

End Of August 2012

How's that for a creative title? I don't have much time to exercise my creativity these days; well, that's not true... In my daily adventures of running a household of 7 and caring for 5+ kids every day, I exercise creativity all the time. I need to "fly by the seat of my pants" all day and find creative ways to combat boredom, disagreements and to provide a fun, stimulating and educational environment. But as far as written creativity... well, maybe someday I'll have time to once again work on enhancing my writing skills.

Luke had his 9 month checkup today. He is actually $10\frac{3}{4}$ months old, but we had to reschedule his appointment twice because of an injury (he's ok now but had to get stitches in his pinkie) and work. He measured out perfectly for his age on all of their growth curve charts, and he was able to pass all of the physical tests with flying colors (picking up small objects, standing, clapping, etc). He weighs 19 lbs, 11 oz and is 29" long. He likes all kinds of table food, especially fruits and pasta. Nothing else really of note about the visit, except that he got his blood drawn and ate the band-aid after. I was wondering about the effects of wearing a band-aid on a finger that spends 90% of its time in the baby's mouth, but they're the professionals – or so I thought. I meant to take the band-aid off but alas, I didn't get to it in time...

I was actually going to write more; I wanted to share the homeschool curriculum I wrote for the kids, but I was reminded why I don't blog anymore. In just the short time it took me to type this, I had to stop more than 5 times to get kids out of the bath, change diapers, and break up fights... now I've been informed the baby is pooped and there is still a kid left in the bath, sounds like another one going back in... more later ?

WHY Can't Babies Go To The Movies?

Gonna climb upon a soapbox for a moment...

The families in Colorado who were involved in the shooting need prayer. Probably one of the very last things they need right now is a network of UNSupport – people using mass media to put down the people involved and some of their decisions. Mainly, I'm bugged by those who say things like, "What was a 3-month-old doing at a movie theater anyway? Especially a MIDNIGHT showing of a PG13 movie??"

What's wrong with taking a baby to a movie? As long as the parent(s) willingly leave before the baby causes a disruption, then I don't understand what all the fuss is about. I have 5 kids, none of whom have slept thru the night until they were over a year old (probably – my youngest is only 9 months old, but he's the worst sleeper yet, so I'm guessing he won't sleep thru the night until he's a year). So if I'm up at midnight anyway with the baby, I think it should be up to me if I want to spend my own money on a movie, knowing there is a chance that I won't get to see the entire movie if I have to leave if the baby fusses. Babies are not going to watch the movie; they're not going to pick up any bad things from the screen at that age, and taking the baby to the movies late at night can actually be the ONLY time new parents can find to connect to each other while trying to balance the demands of parenthood and careers.

Or, take the situation of a big brother who REALLY wants to see the midnight showing of Batman. Again, the parents feel they are going to be up anyway with the baby, so why not

schedule in some family time at a most unusual, however more convenient, time. Again, if kids (or babies) cause a disruption in the theater, they should be taken out immediately as a courtesy to others who have also paid to see a movie.

Well, that's all I have time for now, just had to get that out – I just don't see anything wrong with taking a baby to the movies, and it bugs me a tiny bit that people are so busy worrying about how others raise their children instead of getting out there themselves to improve our society's crumbling family unit. Please don't attack the parents who are actually seeking to spend time with their children.

Dear Lord, Thank you so much for the gift of children. We pray to you to continue to guide us to love them, to nurture them, and to lead them to you. We pray for the comfort and healing of those involved in the Colorado shooting. May they grow ever closer to you, Lord. Amen.

Checkin' In

Here it is mid-April already! It's funny that a few days ago I thought I had made the decision to not blog anymore, but here I am (part of this doing-less-for-me-more-for-others mentality I'm attempting). I have a kid who wants to train to be a babysitter by watching her siblings, and I have a baby who decided he needed a nap – so I find myself with idle time. Wait, idle time?!? What's that? I'm not used to this; I don't know what to do! Usually I try to cram in some housework or laundry or food prep in my “down” time, but right now I just want to sit... so writing I will do!

