

Year One

Because I was born and raised in the Chicago area, I still peruse the online suburban newspaper; I guess it's to get my news "fix" because let's face it – good news is boring. The more serious or tragic the news, the more interesting it is, and my local daily newspaper just doesn't do it for me – I mean, local news is interesting, but not in the same way. So lately as I've been reading Chicago news, I couldn't help but notice these all over the place:



So what is the deal? What is Year 1? It's no secret that the Chicago Cubs are under the new management team of the Ricketts family this year, so I'm sure it has something to do with that. And it's an unfortunate reality that the Chicago Cubs are also the team in baseball to have been without a World Series title the longest... so I guess management figures that maybe if they just reset time altogether and start from the beginning, the Cubs might have a shot this year. Two or three months from now, we will have a clearer outlook as to how the "new" team can really play. But what if the Cubs go nowhere this year, and we fans find ourselves chanting our infamous October mantra, "Maybe next year..." – what then? Will 2011 be Year 2? Let's hope we don't have to find out. GO CUBBIES!

Nothing To Say...

Another fog day, so the kids are off school. They're playing with each other right now, so I have a few minutes... why bother to start cleaning when I know that they'll be "momming"

me any second? The house is a disaster, and it needs a good few hours of attention at least. Why bother starting laundry? The bird will only scream at me and rile up the kids who are otherwise being good.

A fellow tangents blogger recently wrote about the grey days of winter, and I guess I'm feeling that now. It's too cold to bundle up the kids and take them anywhere, and we're really trying to watch our pennies anyway – taking them out costs money, even if just the gas in the car, it's still more expensive than staying home. Can't walk anywhere because it's too cold. So, we're staying home, trying to keep all 5 of us out of the way of my husband, who works at home and is, of course, working all day.

No need to bring you up to speed on the current happenings in my life – just every day stuff, laced with a little bad luck. Nothing to spread any “cheer” about.

We've watched a few movies recently; saw Star Wars for the first time as an adult. Growing up in the 80's, I saw clips of the most famous parts as a kid. My husband and I both had the stomach flu last week, and we couldn't sleep, so we stayed up and watched Star Wars. It was entertaining; not my kind of movie, but perhaps eventually I will watch the other movies in the series. Here's a question for Star Wars fans: I know that they re-released the movie with digital enhancements, including the scene with Jabba the Hut. So did they film that as new footage for the re-release? Harrison Ford did look like he could be decades older...

And speaking of series, I have begun to read the Harry Potter series. I'm about 50 pages away from finishing the first book, and I'm really enjoying it. I was really excited to watch the movie when I was finished with the book, but then I started thinking that I might want to keep my own vision of Hogwarts. Might the movie ruin the picture I have in my head? Using imagination is fun; I don't want to take that

away from myself or lose motivation to finish reading the series. Then again, I've never heard any Potter fans complain that the movies didn't do the books justice; I hear they are very good. I'm just wondering if I should wait until I'm done with or at least a little further in the series to watch the movies.

Then again, it's not like we have a lot of time to watch movies, anyway. With my husband back on full time and us still fulfilling our youth group and other obligations, as well as caring for our 4 kids (who don't sleep a lot!), by the time we put in a movie for "us" time, we are both dozing and can't get through an entire one anyway. Sigh. Well, not to be negative, but the grey days of winter are here. Can't wait until spring!!! GO CUBS! Maybe THIS year...

The Drama...

I'm going on my third month as a youth group leader, and while I always enjoy myself at church on Wednesday nights, in recent weeks I've also felt a strange kind of dread. I couldn't put my finger on it until last night. There was a huge drama in our small group of 7th grade girls involving a friendship between two of the girls. The situation made for a lot of tension and was also a huge distraction from our lesson. After group, I mentioned this to the other 7th grade girls leader and the youth pastor, and neither seemed surprised, especially given the dramatic nature of a specific girl in my group – their words, not mine. I came home around 9 pm last night with 4 of my own little kids to put to bed while feeling entirely emotionally drained. I realized that even though I enjoy being a youth group leader for the most part, that strange sense of dread that I feel in the beginning of the

week has to do with bracing myself for the weekly Wednesday night drama. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that the other 7th grade girls leader's attitude has greatly improved since the beginning of the year. Also, a few weeks ago, two students were transferred into my group because their friends were in my group – so now I have the entire clique in my group, and I get to oversee and facilitate all of their various factions. Wonderful. I have a theory that the other leader was very discouraged and emotionally drained by these girls and their drama by the end of last year, and so when I showed up, I was given the clique and their dramatics for my group. Ah, the joys of being the newbie. I'm happy to help, and I'm glad the other leader seems much happier, but I really need to find a way to encourage these girls to shift their priorities a little bit.

