

# That's A WHAT?

We visited our local zoo this weekend (to feed my zoo addiction, it had been awhile), and when I got home, as usual, I decided to research some of the animals we observed. As I was researching these animals on the internet, I came across some ultra-cute baby animal pics, and I thought I might make a fun game on my blog of having people guess which animal is what type of baby – HAVE FUN! Don't worry about posting your guesses – other people can just ignore them or use them as hints if they get stuck.





Here is an added picture of the same type of animal, a little older – per a request in the comments



for a better picture:



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# Back to work...Finally

Goodwill has not opened officially yet, but they have gotten us back to work and hired seven new people. At the moment, I am putting clothes onto racks while everyone else is filling up racks and sorting clothes. Working full-time is a different experience and after working just one week at full-time, I am not used to it. My legs have finally stopped hurting after work, but my feet still hurt after only a couple of hours walking around. I have gotten very lazy around the house right now, since standing on my feet after work is very difficult to stand in front of the sink for about 15 minutes. By the time I am finally used to the full-time, eight hours on my feet, I will be back to my cashier position with only a couple of days a week and even less hours a day. □ I was supposed to be either working in the back as a full-time sorter or going through the housewares, but that for some reason didn't work out. Then I was going to be a head cashier, but that didn't pull through either. I am not sure why, since Sarah, the manager, said to everyone who had be hired back that we would get first pick because we had waited so long to be back to work. Obviously, that did not happen for me and I am still a cashier. I am full-time at the moment, up until the store opens, and then my hours will be cut.

Because of all the bills Tony and I have building up, I will have to find something else to do as well. Tony's hours are being cut at KFC because they are not staying open as late and we keep having bills added to our already long list of bills. Next month, we have to add the electric bill to our list and then probably shortly after that, we will start paying rent for the house. We are staying at his parents' old house and thankfully, they weren't making us pay anything because I was

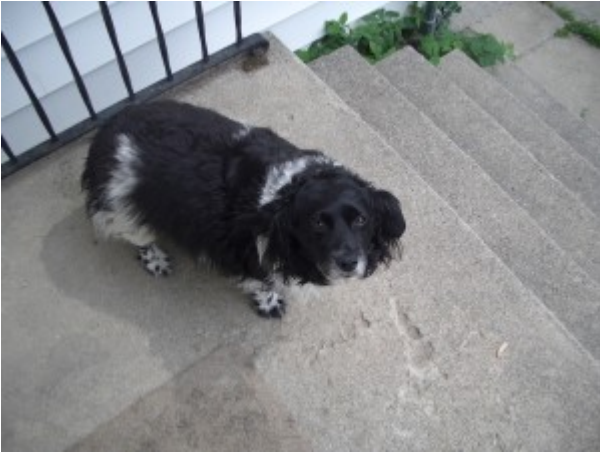
not getting a lot of hours at work. Then, when Sarah and Sue went to work at the new store, I started getting more hours at the outlet store, so we had to get the gas in our name and start paying that. Once again, things changed for the worse, Sarah and Sue had to stop working at the new store because things became a standstill, so they came back to work and my hours were once again cut. We are hoping that things will change, that we can find jobs, either a second job or one that is full-time that will help us through this tough time. We are willing to stretch our food, just to make sure our cat and frog will be comfortable and have enough food. Our animals are so important to us and we want them to be happy. ☐

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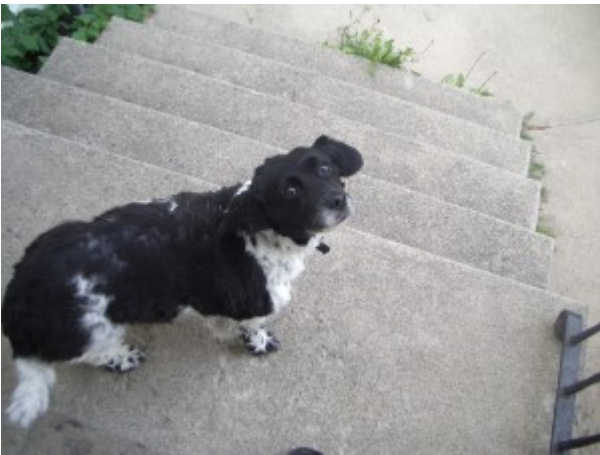
## **Before And After – Chapter 3 – Beesly**