Nothing much to say, just a generic update on my family. The

kids are doing great! There hasn't been any sickness in our house lately, so we are thankful to God for that. So a quick update on each of us if I can get it in before Luke's nap is over...

Taylor is 12 and a half now, and she is a great kid. She shows so much responsibility and genuinely cares for others. She is challenged at times with patience with her siblings, but she does well. I can't imagine it would be easy to be the oldest in a house where there is always so much chaos and needy little kids! Taylor leads the worship music for the kids at church, and she also enjoys using her artistic gifts to make posters for church events.

Sammie is almost 8 and is a pretty good babysitter. She LOVES her baby brother, and if it's the right day, she's great with her 5 year old sister and 3 year old brother. But Sammie has her off-days too, and if it's one of those days, WATCH OUT! ☐ She will push buttons of all of her siblings, and she is quite good at getting them going. She is watching the littles as I write though, so it feels wrong to say bad things about her behavior. She is getting ready for her 8th bday party coming up in May!

Disney has been causing 90% of the trouble in our house lately. Our sweet little Disney is going through a phase right now that is making all of us (her included!) crazy! She had a good day today, but in the past few weeks, she's been upset about EVERYTHING and also intentionally pushing the buttons that drive siblings over the edge. She loves school, and she is excited to start Kindergarten in the fall (we do homeschool, but we don't start homeschooling our kids until 2nd grade for a number of reasons; one is because we like the social skills that kids learn at school in the early ages).

Christopher has been acting like such a big boy lately! He's been potty-trained since New Year's day, and he does well with that. He's stopped throwing so many tantrums and is really

acting more like a kid these days instead of like a crabby tantrum-throwing toddler. He does get into his fair share of messes, and he gets especially upset when he goes thru candy withdrawal.

Luke is 6 mos. already, and a handful as always – it's only getting worse as he gets older. Then again, he is getting even cuter as he grows, so that's the plus side ☐ But what a strong personality and eye for mischief he has for such a young age! I try not to think about it, but I find myself tempted to worry about how I'm going to stay sane when he is actually moving! Right now he's just scooting and rolling around, but he puts EVERYTHING in his mouth and is quite demanding; wanting 100% of the available parent's attention 100% of the time! You can see why this is challenging when there are 4 other kids – it's just one reason why I gave up my social life ☐

Hubby and I are doing well also. His working 2 jobs keeps us busy, but in some ways, it's actually not as stressful as I thought it would be. It's amazing how much easier things are when you truly trust the Lord to get you through. By no means is life easy these days, but I am so much better equipped to handle the twists, turns and busyness now than I was a few years ago thanks to Him. As I mentioned, we have given up our social lives. I miss my friends, but luckily we live in a world where I can still keep up with their lives and know how to pray for them when they need it. I've tried hanging out with adults a few times in the past few months, but unfortunately with all these kids running around and being so demanding, it seems better for everyone if I just focus on the kids and live a kid-oriented life. So, with Hubby now working on the weekends, we've been having our family Saturdays on Fridays when we can. And we've been doing less of the expensive entertainment stuff and have been trying dedicating our hearts to serving more. My husband has thought of some very creative ways to do this, and we've had many an

opportunity to get out into the local communities and give and share God with others. It's been wonderful!

I was going to write more, but the baby has woken up, and he's demanding my attention, of course. I just can't think straight when he cries and he knows it! More next month... haha!