Complicating the matter is the fact that we meet in the youth pastor's office, so it's really hard to supervise everyone at once, especially when there is drama. I have girls wanting to poke through his drawers, lie under his computer desk, read his post-it notes and memos, and to sit on his desk. I'm starting to feel more like a babysitter than a small group leader, and the girls in my group are turning 13; it's not like they're little kids (which is what I'm dealing with all day and at night AFTER youth group).

Don't get me wrong; I do enjoy it; I'm just really frustrated right now. I really like the fact that it's something I get to do with my husband (the small group part is only about 40 minutes. For the rest of the two hours, we get to do things together), and I like hanging out with the other leaders and the girls when they're not acting crazy. I'm just saying that those times are getting few and far between. I need to find a way to focus the kids and also to get our group back to concentrating on the weekly lessons. We can still have fun while we do that, but step #1 will probably be to get us out of the pastor's office – I don't even know where to start if

not there.

When I signed up for this gig, I failed to realize that aside from the long-shot of the Chicago Cubs making the World Series, my two favorite yearly live televised events – the Country Music Awards and the Academy of Country Music Awards – air on Wednesday nights. I cannot express how much I enjoy watching these shows, and it's kind of like an athletic event – it's not really the same to watch them after the fact. One year, I even did a live blog while watching one of these awards shows, and it was hectic, but a lot of fun. Tempted as I am to call in sick to youth group next week, I could not look seven 7th graders in the eyes and tell them that I missed our group to stay home and watch the Country Music Awards, especially after the major drama that was this week. So next week, I will actually be avoiding cnn.com and the media from late Wednesday night until whenever I will get a chance to watch the recorded CMAs – which might not be until the weekend!!! Yes, I'm pouting, but I'm going to put my best face forward and just do it. But I reserve the right to complain about it all I want on my blog!!!!

New TV!

Last night, my husband and I decided to visit an old friend we haven't seen in some time – The Redbox. You all know the Redbox – the dvd rental machine that sits like a swollen ATM at many Walmarts, Meijers, Walgreens and the like. Dvd rental at the Redbox is \$1 per night, and one of the perks of the Redbox is lack of selection. Yes, I said **lack** of selection. In this day and age of rushing from here to there, who has time to actually make an extra stop to go into a video store and browse hundreds of selections? We really enjoyed our

Redbox summer, renting a movie almost every night and exhausting pretty much the entire Redbox collection. Now the kids have been in school for a few months already, and time has gone by without us having time to think about our long-lost Redbox bud. So anyway, last night, with the cold wind howling outside, we thought it to be the perfect night to stay up a little too late with a random Redbox horror movie. It was [Seventh Moon](#), and it seemed to actually be pretty scary, except that it is a 'dark and shaky' type horror movie – the camera moves around a lot, and the entire movie takes place in the dark. We turned off our lights in the house, but we still couldn't really see. Remembering what a repairman had told him once, my husband suggested we take the front panel off the tv and dust a little mirror inside – supposedly we would get a brighter picture. Thinking it sounded easy (?), I agreed and we began to unscrew our tv. We get the panel loosened and discover that there isn't any dust on the screen! And, you'd be surprised at how much empty space there is in a big tv! But anyway, we started to put it back together when CRACK! Uh, oh. Here's a hint – if you ever decide to tackle a home improvement project on the suggestion of someone else, no matter how small the project, always remember *who* told you to do *what* so that person can be held accountable!

