so there are plenty of worse things, but this is one of my least favorite things about daily life, getting sick at the same time as my kids. The hits just keep on coming – is it December or what? (in case you aren't aware, this is in reference to my family's annual dose of uncanny bad luck that seems to show its ugly face every December)

This time around, it's a nasty stomach virus, which means loads of extra laundry and some very crabby kids. The two little ones were up all night last night, and even though Hubby was the one who got up with them, I was still awakened all night, so neither of us got much sleep. Today was a take-it-easy day, and somehow I found the energy to get through it while being sick and on little sleep. I'm slightly concerned about the little ones being kept up all night again because it's the night of our oldest daughter's birthday party, and we have 8 screaming, shrieking 5th graders running around the house. But they seem to be having a blast (while us sickies keep our distance), and that's what matters. Now I just have to figure out how to talk them out of wanting to watch Twilight Eclipse, which in my opinion, does not seem appropriate for a bunch of 10 and 11 and one 6-year-old.

In a way it stinks getting sick on the weekend- there goes any chance we have of a fun family outing tomorrow, and I'm going

to be really upset if I have to miss teaching my Sunday school class on Sunday morning – those 1st graders are adorable, and we have so much fun together every week; I really look forward to seeing them. But on the other hand, getting sick on the weekend means that Hubby doesn't have to worry about missing work, so that's a positive.

Well, here's to hoping that we are well soon and that there is some way that the rest of the family (2 left standing) does not come down with this. I guess if there was a weekend in December for the whole family to come down sick, this was the best one. We have my daughter's birthday party, but nothing that involves travel like the weekends in the rest of the month.

Take care of yourself and your family in this, the lovely month of December!!

A Vocal Workout

I am happy(?) to inform all that my voice lesson today was ALOT of HARD WORK ☐ I loved every minute. During my warmup (does sound like a workout, yes?) I was offered three pointers on reaching those high notes:

1. Bend your knees slightly (already knew that)
2. Hold your hands out palms down and turn them up as you hit that soaring note (I tried that once and it DID WORK!)
3. Squeeze your glutes together. (Haven't tried that one)

Today, I chose to work on some of the "power pieces" which I am on good standing to perfect. Boy oh boy maybe next week I'll mix it up with some novelty songs. As it was, we only

made it through two selections but a lot of work was put into polishing them up. I think it is much more draining to perform a song that is driven by heavy emotion than lighter fare. But one of these pieces is one of my favorites so of course I am going to focus a bit on it but man what emotion it carries with it!

I even surprised myself by the emotional impact I created. When it was over, I did feel like I had been on a roller coaster of turmoil and angst. And I don't want to perform them until Spring?! Imagine the possibilities! I did get to have a little gingerbread cookie on my way out! Who could ask for anything more?

An Afternoon With The FBI

It seemed like something out of a movie, our visit to the local FBI office yesterday. Except that it wasn't a movie, and the office wasn't exactly local...

Let me back up. It's December, and don't you know, that seems to signal a yearly torrent of bad luck thrown our way. Shortly after turning the page on our calendar this month, we found out (among other things) that my husband's website (and our family's livelihood) had been attacked. And I don't mean a little harmless virus or an annoying spam attack – it's a DDoS – simply put, someone targeted this website, and essentially used thousands of computers around the world to overload this website and crash the server. It's enough of an incident to capture both the interest of the local media and the FBI, both of whom politely requested interviews yesterday. So we drove out to the city, found the government building that houses the FBI offices, walked inside and

checked with the doorman who wanted to know who we were there to see.

“I have an appointment with Mr. X at the FBI (*name changed for privacy*).” said my husband, and once it was confirmed that he was on the list, the doorman stated that he “would get us up.” He led us to the elevator and punched in a special code – can’t just push the floor number for the FBI these days it seems. We got off the elevator and waited around for a few minutes, entertained by the FBI’s 10 Most Wanted posters. One in particular caught my husband’s eye. “Doesn’t that look like our neighbor?” He asked me, and I had to agree. I began to read the description and was surprised to see that it did seem to describe our neighbor – he’s into sports like golf and dirt-biking, and it’s strange because my husband and I would often notice the neighbor packing up his car for weekend trips and coming back, unloading things like helmets, golf clubs, and lots of other sporting equipment. Such is life when you don’t have kids, we thought, and I guess you should know that the reason we pay so much attention to this neighbor’s activities is because he happens to have a nasty cat that terrorizes our neighborhood. So while keeping tabs on [that darn cat](#), we’ve observed some of our ~~most-wanted~~ neighbor’s behavior. The kicker of this whole coincidence is that the Wanted-by-the-FBI guy was listed as possibly having bi-sexual tendencies, and that fits in with what we’ve seen about our neighbor as well. Don’t get me wrong, I don’t think it’s him, but it was an entertaining wait, to say the least.

So then an agent comes out of a door and asks if we’ve been helped. We said not yet and repeated the name of the agent we were there to see. We were led to a door, and there was a sophisticated series of security measures that the man went through to enter (not going to repeat them here on the internet out of respect for the security of the FBI – not that I even knew what he was doing anyway). In this small waiting area, there was a metal detector, which began to go crazy

every time this guy went near it – I forgot to mention that he's carrying 2 or 3 very large bags. He disappears behind a door, and the man we were supposed to meet with appears and introduces his assistant – a lady carrying a notepad, a pen, and oh yeah, I shouldn't forget to mention the large gun she was packing tucked into the back of her skirt. What kind of assistant is that?!?



Two of the most famous fictional FBI agents in pop culture history: Agents Mulder and Scully from the X-Files. Ok, so our agents were not Mulder and Scully, but I couldn't resist making the comparison.