Our dog Beesly (named for the character Pam Beesly on the awesome NBC show The Office, which you should really watch (end of shameless plug)) can grow to be very fluffy. From people who have seen her, we've had comments ranging from "That dog is more round than she is tall!" to "there is more fur than dog there" and then there are the people who would just laugh after they saw her. She ~~is~~ was a very fluffy dog. Since it's summertime where Beesly lives, we figured it was time to shear her like a sheep, which ended up being a surprise doggie makeover because she had SO much fur. Check this out:

BEFORE:



AFTER:



After we sheared Beesly, we looked forward to showing her to our 9-year-old daughter, Taylor, who is Beesly's main caregiver. We told the kids we had a surprise for them, and we let Beesly in from the back yard and my daughter's friend cried out that the surprise was that we got a new dog. Well, thanks for giving the kids expectations about the surprise (hehe), but she **was** half-right. The surprise was a "new" dog. The kids can now pet Beesly since before the haircut you would only be petting a thick mat of fur. Beesly herself appreciates this makeover a lot too! She is much more cool when she lays outside, she is less thirsty, and she even has lots more energy! She IS like a new dog! And by the way, the kids all liked the surprise. Taylor saw Beesly and laughed and laughed; it was adorable. And as a finale to this blog post, THIS is how much fur we got off of Beesly – the pen is sitting on top of the bag to reference the volume of the fur contained inside:



I know they make clothes out of alpaca fur and sheep's wool; does anyone know about the harvesting of dog fur? And I'm not talking about Burlington Coat Factory, YUCK!

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## New York Trip Diary Volume 2

**NEW YORK TRIP – MARCH 20-23, 2009 – TAYLOR: 9 yrs, SAMMIE: 4 yrs, DISNEY: 2½ yrs, CHRISTOPHER: 8 mos**

*(continued from a previous post)*

**Friday March 20 (cont'd)** – We arrived at the Akron Zoo about 2pm, which was right on schedule pretty much, although it would have been nice to have more time to explore the wonderful zoo that awaited us. From what I saw, Akron looked like a dumpy little city with a beautiful little zoo. All of the exhibits seemed to be of newer construction, and the animals seemed really active and happy. The Akron Zoo has many unique animals in their collection; including the super rare Sumatran Tiger, (most people are used to seeing Bengals, also called Siberian tigers as those are the ones frequently exhibited at zoos) and the Sumatran tiger was roaring when we saw him. They also have 2 types of animals that I was looking forward to seeing – the hyacinth macaw and the capybara

(largest rodent on earth) – but both species were off exhibit waiting for warmer weather. No problem, we had seen capybaras at the Cleveland Zoo earlier in the day, and I have a macaw at home, not a rare hyacinth, but a macaw just the same. Akron has a Malayan sun bear, the type of bear that was the inspiration to A. A. Milne for his Winnie the Pooh stories, and these are also not commonly on exhibit in zoos. When we stopped for lunch, we were pleased to find that the cafe is attached to a building with a Galapagos tortoise habitat, a komodo dragon exhibit, a really cool marmoset environment (a little marmoset – it's a small primate, if you don't know – came running up to the glass when he saw us with our nacho container and started licking the glass!), and an awesome jellyfish exhibit. Before Friday I had only seen one type of jellyfish – moon jellies – but the Akron Zoo has several different kinds on display. My favorite were the bulbous blue blubber jellies. Here is the marmoset trying to taste our nachos through the glass while my daughter is in the middle of a blink:



And next is a picture of the komodo dragon; I couldn't resist posting it. These things are incredibly ferocious and huge. Once they claw (and *look* at those claws!) or bite their prey (and I'm talking prey as large as water buffalo), they hang around until the animal succumbs to the 28 varieties of deadly bacteria the komodo has in its saliva and then devour it. [Sharon Stone and her husband Phil Bronstein have something to](#)

[say](#) about the danger of komodos after one bit off his toes during a behind the scenes visit. You can't really tell from the picture, but this thing was almost 10 feet long!