So we are trying to put the tv back together, and we were thinking that at this point, we would just like to go back to our movie, however dark it might be, we just want to be able to WATCH the movie on a working tv. But then my husband sees the small mirror at the bottom that is FULL of dust! I rigged a paper towel rod with a dust cloth, and reached in there and dusted off that little mirror. We tried again to put the tv back together, encouraged and excited by the fact that we might have actually been able to fix it. We put the tv back together, but we had cracked something, so it's not really properly lined up and is now missing a few screws, oopsie. BUT... the picture is SO much brighter! Not only were we able

to see the rest of the movie (which was a nice 'n suspenseful creature feature), but now we can actually watch tv during the day! Oh, if only we had discovered our new tv during those bright summer days months ago when the Chicago Cubs were still invited to play baseball...

Blast From The Past

Being a child of the '80's, I definitely remember the California Raisins – they were 3D-ish Claymation figures of singing and dancing raisins, mostly famous for their rendition of “I Heard It Through The Grapevine”. Thinking about this as an adult has me wondering if this was a successful ad campaign. I guess successful is not quite the word I'm looking for... I mean, of course it was ultra-successful in a sense; everyone in the '80's knew about the California Raisins, but did they really make kids want to eat more raisins? Later they began to do commercials for Post's Raisin Bran (Post only chooses the plumpest, juiciest raisins!), so maybe they helped to sell more boxes of cereal.

In the '80's, the California Raisins were celebrities and they had their own line of products that ran the marketing gamut: lunch boxes, stuffed toys, tv specials, t-shirts, Happy Meal toys, you name it. This is precisely the reason why I came across a California Raisin figure the other day at the thrift store. I had stopped in to get myself a few more little Halloween figurines for my front hall shelves (had an empty shelf after finally packing away the figurines of the bears playing baseball after the Chicago Cubs were eliminated from MLB's post-season – that is ALL I'm going to say about THAT!), and at this particular thrift store, you get a free Happy Meal-type toy with every \$2 spent. My husband and I did just

spend 5 hours gutting out the girls' room and donating most of their toys last week, but I couldn't resist picking out a toy for my favorite little shopping companion – my 3-year-old daughter Disney. So anyway, we were pressed for time, and I found the California Raisin, so I grabbed him and gave him to Disney, promising her we would watch a movie of her raisin dancing and singing on the computer when we got home. True to my word, I loaded up youtube and found some great clips of California Raisins, which went over really well with Disney. She giggled and covered her mouth, and then she put her raisin on the computer to “watch” the other dancing raisins. He's been a presence in our household since last week, and of course her little brother likes him too. He is small enough so that I can put him in our “emergency” car box (full of toys, snacks, band-aids, etc) when the kids tire of him in the house (the raisin, not the little brother!). He even makes a great bathtub toy! So anyway, while resurrecting the California Raisins last week, I came across this cute little commercial that I hadn't thought about in the 20 years since it was made. Enjoy this blast from the past!

And Yes... They Keep On Winning (some)

Not all but some... and look out... her comes the return of the Red Stockings (on Friday)... B0000!!!!!! no doubt on the war path following the sweeping of the last series. The Yanks have clinched a berth for the post season. They slipped a bit but thanks to a win or two and a loss from Boston, New York has gone back to a six game first place lead and defeated the Angels of Anaheim tonight. Just sayin'. Last season, I did not get to say that.

And it looks like the Tigers (another team on tangent's radar) will be a post season hopeful, correct, [_justj?](#) What about the Cubbies, [taylhis?](#)

It Runs In The Family

My aunt sent me the following picture of my cousins at the Cubs game the other day down in Florida – it's a screen shot from WGN. At least they got to go to the game where the Cubs beat the Marlins at LandShark Stadium! In case you're wondering, the Cubs are doing very well right now – over .500 and just a half game out of first place. They've been playing some GREAT baseball and are very fun to watch these days – GO CUBS!