Blessings

We always knew that we were blessed with our 5 healthy babies, but the reality of how blessed we really were is beginning to sink in. Our first 4 children were very easy, content, healthy babies, so our 5th child, Luke, has rocked our world a little bit. He has always been an intense baby; very energetic, playful, sleepless, alert and specific about his wants and needs. But during the past few months, he's been sick as well, so the poor little guy is having trouble being comforted. We've taken him to the doctor a few times, and he's been diagnosed with bronchitis and an ear infection. As if these illnesses were not enough, his chest x-rays show he has an enlarged heart. We are currently praying that this is not a symptom of something seriously wrong with little Luke's health. My husband made me promise not to google it since we've made a few medical scares in our family worse by scaring ourselves with random internet information. We are currently waiting for our appointment with the pediatric cardiologist. Scary stuff.

I will continue to update when I can. In the meantime, prayers for Luke would be wonderful ☐

Little Luke Likes Lights

Thought I would post a quick little update about our youngest child who is growing so quickly that I don't know if we can call him our "new addition" any longer! Luke James is almost 2 months old, and among his likes are being held, listening to music, and looking at lights. He's been especially impressed by the colorful lights on the Christmas tree. These things are common favorites among many almost-2-month-olds, but Luke is a very special baby – he has been able to hold his head up for a few weeks and is extremely alert for a baby his age. His VERY FAVORITE thing to do in the whole world is to be held like this while his little hands open and close and his eyes bulge as he takes in the world around him:



Luke

doesn't sleep well at night, but we aren't really surprised because none of our 5 kids were very good sleepers as babies. But Luke doesn't sleep much during the day, either – he takes about one good nap per day about 3-4 days per week. And by "good nap" I mean him sleeping for over an hour without waking up. Actually, I thought of the perfect way to describe Luke the other day: he is an *intense* baby. He wants **what** he wants **when** he wants it, and he's not shy about asking. Don't get me wrong; it's not that he is a disagreeable baby, and he is very

smiley. He's just very demanding, and since he is always awake... well, you can understand why my free time is down to almost none and the blog posts from me remain infrequent. Especially because he demands to have 100% of the available attention, whether it's eye contact while playing with him or using both hands to feed him – he is not a fan of a multi-tasking parent.

He's already able to play – he loves looking into the eyes of people who play with him, and he especially likes to exchange baby talk with “goo” being his favorite word. He loves when his sisters and brother play with him, but it's hard to tell if he has a favorite yet. Christopher is 3 and Luke's only brother, but he doesn't play with him often – it seems like Christopher is afraid of hurting Luke, and he also seems shy about talking to him or playing with him. Disney likes to hold Luke (she's 5), but she loses interest in a matter of minutes. Taylor is almost 12, and she enjoys Luke's cuteness, but she is too busy with a life of her own to spend a lot of time with her baby brother. Sammie stands out as the remarkable sibling. 7-year-old Sammie just adores her baby brother; she's always asking to hold him, and she doesn't soon grow tired of it. She plays with Luke, asks how he's doing, expresses interest in his activities, misses him when she's gone, and loves seeing cute pictures of him. I'm looking forward to watching their special bond strengthen even further as they grow up together. His brother and sisters love their baby brother in their own ways, and any time Luke does something new, he is crowded by an admiring entourage that can rival that of most celebrities.



Luke also really likes baths. He smiles like crazy the whole time he's in the bath; he'll even throw out a couple of "goo"s and "gaa"s and doesn't seem to notice that he sounds different when his ears are under water.

Luke is also the tie-breaker in our family – we have 3 brown-eyed people and 3 blue-eyed people. Two months old is too early to tell what color a baby's eyes will be, so right now we don't know which "side" will win. It's interesting also that our 2 blue-eyed kids are left-handed while our 2 brown-eyed kids are right-handed. Will Luke be a tie-breaker in only the eye color category or will he break the mold and be a blue-eyed righty or a brown-eyed lefty?

Even with his intensity, Luke is a wonderful baby and it's been nothing but a pleasure so far to get to know him as his personality develops – I wouldn't change any part of him or anything about him, no matter how far behind on stay-at-home-mommy-work I am! Here he is wearing the adorable camouflage hoodie someone got him – it's so cute! And here's an interesting bit of culture clash for you – where I grew up in the suburbs of Chicago, Luke would wear this and we'd be trendy. Here in the woods of rural Northwest Ohio, I put the camo hoodie on Luke, and we heard no fewer than FIVE comments about hunting and him being a little woodsman ☐



So How'd It Go?