The Akron Zoo is a place for great family fun. The girls got to be penguins:



and measure their wing spans:







Even though their baby brother didn't quite make it long enough to see all of the animals and activities Akron had to offer:



Another cool experience we had at Akron was hearing the bald eagles chirping. I always kind of assumed they would have big voices to match their size, but their tweeting was really cute! Overall, we had a wonderful day zoo-hopping. After our visit to Akron, it was time to head for our hotel in New Jersey. The ride was uneventful; the kids got some sleep and so did I. The traffic in New Jersey was absolutely horrible, which we totally expected, but what we didn't expect was all the detours. There were police and road construction everywhere, which amounted to a ton of traffic, especially for one in the morning. It was a bit stressful, but we did it, and kudos to my wonderful husband who kept his cool and guided us through the many detours for which Jill the GPS couldn't compensate. But who needs Jill? We made it without getting

lost! And as we were walking down the hall to room 913 to turn in for the evening, I turned to Jamy our great friend and traveling Manny (man who's a nanny in case you missed my first diary installment) and said, "At least we're not staying in room 911 for our trip to New York." He showed me his key, which did say 911 – oops. Thankfully it was just a coincidence, not an omen:



And here is a parting shot of our family outside the Akron Zoo from earlier in the day – stayed tuned for Trip Diary Volume 3!



# Elephants Are Not Toys

I saw this article in the news a few weeks ago and was reminded why I will never take my kids to a circus:

*INDIANAPOLIS – More than a dozen children were injured Saturday morning at the Indiana State Fairgrounds when a circus elephant they were waiting to ride got startled and caused some scaffolding to give way.*

*The scaffolding stairway leading people to the elephant ride collapsed just before 10 a.m. inside the Pepsi Coliseum where the Murat Shrine Circus is being held, said Indianapolis Fire Department spokeswoman Capt. Rita Reith.*

*At least 15 children between the ages of 8 and 12 years old were taken to first aid stations at the site, but most suffered only bumps and scrapes, Reith said. One adult suffered a minor arm injury when he or she fell from the top of the stairs.*

*It's unclear what caused the elephant to become startled.*

*The circus continued as scheduled.*

Well, first things first – thank goodness no one was seriously hurt. And it's not that I'm some crazy animal rights activist. But I do believe in treating animals with respect. And I don't see how it's possible to treat circus elephants with respect given their busy show schedule, the cruel training methods, and the high intellect noteworthy of the elephant. Not only is the performance schedule strenuous, but the fact that such a huge animal is forced to travel from city to city *on a train* leaves no room for an argument that the animals are being treated with respect – in my opinion anyway. In fact, given the conditions that circus elephants are continually forced to endure, I'm actually surprised that circus catastrophes don't occur more often.

Zoos are another story; zoo animals' habitats try to mimic nature as closely as possible; they're not exploited for the sake of making a few bucks (pony rides and things like that are different – as I said, elephants are highly intelligent and when you add in the traveling with the circus and the sharp stick used to prod them when they disobey...), but rather, zoos exist to help educate the public. And if the general public is going to care enough about animals to want to help endangered species and to further conservation, zoos are a key factor in making this happen. So that brings me to the following picture, which was in an email I was sent. There is a zoo exhibit in Canada where you get to go in a pool adjacent to the polar bear exhibit; with only a pane of glass separating you from the polar bears (albeit a VERY thick pane of glass!). It's a great example of how zoos can capture and hold people's attention about animals without harming the animal in the process. Check it out – maybe I can see it live some day!



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## What Sets Him Off?