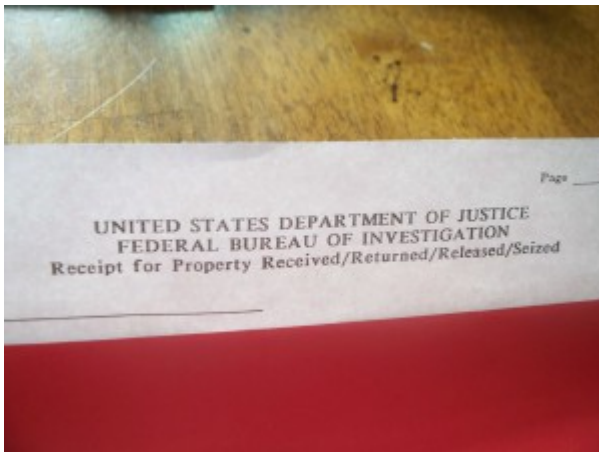
So we go into a conference room of sorts, and the interview begins. The agent and his assistant are not unfriendly, and they want to know the facts of the case. They are both taking notes, but probably most surprising to us is the absence of laptop computers – these FBI guys (from the cyber crimes division) are taking notes with pens on Steno pads, and that's not even a joke. But it is hilarious.

The entire day had a Men in Black-like feel... If you've seen the movie, then you remember the part where Will Smith is recruited to be a man in black – he goes to this bland looking government building that turns out to be very sci-fi on the inside with all the security measures and things like that. Such was the case here – lots of doors, signs about authorization, keypads, things like that, very sci-fi, and my husband told the agent so at the end of the interview. Mr. X seemed to chuckle (we wondered on the way home, are FBI agents trained to drain themselves of personality?), and he told us

that we could just take the elevator back downstairs, no special code needed – thanks for the advice.

All in all, a very interesting trip. Made me want to do things like see Salt (a movie about the FBI) or read [Special Agent: My Life on the Front Lines as a Woman in the FBI](#) again. Did the FBI interview do any good for my husband's business? We don't know yet. It depends if they catch the people who are doing it. The FBI disclaimed several times that it doesn't seem as if the damages the business has incurred will be recovered, and we of course are praying otherwise. Whatever happens, this is part of learning to trust God's plan for us, isn't it? Easier said than done. I'm really hoping that the stress on my husband dissipates soon...

And oh yeah, a little souvenir from the FBI (the property we gave them was received and not seized, in case you are wondering):



Mars, Venus, Whatever You

Call It

It seems like men and women can be from different planets at times. During a series at youth group called "Lovesick", we were shown the following videos, and they illustrate the differences between the opposite sexes hilariously – Enjoy!

[cartoonconversation-outtoeat.mp4](#)

[cartoonconversation-pant.mp4](#)

December Blues...

Well, it is December and the Bears are 9-3... However, I am not feeling particularly joyful.

For one – one of my major clients has vanished with a large unpaid bill. A payment we were really relying on and our budgeting included. I sure hope she is ok. I am worried that something has happened; though hopefully it is just that she doesn't want / cannot pay her bill and is avoiding me. That has happened several times before with clients.

For two – my (other) server is under a **major [DDoS attack](#)**. And, while I am not going to post the site name here (don't want this server to get attacked) it is my site that outs online scammers that got threatened and then attacked. It has already cost me one client and will undoubtedly cost me tons in terms of losing visitors. The two major sites on that server get a LOT of visitors through Google. But, since it is now basically offline, it is only a matter of time before Google de-lists my sites costing me potentially tens of thousands in revenue. I have worked so hard to get those two

sites to be major forces; I am SO BUMMED.

For three – my health has been icky-poo. Nothing serious, but with all the other stress it is just something else I don't need. I have had headaches on most days, back pain which sometimes mounts to a sharp-pain-attack, I have some weird cracking noise and pain in my knee, and my eyesight has gotten blurry, and my stomach is often aching. I guess I am just THAT old.

For four – my investor has bailed. I had a partner/investor on a project and he wants out. This means \$7500 must be paid (back to him). \$7500 that is long ago invested. Now, legally, I do not have to give him a thing back but ethically/morally I have to return his money. After all, I am delayed more than FIVE MONTHS on the project. This just comes at a really bad time for that.

Last December I suffered a catastrophic HD failure when my HD crashed, was low-level-formatted and then when I went to restore from the backup – it was damaged. It cost me several clients, lots of money, and a very big headache.

Last December Charity, the dog we loved as a member of the family, died.

December has always been one of my favorite times – Christmas! And, now that we celebrate for the real reason (Jesus), Christmas has become even more special. However, after these past two Decembers I don't know. I just don't know. In every way other than Charity dying (which is a HUGE one), this December is much worse than last one. I cannot remember a time I felt so un-optimistic in my adult life.

I have no choice but to work hard to try and salvage and fix what I can and to lay the rest at the foot of the Cross. I have trust in God's plan for me and know that He will keep His promise not to give me more than I can handle; just as He has kept it all my life.

After all, I am still **very** blessed. I have been given much; so much is to be expected of me. I have an amazing wife, loving children, dear friends, I live in a free country, I have a roof over my head, plenty to eat, and much more. Too many blessings to even list...

And, the trials I face are nothing compared to the issues some of my friends and family have had to face or are facing. Some have lost loved ones, some have friends moving away, some have serious medical issues, some have stress and pressure well beyond mine. And some have not come to know Christ yet and to accept His sacrifice.

So, even though I am feeling sorry for myself, I won't complain. I have TONS of reasons to give worship and praise to our Creator! Especially at Christmas time where we celebrate the greatest gift ever given.

Derek, do you see who that is in the video!? Christ Saves!!