Overall, so much better than my fears were telling me it would go. I had my second cesarean section on Friday, October 7. Boy was I nervous beforehand! I figured I would write out the details, just in case we decide to do this again I can look back at it and know what to expect. So I warn you, if you're squeamish about medical procedures or just plain not interested, then skip the post. But if I can make just one person feel more at ease about their impending cesarean, even if it's future me, then it's worth writing this all out and sharing the details.

The day of my scheduled cesarean, the hospital told me to arrive at 5:30 AM. Hubby and I set the alarm for 4:30 and got there a little early so we could visit the hospital chapel and pray together. Thankfully, Grandma had arrived in town the night before and had our 4 kids at her hotel. The first nurse we asked did not know where the chapel was in the hospital, which I found strange, but then again, our local hospital is undergoing major expansion and renovation, so I guess that's the excuse I'll let them have for the fact that their chapel (when we finally found someone who knew where it was) was just

an empty room. No matter because God listens where ever you are, so we prayed together and went back to the maternity ward where they began to prep me for my surgery. They put an IV in, which didn't go very well. Seems I have great veins in my arms for drawing blood (the blood techs always ooh and ahh over me and my veins, which makes them weird in my book), but in my hands, not so much. Getting IVs is always very painful for me, and it bruises up my whole hand. This day was no exception. It hurt a lot, and they had to give me 2 holes before they got it right. Then the nurse comes and tells me that because of the combination of it being my 5th baby and the fact that I had to have a blood transfusion last time that they were going to have to give me a back-up port in my other hand just in case. So they start doing that, and that one hurts even more. Next thing I know, I have a golf ball sized lump in my hand – "The vein blew" the nurse told me. I don't ever want to hear anyone tell me that something carrying blood throughout my body "blew", and I still haven't googled that one to see what it is because it sounds so nasty. And at this point, I'm near tears thinking that if things are going wrong already, what will happen when they cut me open? But they finally got my second IV port in, and then after the insertion of the catheter (not a big deal and I will spare the details), I was ready to be wheeled off to the surgery room in a wheelchair.

Luckily I had taken the c-section class at the hospital, so the cold sterility of the operating room did not alarm me, and I also knew that my Hubby had to wait outside until certain preparations were made. On our way into the operating room, I saw the backup doctor, and he was talking to himself in the hallway in kind of a strange way. He is known for being a bit different, so it didn't really worry me, especially since I knew my regular doctor would be there also. Besides, Dr. Strange delivered my 3rd child, and she was the easiest delivery I had. I will spare details for what happened next; it's a bit personal – if you really need to know how they prep

a patient for a c-section then take a class at your local hospital. Then the anesthesiologist came in, and my heart sank when I realized it was the same lady who gave me my epidural during the birth of baby #4 – the epidural that never worked. She gave me my spinal, and it pinched a little, but much less than an epidural, not really a big deal at all. My legs started to get tingly, and I was really starting to panic big time. I kept asking the anesthesiologist if everything I was feeling was normal, and she was so nice and reassuring. They had a blood pressure cuff on my arm which kept going off every few minutes, and they also gave me oxygen in my nose – I felt very well cared for. They let Hubby in, and he and the anesthesiologist (so tired of typing that word, think I'll just call her Dr. Drug from now on) sat by my head the whole time. Dr. Drug said that they would test me to make sure that I was numb before they did anything, but guess what – they didn't. I brought this up to someone after it was over, and they had a good point – they probably tested my numbness but didn't even tell me about it. Since it was working, I didn't feel the test, so they proceeded. Duh. It's just that I was so nervous about the numbing not working after what happened with my epidural; you can't blame me for being concerned.