A Patch Of Blue In A Sea Of Black And White

We took a fun little excursion to Chicago this past weekend and had a few adventures! More about those later (if I get to them – my time to blog has dwindled A LOT lately!). What I want to write about now is the Chicago Cubs game. Let me begin by escorting the elephant from the room – the Cubs got creamed by the White Sox yesterday. There, I said it. And I'm just stating fact, unfortunately. We were lucky enough to have tickets (happy birthday to me from Hubby – THANK YOU!!!!) for Sunday's game – the final game of a 3 game series between the cross-town MLB rivals the Cubs and the White Sox. This game was to be the "rubber match" – with both teams tied at 1 win apiece for this series, Sunday's outcome would decide the series winner. But the Cubs lost. Miserably. It was almost like they didn't show up to play baseball – which is something I and probably at least a few other Cubs fans lovingly yelled from the stands. We got to watch Carlos Zambrano, the Cubs famously hot-headed starting pitcher, take the mound – and consequently lose his control and get booed off the field. And let me say it wasn't just

Sox fans who were booing Zambrano. But I think it was awesome that he was the starting pitcher the day we got to go watch the game live, and he was really fun to watch. It was frustrating to see the empty bullpen across right field though – it seemed empty forever. My husband and I really thought Lou Pinnella should have made the call to the bullpen a little bit sooner and at least get someone throwing balls down there – Zambrano does not recover his game often once he loses it. We were both watching for Lou's call, and finally Zambrano made his trademark nasty move – the guy gets so angry that he beans someone. He throws a 90ish mph baseball AT the batter! So then he stalks off the field, gives the fans a one-finger salute (I don't think it was THAT finger), and goes into the locker room to pout by himself. He didn't throw down any water coolers on the way this time as he's also been known to do, but I can't say that I wouldn't have liked to see that. As lucky as we were to get to see Big Z pitch, he didn't do very well and we were happy to see him go.

But alas, Zambrano was not the only problem yesterday since the Cubs' bats haven't produced much of anything for weeks, and our game day was no exception. Thus we witnessed a shut-out on the Cubs.

But that's enough of that. It 's amazing how much fun we had despite the worst possible scenario for the game! I LOVE live baseball, and MLB almost doesn't compare to the smaller AAA and AA leagues. Those are fun too, but comparing those atmospheres is really like comparing apples and oranges. It was kind of toasty in the sun, and my knees got burnt to a crisp; I'm dealing with that today. For those of you who want to know the outrageous robbery they're getting away with in MLB stadiums across the country, at U.S. Cellular Field in Chicago, it costs \$23 to park, \$6.75 for a 20 oz. beer, \$4 for a bottle of pop or water (let me guess – they took out all the public drinking fountains, I sure didn't see any), and \$4.75 for a hot dog. If you can keep yourself hydrated during the

game, you can save yourself \$6 on 2 bottles of water by buying one before and one after the game from the street vendors – they sell them for \$1, which isn't bad at all in that heat! Originally I had planned to eat all day at the stadium, but I just wasn't hungry in the heat. There's nothing like sitting there at a baseball game and cracking peanuts, but I actually passed on those too. I certainly didn't want to leave my seat much, and by the time the peanut vendor arrived, we no longer felt like sitting there calmly cracking peanuts while the Cubs played like you-know-what and gave the game away. That reminds me – we had GREAT seats, upper-level, 3rd base side, right about even with the pitcher. We had a bird's-eye view of Zambrano's animal-like pacing and stomping rituals on the mound. I guess that's enough about the game – interesting how we were ALMOST late...

Sox park (its real name is a tongue and finger-typing twister) is situated on I-90, one of Chicago's expressways. I was anxious to try Jill the GPS's skills in a city environment since she had so failed us in Pittsburgh, but more so in the outskirts, we weren't really in downtown Pittsburgh. Jill did fine in the big city of Chicago, but when we got off the expressway, it was chaos – and it wasn't like Jill was programmed to guide us through the Sox's bizarre parking system; red coupons, green coupons, etc. We THOUGHT we had left in plenty of time for the game and might even see some batting practice, but we hit some traffic on the way down (did I mention this was also a weekend for the Taste of Chicago?!? Oops – bad planning on our part; we couldn't believe it. The Taste draws *millions!*). Anyway, when we arrived on the south side, we were confused about where to go for cash (\$23!) parking. There were people directing traffic (don't know if they were cops or city workers or Sox park workers, but I might find out so I can file a complaint!), so we asked one of the ladies how to get to cash parking. She said, "I'm going to let you make a U-Turn (we were heading east, toward the stadium), and you make the u-turn and go to 33rd street. So