What sets him off? Everything under the sun and even the sun itself. I'm talking about our lovely scarlet macaw parrot. I

would not recommend these things as pets for ANYONE – it's true when they say that wild animals cannot be tamed! Why we have our bird is a long story, and it's not important now because we're stuck with him. I'm not one to just "get rid" of pets unless the circumstances are extreme. It's a pet peeve (pun intended) of mine when people get animals and then discard them just because they're sick of taking responsibility for them. And in a way (though I can't dwell on this right now because I'm extremely upset with Squawky – who really lives up to his name), I love our parrot and wouldn't want to ~~curse~~ see him go to another home.

So that brings me to the point of this post – parrots scream constantly. They might be beautiful to look at, but their ear-splitting screams are beyond annoying. They're unstoppable and headache-producing, and more than once, our parrot's screams have made our kids cry. We've adjusted our lifestyle to avoid his upsetting the kids, and for the most part that works; it seems to be me who feels the brunt of the negative parrot side effects. Thank goodness we were able to move into a bigger house a few years ago where Squawky was given his own room. Unfortunately, he shares the laundry room, and since somehow I was voted the family laundry-doer (gender?), it seems that Squawky's screaming affects me the most. I cannot do laundry during the day because I can't bring my young children in the laundry room with me. I do have a basket of toys in there, and they enjoy playing in there because there's lots of light and a nice soft carpet to lay on. But we get screamed at by the parrot. By nighttime, I'm too tired to do all the laundry, so much of the time, I'm left to worry about when to do it. Ideally, I'd do some here and there in between kids' lunches, naps, diaper changes and my errands, but then the parrot gets all riled up and screams me right out of the laundry room.

I looked to the Internet for advice, and one site suggested noting his "triggers". What sets him off and makes him

scream? Making the list of his triggers hasn't helped, however. It's only made me see that getting screamed out of the laundry room seems unavoidable. Here are his triggers (if you're thinking about getting a pet parrot, use this list as reasons on why you should NOT):

the sunrise or light of any kind – it's a parrot's natural instinct to be quiet in the dark so predators won't find them. But heavy drapes and a sheet over his cage do not block out all the light during the day, and it's really difficult to do laundry at night in the dark – believe me I've tried more than once!

yelling – any yelling in the house gets him going – kids fighting, kids having fun, just raising our voices to hear each other when we're in separate parts of the house. He especially likes it when I yell at him for yelling!

singing – if my husband is in a show and needs to practice, everyone has to leave. And not because my husband is a bad singer – he's actually very talented. But the bird will join in, and HE is a BAD singer!

talking on the phone – any time anyone is on the phone, the bird thinks we're calling out for him I guess, but he takes it upon himself to yell. So I can forget folding laundry while talking on the phone, which was a great way to pass the time while doing this boring task.

having his door open – closing his door not only muffles his screaming, but it makes him scream less for some reason

something he likes on tv – he has a tv in his room, which was put in there for me to watch while doing laundry. But I can forget about hearing anything on the tv while I'm in there, thanks to the parrot. Sometimes Animal Planet or his favorite show, The Price Is Right makes him scream along with the audience.

happiness – if he's happy, he will get rowdy and play and scream.

anger – if he's upset about not getting enough attention, he will scream.

hunger – if he's hungry, he will scream.

thirst – if he's thirsty, he will scream.

dogs barking – if our 2 dogs bark, which they do at least 4 times per day, the bird will join right in and scream.

So, I guess for now I've decided that the laundry must be a family affair. I've gotten upset several times about this same issue and came to this conclusion before, but it's never worked. My husband works during the day, and at night, we're usually busy or the kids have their own chores or homework to do, so my getting help with the laundry has not been a consistent solution. The other thing we've thought of is to move the parrot out of the laundry room, but if you look at my list of Squawky's triggers, you'll see that he must be in a room with a door, which eliminates the other spare room we have on the first floor because it's doorless. I can't imagine that he'd do any better on the second floor closer to the bedrooms either. The laundry room is right below my bedroom so once he gets going in the morning, I can usually forget about sleeping in anyway.

Well, I guess I'm done venting for now. I have a good hour to catch up on laundry since we have a meeting tonight and we took the kids to the babysitters early, so I have to make it productive. I guess I will have to blast my ipod and leave my husband to fend for himself on his business call... Well, it is HIS bird after all!