The next thing I remember is the tugging and pulling, which is also something for which the c-section class prepared me. But it was actually much less unpleasant than I had panicked it would be. It's just that it seemed to take forever. They said it would take about 1-2 minutes and according to Hubby, it took 4 minutes. If you ask me, I would say it took 15 minutes. The whole time I could hear the doctors talking and I kept asking Hubby what they were saying because I was panicking about the health of the baby and the fact that I was lying there sliced open on the table. He said they were just discussing their techniques. My Hubby kept looking down there, past the curtain, and I kept wondering how he could do that – if it were him lying on a table sliced open, I don't know that I could look. But then again, I don't think it was

like surgery looks on tv – I was picturing a completely open body cavity, but that's a different kind of surgery. I guess that's why there was all that tugging and pulling. So anyway, finally Hubby says that the baby is out, but I don't hear crying, so I begin to panic even more (notice a trend here? I am a worrywart, in case you haven't noticed). But both people seated at my head tell me everything is fine, and then I hear the baby (Luke James) cry. I feel so relieved, and I can't believe it's over. Except it's not. They clean up the baby, and they hold him up in front of my face for about a millisecond, and then they take him out of the room along with my husband and probably about half the staff that was on hand. At some point, I don't remember when, but I'm pretty sure it was after the baby was born, Dr. Drug held up a little vial and says, "I'm going to give you this." She puts it in my IV, and I find out later that it was Duramorph, a form of morphine. I'm wondering now if this is something they give all their c-section patients (those who are not opposed to medications), or if I got the "panicking patient" special. At any rate, after the morphine, my memory gets fuzzy, but I do remember lying there getting sewed up (still not feeling a thing below my chest). My complaint was that it seemed to take FOREVER because I had nothing to do but lie there, and all I could think about was seeing my baby. I even got envious of my poor husband, because here I had just gone through this surgery and now HE was getting to spend all this time with the baby and I hadn't even barely gotten a look at him. They should really think about putting a tv in there or something... or would that distract the doctors? Best not to think about it, I guess. I had to keep talking myself out of looking at the ceiling because it was reflective, and I could see a little of me and a lot of red there – they ought to fix that too; I would bet that no one wants to see themselves getting surgery. But finally they were finished, and a few of the staff people worked together to lift my helpless body onto the gurney for the transport back to my room.

When I got there, there was Hubby with the baby, all excited to see me, and then I finally got to hold our new son. And he was (is) so incredibly beautiful. The rest of the day was wonderful. Slowly my legs began to work again, and I could not believe it that I had absolutely no pain! It did not resonate with me that I was on drugs. I did feel kind of loopy, but I didn't really think much of it and enjoyed the euphoria of having a new healthy baby and the relief that the worst part was over. Weather-wise it ended up being a terrible weekend to be stuck in the hospital – it was 80 degrees out and sunny, and the grandmas took my kids to the zoo on Saturday, so I had to miss that, but at least they got to go. When I was released from the hospital on Monday, it was still very nice out for a few days, but I didn't feel up to going outside and by the time I did, Northern Ohio fall weather was in full swing and I've been cold ever since. Oh well, such is life, and my Hubby had perfect advice when I was bummed about missing the beautiful fall colors (it was amazing how different our neighborhood looked with all the leaves on the ground after just 3 days!). He said, "There will be plenty more color-changing seasons, but there are only so many baby seasons." What a wise, wonderful man!