we made the U-turn and headed west when we began to get a not-so-comfortable feeling. Remember, we had seen the stadium, and we were now heading away from it, out of the city. And usually numbered streets in cities are parallel to each other. So if we were looking for 33rd, most likely we should see 31st, 32nd, or 34th streets first – but we weren't. So we turned around, and an hour later, when we finally figured out where to be, we had passed the “helpful” traffic person again and confirmed our suspicions: she had tried to take us out of the city **on purpose**. In fact, when we passed Ms. Directions again, there was a Sox parking pay lot *one block* in front of her. I like to think the best of people, but here it's obvious that earlier, she had us make the U-turn rather than turn around so we wouldn't be able to see that she was taking us the wrong way. Rude isn't even the word for that. As most locals know, Sox park is not known for being nestled in safe neighborhoods – Wrigley Field, home of the Cubs, is known as the “Friendly Confines” – NOT Sox Park. We were fine, the area didn't get too bad, my husband just got really upset that we might be late for the game. Indeed, when we did finally find our lot, there was a big line and we sat in it for a long time. I can't help but wonder if maybe Ms. Helpful had noticed the color of our shirts – Cubbie blue- which isn't exactly welcome on the south side of Chicago. And those Cubbie blue shirts we wore (which ironically said “Cubs win!”, sheesh) were probably responsible for other rude behaviors directed our way. For instance, my husband got bumped a little harder than regular crowd jostling, and some of his popcorn spilled. Sox fans nearby jeered, and there were also the people who would walk by us up the stairs on the way to their seats (we were seated on an aisle) and feel inclined to say “Cubs suck”. Yesterday they may have had a point.

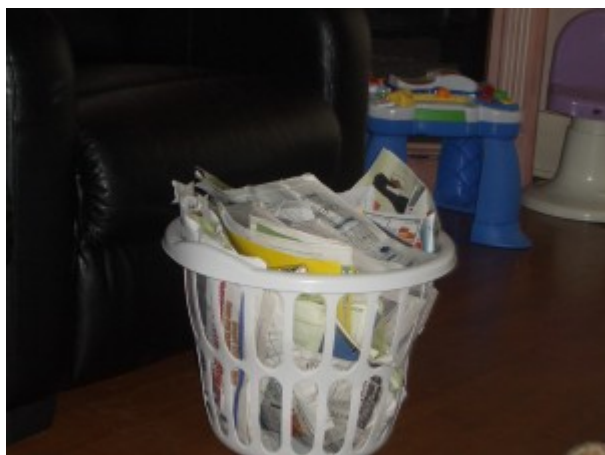
The people directly around us were friendly enough, a mix of Chicago fans, both north and south, Cubs and Sox. Some people wore a Sox hat and a Cubs shirt, while there were families of people dressed for both teams, an interesting mix. As I

looked around the stadium, I saw mostly white shirts (the black shirts were hard to see) in the sea of people, although the sea was dotted with many patches of Cubbie blue, much like the blue patch the two of us created. As rude as a select few Sox fans were though, I suppose they can't be all bad... on the way in to the stadium, it was extremely windy and we both got our Cubs hats blown right off our heads – maybe it was a sign of things to come... But anyway, it was Sox fans who helped up retrieve the runaway hats.

Overall, a great day for some baseball; definitely something I hope to do again. Except next time, I think we'll park far away and take the train to the stadium and forget trying to park in the city. We hit traffic on the way out too, and an hour after the game had ended, I turned around and I could still see Sox park which was STILL within walking distance!
TOO MUCH TRAFFIC!

Camping Pictorial

If you've been reading my blog lately, then you know that I was away last week camping with my family – my husband, 4 kids (ages 9, 5, 2, and almost 1), and 2 dogs. Camping for the entire week with 4 little kids has its ups and downs; mostly ups. But one of the major downs is the amount of house-mom work that awaits my return: 6 persons worth of laundry for a week and a half, which I refer to as “Mount Washmore”, grows to be the size of a small county's dump. And my Week 0' Heap 0' Paperwork I must sort through is picture-worthy:



But when all is said and done (a week or more from now), I will say it was well worth it. It was worth it to be (mostly) away from the internet and other electronic distractions for a week, especially tv. During that week, it wasn't my job to dwell on horrid and depressing headlines from around the world. And it was worth it to spend a distraction-less 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with my family, just the 6 of us in the wilderness (of Indiana) with only the bare necessities (a furnished cabin with refrigerator and a store within walking distance) with which to survive..