Here's a picture of the jerk:



Don't let his cuteness fool you. This is actually a "baby" picture. He's much more obnoxious looking now!

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## Farm Frenzy

You might have noticed a decrease in the frequency of my blogging. I am still super-busy with my 4 kids, but now that the horrible months-long-lasting illness has run its course through our house, I have more energy and time than I've had in a long time... so why am I posting less? Because I've gone and gotten myself addicted to a video game, of all things!

It's called Farm Frenzy Pizza Party, and it's addicting to play! Basically, you get this little plot of land where you choose what animals to buy and manage. Each different kind of animal drops a type of product, and you can either use these products to make other products, or you can sell them. You can upgrade your warehouse to make it store more products, you can upgrade your factories to produce products more quickly, and you can upgrade your vehicles to make them faster. The game is surprisingly complicated, yet easy to learn. Ultimately, the more difficult levels consist of making pizzas, and each pizza is made up of five types of product. Complicating the game player's goals is the fact that some of the pizza components are made up of two different products themselves, so you have to choose which animals and factories



to buy and in what order to make the products with the funds you have. There are also bears that drop down from the sky that eat your animals and even trample your factories! It's really fast-paced (you get rewarded for completing the levels in a timely fashion also), and like I said, it's very addicting.

I was looking for a hobby, but this is ridiculous. I could have chosen something a little more productive than sitting on my butt and playing a video game. But this is *fun*. And I haven't let myself indulge in a hobby that's non-productive in a long time... Usually in my spare time I organize our family photos or work on our kids' school memory books or things like that... What's that you ask? What about my blogging? Well, ok, I see your point. So I have a few hobbies now; they'll have to compete for my time. And right now, Farm Frenzy is winning! Here is a screen shot:



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# A Living Breathing Hoax

A while ago, I decided to write a series within my blog about animals, my favorite things. I just can't find enough time to learn about animals, and I love sharing knowledge about their incredible attributes. Here is chapter two in my Interesting Animals series. To read chapter one about a scaly mammal called the pangolin, [click here](#).

For chapter two, I chose to focus on the duck-billed platypus; an animal who is so strange looking that people thought it to be a hoax when it was first discovered in 1798.

The platypus is one of 3-5 species (depending on the source – animal knowledge is very differential) of monotremes or egg-laying mammals. I know, at one point we were all taught that one of the characteristics of mammals is that they give birth to live young, but that is not the case. Monotremes lay eggs, and the platypus join echidnas (spiny anteaters) in this animal order. The platypus is found in Australia – seems like they have all the cool animals, doesn't it? I just wish they weren't so stingy with their animals. I know they stopped loaning out the Tasmanian Devil years ago, and now that the last one died (it resided in Fort Wayne Indiana until its death – I could kick myself for not making the less than hour trip over there to see it while it was alive), the only place to see them is in Australia. The same goes for the platypus. I've visited many zoos, and I've never seen a live platypus. A quick check on the internet reveals that they are only found in Australian zoos.

But anyway, aside from being an aquatic (with water-repellent fur), egg-laying mammal, another cool thing about the platypus is that the males are actually poisonous. Both genders have a

spur on their left foot, but the males' spur produces enough venom to really hurt a human being. Here is a picture of the duck-billed platypus – note the soft, leathery duck-bill which is actually used by the animal to sense the electric fields caused by its moving prey (feeds on shrimp, fish eggs, small fish, and aquatic invertebrates found in streams and lakes).



Easy to see how this duck-billed, beaver-tailed, otter-footed, egg-laying mammal was once thought to be an elaborate man-made fraud, huh?

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# How Sweet It Is

Two different family members sent me an email forward with the following video because they knew I'd love it. They were right! The following is a touching story about the unlikely but very true friendship between a dog and an elephant – you have to see it to believe it!

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# You Dirty Rat(s)

According to Wikipedia.com, James Cagney never actually said the line, "*You Dirty Rat*". The closest he got was saying "Come out and take it, you dirty, yellow-bellied rat, or I'll give it to you through the door!" in *Taxi*. But *rats*! That's not the point of this post.