Back to my recovery in the hospital, it went fairly smoothly, although I did have a lot of pain starting Saturday once the morphine wore off. The baby was up all night on Friday, but I didn't mind at all because I just wanted to be with him. I haven't watched tv in years, but over the weekend, I watched countless episodes of 3's Company, Roseanne (forgot about the one where Becky gets into the liquor cabinet, haha!), and Everybody Loves Raymond – you know, shows from when tv was actually good. I learned about the Prohibition era from PBS, and I also learned that there are conspiracy theorists who believe that there really isn't gold in Fort Knox – hmm, that's something to think about I guess. Luke slept a full 5 hours on Saturday night from 1:30-6:30, and so did I since no one came for my blood until 6:30. Last time I was in the

hospital, I seem to remember them coming for blood every hour on the hour which made it really hard to sleep, but then again I had a lot of complications last time including the need for an emergency cesarean and a blood transfusion. Sunday night, little Luke decided he wasn't going to sleep again, and I woke up from my 45 minute nap that night feeling terrible – achy and lots of other pain, and chills because of a fever I was running. Not only that, but there was a mean nurse who informed me in a not-so-nice way that I was over my limit of acetaminophen, which meant I was not allowed any pain medicine. That really ticked me off; partly because of the way she said it, and partly because no one had given me any indication that this was a problem. Had they warned me that I was getting near the limit, I would have declined some of the meds offered to me to avoid this. Actually, all of the other nurses had been telling me that I should stay ahead of the pain. They specifically said not to wait until the pain was really bad to take the meds otherwise they wouldn't work. The staff must have known I was upset because at 11pm Sunday night, my doctor called my bedside phone personally and reassured me. And my doctor is the one I credit with my smooth delivery and quick recovery – she has been 1000% better than my previous doctors in every way throughout this process, and for that, I am so thankful.

Since I've been home, I've been resting (probably not as much as I should have, but I have 5 kids now, who can rest with 5 kids in the house??). Hubby has been *amazing* at taking care of me AND things around the house, but he also started a new job 2 days after the baby was born, which leaves him with 2 jobs, taking care of the 4 kids and me AND waking with the new baby at night as he likes to do. My mother did a ton of laundry while she was here, and I'm just now starting to do laundry again a week and a half later, so that helped a lot too. People from church have been wonderful about sending meals for our family, and that has been incredible. Not only that, but we also have frozen meals that people sent and that

my husband's mother made while she was visiting for when our meal delivery runs out. It's been crazy, but we are managing, and a week and half later, I've been out and about and back in the real world. I still have pain, but nothing extreme, and my 600mg ibuprofen works pretty well for that. There are 2 complications I had that I was not expecting; one is worthy of a blog post all its own and I'll get to it next time. The other is the return of my backaches. I've had a sore back since high school; I worked fast food and had to pop a Doan's before every shift to make it through. There are various things that I think caused it, but what does that matter now. The strange thing is that during my pregnancy, my backaches disappeared. Most women find new backaches during pregnancy, and mine disappeared. I didn't think much of it until I get home from the hospital and experience my back pain again. This is discouraging because I know the incision pain will go away with time, but the backaches seem to be getting worse, and I have no guarantee that my back will ever feel better. I guess it's something to talk to my wonder doc about in my 6-week follow-up. I already had my 1 week follow-up with the doctor, and she said my incision looks really great and my body is healing well – for that I am thankful.

Baby's healthy, 4 big sisters and brother are healthy, I'm getting healthy, and Hubby is healthy (even if he needs much more sleep – praying for that to come soon) – what more can we ask for! Life is good; God is great!

And oh yeah... everywhere little Luke goes, he has a constant crowd of admirers. If it wasn't so sweet, it would be annoying because hey, when is it MY turn to hold the baby?!?

□



Luke James

Our 5th bundle of joy arrived on October 7, 2011. His name is Luke James, and he was born at exactly 8 am, weighed 7 lbs 11 oz and was 19.5 inches long. He is healthy and a very happy easy-going baby. He seems to have his days and nights mixed up though, which I suspected based on his movements when he was still in the womb. We are enjoying him immensely, and so are his 3 sisters and his brother. I am recovering from the c-section pretty well, and I will write more about Luke's first days at home when it doesn't hurt to sit in a chair for longer than 10 minutes. I would love to put up a hundred pictures of gorgeous little Luke, but my bunny chewed my camera cord, and I can't get any pictures off my camera. I hope to have this situation remedied soon, but I depend on Hubby for all my tech-related needs, and Hubby is exhausted staying up with the baby at night, taking care of me and the kids during the day while also keeping up with his responsibilities at both of his jobs. It just seems mean and commanding of me to place more demands on him now, so I will have to somehow be patient about the picture taking and sharing. I wonder how long I can last; Luke is one of the cutest babies I've ever seen!!!

****UPDATE****

Hubby devised a way to transfer my pictures using my ebook reader – genius! So anyway, here is a picture of swaddled Luke at 1 day old:



He Ate The Cheesy Fiesta Potatoes, And Then He Wore Them

I have an 18-month-old little boy, and the other day, he tried cheesy fiesta potatoes from Taco Bell. I think the title of this blog post pretty much says it all.



Down And Out In Shipshewanni

Well, life is back to normal, I guess you could say, whatever “normal” is. My 3 girls were with their Grandma in Illinois for over a week, and they had an awesome time. Our house was quite quiet and empty without them, so we made it our business to not be in the house much at all. We were constantly on the go, getting to do lots of fun things with just the baby and even some things just hubby and me – great times! More on that later since I need to finish writing about our trip to King’s Island, and hopefully entice some people to come along when we go back close to Halloween. But for now, here is a re-cap of our trip to Shipshewanni – I’m respectfully poking fun at my mom, who has a tendency to sometimes mispronounce things – love you Mom!

So Monday, instead of driving to Illinois to pick up the kids, we met them and my parents, uncle, sister, nephews, and brother-in-law in Shipshewana Indiana for two days of fun in an indoor water park. Anticipating this trip for months, I was sure I was going to have a fun blog to write – a family trip with 7 adults, 4 kids and 2 babies sounded like fodder for a National Lampoon movie. But strangely, especially

considering **this** group of people – you know who you are ☐ – nothing bizarre happened; no one in the group got crazy (except for our baby, but that will be addressed later on...), and we all had a blast!

I have to be honest and say that when we got to the water park, I was a bit disappointed to see that there wasn't a swimming pool. But as time went on, I became happy with the small size of the place since it was easy to keep tabs on the kids and find other members of the family to catch up and chat. There were two large water slides where you go down on rafts, and we had an awesome time taking turns going down with everyone racing each other. You could go down one or two-at-a-time, and after a while, our oldest got brave enough to try and found she LOVED the water slides! Same with her cousin, and the two of them went down together – it was adorable to see the two of them work together to carry their huge raft up all those stairs. I wish I had a picture, but it was impossible to have a camera in the water park – and please, with my camera luck, do you think I could have taken pictures in the water park and still have had a camera when we left? Doubtful. But anyway, we (exhaustively!) made our way up all those stairs time and time again to race our daughter and my nephew and even my mom and dad down the water slide.

They also had a kids' pool with lots of things to play with and a soft floor for the babies to crawl on. There was also a playground with 4 water slides – the kind you go down without a raft – and I liked those too until I mistakenly went down one before it was cleared... My husband was standing at the bottom of it holding our two-year-old, and I slid right into the back of his legs, bowling them over. Thank goodness no one was hurt, and I'm sure it was an hilarious, stooge-like display of idiocy.

They also had a lazy river – my favorite. You just grab a raft and float on down the river, and my 1-year-old son fell asleep because it was so peaceful to float down the river in

my arms. When we are rich, we are going to build a lazy river at my goat farm where I will play with goats, make cheese, and relax in my lazy river ☐

We split up for dinner, and my parents and uncle were nice enough to watch the kids so we could go out to dinner with my sister and brother-in-law. We took the babies with us (our youngest sons are 2½ months apart), and they allowed us sisters and husbands some much-needed catch-up time; I think it's been over 5 years since we went out together which is too long! We went to an Amish-style restaurant, and at first I thought it was going to be a gimmick. You know, yucky Sysco food disguised as Amish style food... but thankfully, I was wrong. The food was SO good! The roast beef was incredible, the mashed potatoes homemade and not out of a package as so many are, and the chicken and noodles tasted like the noodles were also made from scratch. Everything was all we could eat, served family style – YUM! I highly recommend the Blue Gate restaurant!

So then we went back to the water park for a little bit until it closed, and then it was time to try to get the kids settled down for the night. My parents were gracious enough to splurge (the entire trip was a Christmas gift from them) and get us a room with some extra space for our large family, and the two oldest girls had their own little bunk bed area with a tv and nightlights in their beds. They were out in a jiffy. Not the case with the younger two – our two-year-old Disney had to bunk with us for lack of beds while her one-year-old brother had a crib. Disney and I caught up on life and her week with Grandma while whispering under the covers while Daddy tried to get the baby to bed. Soon, Disney was asleep which just left one standing... and standing... Christopher refused to go to sleep. In a hotel, especially in a room adjoining my sister's where they also had a fussy trying-to-go-to-sleep baby, we could not let him cry it out, so we took him down the hall to the mini-arcade – at least I could read

my magazine and my husband could play some Madden while the baby crawled around. Ha. All he wanted to do was crawl up and (fall) down the stairs, so no fun for us. I thought about taking him downstairs so we could at least sit with my dad and uncle and enjoy the evening air, but one of us had to stay with the sleeping girls. Since our goal was to be able to spend some time together, this was not an option. We ended up sitting outside of our room for awhile, letting the baby crawl, but soon he got crabby and we realized we were just assaulting my sister's family from the other side of the room with our noise. Finally we put him back in his crib and hid out in the bathroom so we were out of sight, and this did the trick – 4 down! Except that now it was too late to do anything together, so we just watched a few of those weird youtube-like videos and went to bed. Apparently the baby woke up again in the middle of the night and also early the next morning, and my awesome husband took care of him, even though he was dead tired by the time we got home the next day. I didn't sleep well either, especially with Disney in our bed who kept kicking me.

So the next morning, we were up for breakfast, and I couldn't eat anything because I was so tired. No problem; I'd get lunch later when I was hungry and at the very least, we had big plans to pick up some gourmet cheese from the awesome cheese shop before we left town. We split up for the day since my husband didn't mind taking the older kids to the water park again, and the rest of us had had enough water park, so we went to the flea market instead – what a madhouse! I don't know why it's only open 2 days a week because for those 2 days, the area is MOBBED with tons of traffic! But anyway, the flea market is huge and has a wide variety of things for everyone. Before I left, hubby said to make sure I bought myself something, so I did – isn't he awesome? He takes most of the kids for the day AND tells me to buy myself something, awww... (and this is why I obliged to let him try out for a play – he is a giver; he deserves to do

something HE wants to do. Of course, being in a show takes months of rehearsal and prep time – oh, man, what did I agree to???) But anyway, I got a black and white vintage photo of Wrigley Field in 1946 – how cool is that? I bought a Bears Superbowl frame and some hot sauce for hubby, and we left the flea market before seeing all of it – is that possible to do in just one day? Then it was time to go home, and our oldest was really upset to see Grandma go – she has a Grandma addiction, so the more time she spends with Grandma, the more sad she gets when it's time to leave. But she got over it, and we achieved the coveted quadruple-kid-pass-out on the way home. Overall, an awesome time, and I think we should definitely do something again next year. As fun as the water park was, I might suggest a different location next time – maybe a campground or another place where we would have more sit-down time to really get together, catch up, and maybe even play some games. My sole complaint is that I arrived home cheese-less ☐ There was an awesome cheese shop, and we were going to stop on the way home, but the kids were just too crazy and the traffic too thick in Shipshewana for us to stop – dangit. I had been looking forward to that cheese for two days! Bermuda onion cheese, yummmm...
(drooling...)

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):