A great time was had by all, and camping is definitely something that we will do again in the future.

This is our cabin. It has two beds downstairs where Daddy, Mommy, Disney, and Charity and Beasley (the dogs) slept. Along with the two beds are a table and chairs, a bench, shelves, a half-bathroom, a mini-fridge, and a microwave. There is also a ladder which leads to the loft that spaciouly houses two twin mattresses where our two oldest girls slept. As you can see, there is also a picnic table out front and a grill and fire pit. Our cabin's porch also came with a great view of the fishing creek and the sunset.



We did lots of fun activities while we were camping; including boating. We took out a rowboat (thanks for rowing, Dad!), and the little ones caught a nap before we set sail:



We also took out a large pontoon boat and made ourselves quite comfortable watching for wildlife for hours at a time:



I think I could get used to being a boat captain; I just loved driving the boat (and my husband says I'm good at it, whatever

that means). But I really did love being the captain, deciding when to pull close to shore, idling the boat or even keeping pace with the wildlife as we did when we followed a young hunting raccoon. We were able to see SO much wildlife; all in its natural glory; it was great! Among the highlights: butterflies, dragonflies, water snakes attacking fish, fish attacking fish, herons, swan families, frogs, crayfish, geese families, raccoons, does and their fawns, turtles, and even lots of campground dogs and puppies. Here is an example of the beautiful scenery with a doe getting a drink at sunset – I missed photographing her fawn, oops:



And the next picture combines two of the kids' favorite things about camping – frogs and marshmallows – I guess “Big Buddy” does not eat marshmallows... not raw ones anyway. For those of you who are wondering about my frog phobia, you should know that there was a mandatory 5-foot-diameter ‘frog buffer zone’ around the cabin for me. But I did come to terms with the phobia in some ways during the trip, maybe it will lessen with time, who knows.



Next is a pic of our baby boy – he was so excited to finally get at that basketball that we had to take a picture. Never mind that he’s going to play baseball for the Chicago Cubs some day – or the Chicago Bears if my husband gets *his* way...



Here are all 4 of my kids on the beach – they all loved playing on the beach!



And, some more examples of the beautiful scenery – the rising



moon over the lake at sunset:

A hot air balloon over the lake:



And that reminds me – we also spotted some parachuters in the sky (and lots of cool airplanes – the airport was across the highway at the front of camp) who landed in a field nearby. Our daredevil 5-year-old Sammie said, “I want to do that!”. It’s really funny that she said that if you know Sammie. And ironically, when she was in the womb, I even said that she would be the one to parachute and do crazy things like that to scare her parents! I could just tell by the strength of her kicking and the fact that she was *constantly* moving... Well, anyway, another great trip, and let me close by recommending camping as an inexpensive family vacation that pays dividends in quality time and togetherness!

Look For Him Tonight

My middle brother and his son are going to be at the [Great American Ball Park](#) for the Chicago Cubs-Cincinnati Reds game tonight. When I found out that Chad and Alex were going to the big city by themselves, I said "I hope they don't get lost." Chad got lost driving home from a town 8 miles away. Myself, I just can't find the destination I am going to but have never been lost. However, I believe they went on a charter bus. I remember back in the day when my elder sibling would go to his friend's house and open up his COMPLETE sets of baseball cards and trade them away... not some of his brighter moments. Our parents or his godfather would spend good money on these sets. He would even "autograph" cards himself which pretty well made them worthless collectible wise. During several summers, Chad, his friend, along with "E-town's Number One Fan" rode the bus to Wrigley to watch their beloved team play. Last year, Chad and our Aunt LuAnn rode the rails to Chi-town and watched the Cubbies lose. Lu wanted to keep her tally of MLB ballpark visits up but Uncle Bob had no desire to go with them. Some year (especially if the Bronx Bombers are in town), I must make an effort to go.