Seems I couldn't resist adding to the Food Chain Gang – we've added two pet rats to our family, Bobby and Oreo – the kids chose the names. It was kind of an impulsive activity to do today, pet shopping, but it was not an impulsive decision, the type that should never accompany a new pet. We've been talking about getting a rat for some time now, but if it ended up being the wrong decision for our family, we didn't want to *be like rats leaving a sinking ship* and ditch the responsibility. So we've been thinking about it a lot, and today just seemed like the right day to do it.

Rats are friendly, intelligent, non-biting rodents who make great pets. Rat owners compare their companionship to that of dogs, believe it or not, and from what I've seen so far, I see what they're talking about. I think rats haven't caught on as pets because many people don't like the way their tails look, and they still have a negative stigma from a few incidents of centuries past, namely the Black Death outbreak and the legend of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. I did some research about both of these historical tales – not that they influenced my decision to get the rats as pets; the research was just for fun. But I found that the Bubonic Plague, aka the Black Death was most likely transmitted by fleas rather than rats. True the fleas would travel on the rats, but they more commonly preferred larger hosts such as dogs or cats and used rats when larger animals were unavailable. The Bubonic Plague was

attributed to causing the demise of one quarter of the Earth's population of human beings at that time, it's hard to blame people for taking it out on rats. And the Pied Piper story is basically a legend that tries to explain the disappearance of over 100 children from the town of Hamelin in Germany just before the year 1300. Most likely, the children were recruited to newer European settlements, possibly by a man in "pied" clothing. In the legend, there is a rat infestation in Hamelin, and the Pied Piper leads the rats out of the town to a body of water where they all drown. The townspeople neglect to pay the Piper for his rat removal services, and he returns and leads their children out of town. Some versions claim they went to a cave, some say another village, and there are even a few versions that say the Piper had ill intentions toward the children – in one they meet a fate similar to the rats. I enjoyed some of the rat research I read and wanted to share it. If you want to continue the research on your own, I've added to the level of the cheesiness (and length) of this post by putting some common sayings involving rats in *italics* – try looking them up; the origins are interesting. But anyway, back to our new little friends.

When we were at the pet store, I didn't want any part of picking out the rat. I felt like they are only in pet stores to become snake food (which is why I won't join the *rat race* and work in a pet store, as much as I'd like to do the other work in the store), and I didn't want to have to see the ones that wouldn't get saved. As it is, I went over there to take a glance, saw little Bobby, who was about to be put back in the snake food tank, and that's what prompted me to say, "Maybe we should get two." The pet store sent the rats home to us like this, a brown bag lunch for snakes, thus proving my point:



The rats my family chose for us are 4 week old brothers. They are adorable, incredibly tame, and I've already really bonded with Bobby. He cuddles me and sits on me and grooms himself – rats are actually very clean animals. The entire start-up for this type of pet set us back about \$25.

\$2.99 per rat + \$3 for bedding + \$9 cage + \$3 food (for about 3 weeks worth) + \$2 water bottle + tax. We are going to be resourceful about toys and use my kids' toys for the rats – we've already found that they like to crawl through these foam tunnel blocks they have. And we were very resourceful when making their cage as well. Instead of trying to decide between the \$19 glass aquarium and the \$24 hamster cage (I was concerned about the heaviness and the breakable glass of the aquarium and worried the rats would escape the cage), we opted for secret option #3 – a large \$9 transparent Rubbermaid bin with a lid in which we poked air holes. Overall, I'm very happy so far with the new pet decision, and my major concerns have not come to fruition which were: 1. that our Jack (Jerk) Russell Terrier mix would try to hunt the rats, and 2. that the kids would unwittingly hurt the rats. But our dog has not even noticed that the rats are here yet (she's almost 11 and her sense of smell is failing faster than I thought – that makes me a little sad), and we laid down strict rules for the kids about handling the rats. I was also worried about having yet another chore to do around the house, but I was promised help from both of the enthusiastic new pet owners (there's a sucker born every minute). Here are the cuties – Bobby is the

beige one and Oreo is the gray and white one:

