

July 2011 (part 1)

The July 2011 page on my calendar has been filled since spring, so I knew we had a busy month ahead. Organizing everything I had jammed into those little squares on the calendar was going to be challenging enough, but then we were even able to add a few family mini-vacations to the mix! It's been a great summer so far despite the challenges of sometimes trying to be in 2 places at once, and I wanted to chronicle everything to enhance the wonderful memories we made as a family this summer – but be prepared; this will be quite the manifest when I'm finished!

June 30 and July 1 – We began the month with a last-minute trip to an indoor water park that's an hour away. After a sudden burst of cabin fever, my husband found a super internet deal that afforded us some much-loved family time. The kids loved the indoor water park, and Christopher was old enough this time to go on some water slides which he found to be a blast!

Best of all, the constant lower back pain that had been making me short of patience, irritable and tired all the time seemed to be remedied by my getting to sit in water for 2 days. I should note for future reference also how interesting it was to pack different people for 3 different trips at the same time. Simultaneously, I was packing 6 people for an overnight stay (with a separate bag for changing into street clothes from bathing suits, I might add), 1 little girl for a 4 day stay at camp, and also for a 3 day trip for 6 people. It felt hectic at the time, but not unmanageable – due to the fact that my wonderful family did much of the work for and with me. And you know what? I don't think we forgot anything!!

July 2, 3 – After the water park, we got a day of rest (and unpacking, re-packing, laundry) before we set out Sunday for the 4-hour drive to Nashville Indiana – with one small glitch: Hubby had food poisoning. He had to miss church to rejuvenate, and then we were off – well, after packing up the car and some other in-town odds n ends.

July 3-6 – We spent the 4th of July in Nashville – a yearly trip Hubby and I take with our 4 kids, my parents, my uncle, and my sister, her husband and their 2 kids – there were 13 of us staying in a large house in the middle of the Brown County woods. It was a beautiful place, and we're torn on where to choose to have next year's gathering. Last year, we had a beautiful house where each family had their own bedroom and bathroom. The few downsides to this house (called The Oaks) was the large steep hill that led down to the pond and fire pit – it proved to be dangerous last year when someone took a nasty spill (but was uninjured), so we didn't want to gamble with it this year when we have an adult who is practically incapacitated (me being 5.5 mos. pregnant). Also, the kids have to be watched constantly down by that pond, so it was a nice break for the adults this year to not have to worry about who was going to take them down there. Also, there wasn't really any yard for the kids to play in at The Oaks. There

was a swingset, but really only the two 3-year-old boys were of the age to enjoy a swing set this year, and that leaves 4 other kids with no yard to run around in. Both houses had pool tables inside and hot tubs outside (which became little swimming pools for the kids since we didn't want to turn on the heat in 90° weather), and The Oaks had tons of dvds, board games, and a foosball table, but then again, this year we brought our own dvds and games and the kids had TONS to do and were never bored. Another plus to this year's cabin vs. The Oaks: the large dining room table that fit almost everyone at the same time so we could enjoy meals together. The Oaks had only a small breakfast nook that seated 4 people or about 6 kids, so the adults had to eat elsewhere. Given these pros and cons of each cabin, it's going to be a tough decision next year on where to stay!!

The kids' favorite thing to do this year was to go down to the creek that ran around the property (this cabin was called "Ginley's Gulch" for future reference). There they would walk the creek, hunting for crawdads, geodes, and minnows, and they found quite a few of all of the above. As I said, this property had a larger yard, and also 85 acres of forest, and in the future I would like to explore the gorgeous property more since I wasn't quite feeling up to that this year. I did enjoy walking down the cleared path into the forest though – there were many beautiful butterflies, cool looking insects, and birds to see and hear. And oh yeah! I forgot to mention another huge plus of Ginley's Gulch – the screened-in porch! It had a ceiling fan, so it was a wonderful, mosquito-free place to spend our Brown County evenings together. A great trip!!

July 6 – We arose at the crack of dawn to pack up the car and get the kids roused for the 4+ hour drive to Michigan to drop daughter #2 at camp. We were all exhausted, and the kids slept much of the way. We did stop in Fort Wayne for something to eat, and we finally tried a little cafe where we had always wanted to try their eggs benedict since reading an

ad for them years ago. The eggs benedict was a bust – sauce from a packet, don't you know, but they did have one of my seasonal favorites that's very hard to find in the northern part of the country where I live: fried green tomatoes. And they were yummy! We dropped Sammie off at camp just a little late, and we were excited for her after seeing what a great place [Camp Selah](#) is (Camp Selah is a Christian camp in Reading Michigan, and both of our kids who went had a SUPER time!)

July 7-9 – These next few days were a bit quiet without the whole brood together, and we fit in another family min-vacation: since Sammie had to be picked up in the morning in Michigan, we took the other 3 kids to the drive-in in Coldwater Michigan and spent the night there – lots of fun! Saturday the 9th we picked up Sammie, and she said she had a good week during her first ever time at camp.

July 11 was the 3rd birthday of a very special little guy, and we took him out to dinner at the local Mexican restaurant where they sang to him, put a sombrero on him, and dabbed his nose with dessert. I of course forgot my camera ☹ but he liked it all the same. It reminded me of last year when the staff at Bob Evans sang to him, and he dove into my shirt to hide – the year of experience helped him to enjoy the attention more this year. And in the morning of little dude's birthday, I had to drive Taylor to camp in one of the nastiest storms of the year. We made it there without a problem, but the ride home was dicey with driving rain and wind. I was glad I didn't have any kids with me which would have made me nervous, and as you can tell I made it just fine – even if I did arrive sopping wet and very late to Bible study. In the newspaper the next day, I saw a picture of a power line that fell into the road which turned out to be the same road I had been driving down during that storm. Just goes to show you what kinds of things to look out for when driving during inclement weather in the middle of desolate farm country, and I feel blessed to have made it safely.

July 11-14 – So with our eldest away at camp, the week flew by... even though we missed her (I especially missed having someone old enough to have a normal conversation with me during the day). We had 3 days of doctor appointments (me and our youngest-for-now had his 3-year-checkup) and meetings, and then... freedom!

July 15 – Hubby and I met my mom in South Bend, and she took “the littles” (our family name for the younger kids in our family; in this case it meant our 3-year-old, 4-year-old, and 7-year-olds) to Grandma’s for a vacation – which left Hubby and I kidless for a whole day! So Hubby took me to the Potawatomi Zoo in South Bend, and the amount of walking and the weather was perfect for me even while pregnant since it was just the two of us. What a great idea as I was just starting to get zoo withdrawl! After the zoo, we decided to take the scenic route home from South Bend and fell upon a perfect date purely by accident: in Middlebury Indiana, there is an excellent Amish-style restaurant called [Das Dutchman Essenhaus](#). We were driving by on a day when they had a buffet, so we could sample many varieties of their very delicious food. Even better, there were some Amish men offering carriage rides in the parking lot, so we took one! It was so romantic, the grounds of the mini-resort were beautiful, the weather was perfect, and hearing the history of the grounds as told by our Amish guide was wonderful – best date day ever!!

(below is a picture of a horse and buggy like the one we drove in (ours was more of a carriage than a buggy). I had to take the picture on the way home since I had forgotten my camera and couldn't take any pictures while on the buggy ride!)



July 16 – This was the day we picked up our oldest from camp, and we got to hear every detail about her awesome week while driving from Michigan to Fort Wayne to see... the new Harry Potter movie ON IMAX IN 3D!! Yes, it was as cool as it sounds, and it was fun to take Taylor out for a fun day with only parents and no younger siblings – dinner was at Golden Corral, one of her favorite places since she loves steak. I'm thankful that the awful nausea I felt earlier in the day did not persist through the movie, and the cause of it that day still perplexes me... such is a mystery of pregnancy, I guess.

July 17-18 – The 3 of us tackled the huge project of cleaning out our spare room – what a mess! I wish we had taken some “before” pictures, but the most important thing is that it got done, even if I felt like I was going to fall over in exhaustion by the end of it. I'm so proud of Hubby for all the hard work he did for this project, and especially that it was his idea to tackle it earlier than we had scheduled – we began Saturday night after Fort Wayne rather than Sunday after church as we had planned. But it looks GREAT, and as I'm writing this at the end of July, our family has gotten so much use out of it already. We made it into a craft / hobby / school room, and it has a computer, Taylor's new sewing machine (a present from Grandma), all kinds of paper, crayons, glue, etc, and all the many, many arts and crafts kits and supplies we had been saving (and losing) for the past 5 years.

(July manifest to be continued – need to give your eyes a

break! But first, here is a pic of a creative, cute fire hydrant in downtown South Bend Indiana I snapped while sitting at a stoplight – look for it near the silver van's rear bumper)



Outbreak

The flu season is upon us, and it's obvious. In our family, we are teetering between two outbreaks of illness. Last week, it was hand, foot, and mouth disease (not to be confused with its fear-provoking counterpart, foot and mouth disease, which is only found in animals). The kids had little bumps on their hands, and a general feeling of being unwell, known as malaise as I learned on the internet. This is an extremely common (in children anyway) viral illness that usually runs its course in most kids. When my mouth erupted in sores last week (it's like having 10-20 large canker sores at the same time), I was shocked because it's supposed to be very rare in adults. We contacted 3 different health professionals to make sure that our trip to Illinois could go on as scheduled, and they all assured us that if there was no fever, we were not contagious. We ventured across the state of Indiana, and I don't know if I was more fearful of what we were bringing with

us or what we were going to take home, what with the many recent flus reported in Illinois and elsewhere, H1N1 and otherwise.

More on the really great parts of the trip in the next blog post – I need to get this out of my system so to speak, haha – a sick post and a fun post. So for the sick part...

My husband woke up today feeling awful – the flu. My morning started pretty much like the past 2 or 3 mornings now – tremendous pain in my mouth, worse than the day before. One of my favorite things about visiting the Chicago area is the food – despite the city's drawbacks: the aggravating traffic, the inflated prices, CROWDS; Chicagoans do have a talent for their intolerance of crappy Sysco food – ie, Chicago food is fantastic! Last week, anticipating our upcoming trip, I remember thinking that it was only Wednesday, surely my mouth would heal by Friday so I could indulge in some of my favorite Chicago treats. But alas, Thursday's pain was worse than Wednesday's, and Friday's was worse than Thursday's. Actually, as I said before, it's gotten worse every day since it started. Somehow, I was miraculously able to enjoy my [Italian beef sandwich](#) Friday night, but pain-wise things just went downhill from there. We had a wonderful breakfast at the [Uptown Cafe in Arlington Heights](#), quite possibly the best breakfast restaurant *in the country*. They have the best eggs benedict I've ever had, but unfortunately I came very close to sinfully wasting my eggs benedict when I could not eat them (let alone carry on a conversation with relatives) without my eyes watering from the pain in my mouth. My little boy saved me from wasting half my order (I knew I should have gotten soup or at least a half order of eggs benedict, but I literally could not resist – we get to this place less than once a year!) – but my toddler ate *half* my eggs benedict – he is his father's son!

The weekend ended with my sister making us wonderful homemade lasagna, of which I had about 5 small very painful bites. I

did not try any of the appetizers, the steamed vegetables, the salad, the garlic bread, or any of the desserts ☐

I also did not get my usual crave case of White Castle cheeseburgers to bring back to Ohio, although generous relatives supplied us with some Chicago beef for sandwiches, homemade soup and Grammy's out-of-this-world homemade spaghetti sauce, all frozen and ready to be thawed as soon as I'm better! Talk about something to look forward to!!!

We ventured home at 2 am this morning, and arrived safely, however painful (and tiresome for my husband) the ride home. And a special thank you to Officer Friendly of the Ohio State Patrol, who did not issue even a warning for my husband's "hovering around 60 in a 55." I'm glad he seemed to take the 4 sleeping kids and the grumpy wife in the passenger seat into consideration – this police stop was completed very quickly and only blocks from our house.

This morning I awoke in a lot of pain, and it's gotten worse throughout the day. I think if it continues its trend and gets even worse tomorrow, I'm going to have my husband call the doctor to make an appointment. I am so thankful that my kids seem to be over it, and as horrible as it's been for me, I'm still happy I got the most of it in the family. I pray for my husband, and I'm really nervous about swine flu, but he seems to be feeling better, unless he's just putting on a braver face than I. This illness for me has been characterized by bouts of severe pain sandwiched between constant regular pain. In the past hour, twice that I've talked brought on the most severe bouts of pain and was enough to make me start typing on the computer and making my husband read it in order to communicate. Whatever works, it's amazing how easily the threat of tremendous pain can train a person to keep her mouth closed (like [Pavlov's dog](#)). My husband joked that it's the "shut-up disease". That brought a smile; it doesn't hurt to smile – just the talking, eating, drinking, and sleeping. And that reminds me, being in

constant pain has made me an insomniac. I couldn't sleep in Illinois at our hotel and ended up listening to an hour-long Larry King interview with Suzanne Somers – even that did not put me to sleep. Did you know that Suzanne Somers never actually had cancer even though 4 different doctors told her to get her affairs in order because they had mis-diagnosed her? That's a tangent that doesn't need to be taken...

Well, anyway, that's enough from me for now. Sorry about the rambling, but this really sucks, and typing is my voice right now. Hubby is watching the Bears game, so it'd just be rude of me to constantly interrupt by making him read my ramblings. I wish I could take care of my husband while he's sick, but for now we're helping each other. Let's really hope this gets better – if I have to go to the doctor, I can't tell them what's wrong with me because I can't talk, and I don't really want to bring my family with me to the doctor's – who knows what else we could get?!? I guess I'd have to write a note, but I feel kind of silly...

A real Halloween horror treat tonight would be for us to watch the movie [Outbreak](#) – now that's just T00 scary!!!

At least we have a good part of a week to whip these things and get ready for fun Halloween activities abound next weekend! Super-fun blog post about the awesome parts of the Illinois trip – including haunted house ratings! – to follow this depressing post, I promise!

EUREKA!

There's been a lot of buzz around here about a few new restaurants that are to be opening soon in our county. One is a replacement for a restaurant that closed due to the tough

economic times. The old place had good food, but their prices were kind of high for the area, and their service was always very slow – perhaps two reasons that led to their demise? I don't know much about their replacement, except that it's to be called 'Union Street Grille' and will open in May sometime. Hmm, grille. Does that mean burgers and the like?

Next we will have a Sonic drive-in. For those of you who aren't familiar, Sonic is a fast food place, with burgers, french fries, chicken sandwiches and the like, but they also have outdoor booths where you can sit in your car and eat after your food is delivered to you. I try not to eat too much fast food, but I do enjoy Sonic from time to time, and they have excellent slushies, ocean water, and especially flavored iced tea – YUM! And Sonic has a Happy Hour from 2-4 when their drinks are half-price, so I'll be there..

The other new restaurant in the area is a place called '4 Seasons' and it's about 20 minutes away. They have (among other things) Greek food – my favorite! Not a full spread, but enough to make me happy! Their gyros are great (awesome tzatziki sauce), and they even have homemade hollandaise sauce for eggs benedict. I think I've already rambled on in a few blog posts how important it is for good eggs benedict to have homemade hollandaise. My husband and I have searched many states for good hollandaise sauce, and many places will say their sauce is homemade even if it isn't. I guess to a lot of people, "homemade" means that they've mixed the powder into the water. But not to us – you can really taste the (ew) difference if there is powder involved. The other night, we ate at 4 Seasons, and I made a comment – now we just have to ask them when they're getting Saganaki (one of my favorite Greek dishes – it involves goat or sheep cheese, whiskey, fire, and yelling OPA! Good stuff). So my husband asked the waitress about it, and that's when we found out that they HAVE it! Of course – we find out when we're way too full to even consider trying it, and on the eve of one of the busiest

weekends we've had in a long time. We will be up there to try it soon – no doubt! Before that lovely piece of news, we thought the nearest Saganaki was Toledo or South Bend, Indiana!

Anyway, 3 new restaurants opening up within miles of my house is a big deal for us – especially for one to have THREE of our favorite dishes! We eat out a lot, partly because the prices are reasonable in our area, partly because we're very busy people and I'm not home a lot to cook, and partly because it's really difficult to cook with 8 extra little feet in the kitchen to trip over! Maybe some day I'll have the time and the patience to cook more often, but until then, new restaurants opening in our area to give us more variety is a cause for celebration! EUREKA!

New York Trip Diary Volume 3

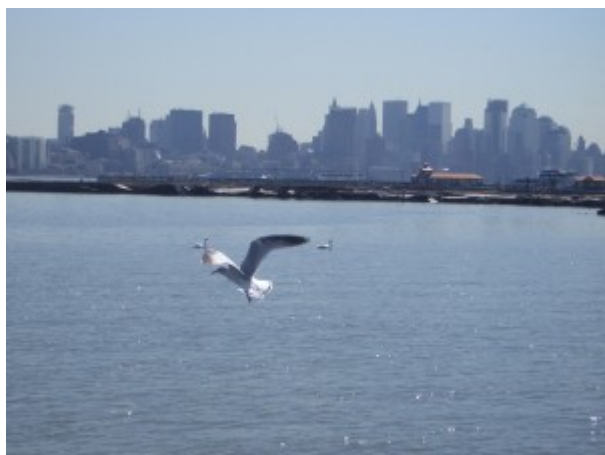
NEW YORK TRIP – MARCH 20-23, 2009 – TAYLOR: 9 yrs, SAMMIE: 4 yrs, DISNEY: 2½ yrs, CHRISTOPHER: 8 mos

(continued from previous posts)

Saturday, March 21 – We awoke about 8:30, which seemed early since we had arrived at our hotel late the night before and the kids stayed up for a little bit even after we arrived. So we went down to the hotel's restaurant to get breakfast, which was a mistake. I had thought it'd be cheaper to eat in the restaurant rather than get room service, and I had also thought we'd be cramped trying to eat in the room. But down at the restaurant, our kids went nuts, and continued to do so while it took about an hour for the food to come. And this was a nice restaurant – not a friendly mom n pop place where they actually like and tolerate kids like we're used to back

home. They did have pretty good hollandaise sauce for their eggs benedict, but my enjoyment of it was severely compromised due to the stress of the kids. Our server kept walking by and mumbling things, and I'll admit that our 8 month old son does make a mess when he eats, but don't they all? We cleaned up the best we could, but that didn't stop the server from "stealing" our change. That's right, when we paid the bill, the included 14% gratuity apparently wasn't enough for him because he failed to bring the change back. Rather than try to track down Mr. Rude (we are SO not in Kansas anymore!), my husband took up the issue with the front desk.

Next it was time for the business meeting (the reason we came, I guess), and so Manny Jamy took the kids down to the pool while hubby and I met with the clients. Except they were late, and while we were waiting, I began to have doubts about the baby and I being disruptive to the meeting, so I took him back to our room to put on his bathing suit so he could join his sisters in the pool. Just as I arrived, so did Manny Jamy with the rest of the kids, and we decided to take them for a walk outside instead. Our hotel was on the New Jersey side, and offered a postcard view of the New York skyline:



Even though I had never been there before, it seemed to me that there was indeed a gaping hole where the twin towers used to stand, and Jamy who had been there before confirmed this. We watched many a garbage barge sail by, and I was surprised to find that the sea gulls in New York are quite bashful – I

guess I'm used to the ones at Sea World and Marineland Canada where they'll just swoop down and swipe the fish you buy to feed the dolphins and whales. But it was a nice day, and our hotel offered a nice little pocket of solstice tucked away from the frenzied traffic of the city. I wanted to kill as much time down there as possible since we were short on room in the car and my packing of toys for the hotel room had to be limited. But my oldest was tired – she fell asleep on a bench outside – and her little brother started losing it because he also needed a nap so badly. So we went back up to the room to wait for my husband's meeting to be over. Manny Jamy was nice enough to watch the two middle girls so that I could catch a nap with my oldest and the baby, and it was MUCH needed and MUCH appreciated. Our 2 year old fell asleep as well, which was a good thing, but I was disappointed I couldn't take her to be shown off to the clients when my husband called – she is awfully cute! So anyway, I went down to meet the clients, and they were extremely nice. They have a baby who was born just 9 days before my son, and she was really adorable! I was disappointed – if I had known they had brought the baby, I would have stayed at the meeting and let the babies play together! Oh, well, at this point, I was just glad to be done with work and ecstatic to be well-rested so that we could go to the city and have SOME FUN!

Because we were on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River, every time we wanted to go into the city, we had to wait for our hotel shuttle to take us to the ferry station, then wait for the ferry to take us across the river, and then board a Waterway bus (different from a city bus, as we later learned) to take us to our destination in the city. Not a big deal, but by the end of the trip, it had gotten a little tiresome to add that much traveling time to get where we wanted to go. So anyway, Saturday night, we ventured into the city to take a bus tour on one of those double-decker, open-topped buses. On the way to the tour bus stop, we weaved our way through the massive crowd that is the Manhattan theater district on a

Saturday night. We did have a few celebrity sightings; including the actor Morgan Freeman:

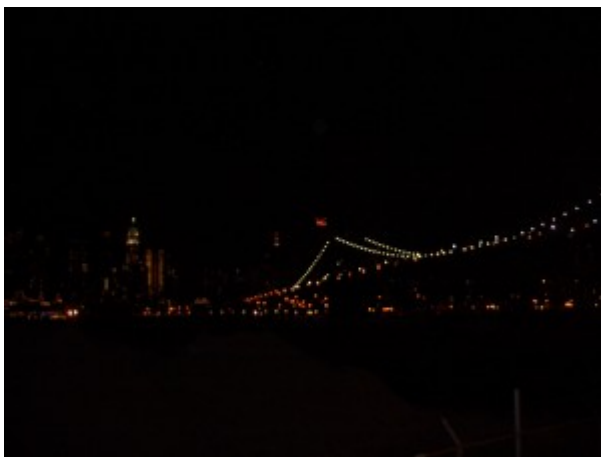


though Mr. Freeman did have the personality of a candle, as [Jamy](#) pointed out. We also saw multiple Statues of Liberty walking around, but a few of them were getting into trouble with the police. Now that's something you don't see everyday – a Statue of Liberty getting arrested – too bad I didn't get my camera ready in time to take a picture, that would have been one for the scrapbook! We also saw Bugs Bunny, Elmo, 2 Cookie Monsters, a walking sandwich, a naked cowboy (don't ask), and Batman. Except I don't think it was the real Batman unless he's always been African American – besides, the real Batman would have been fighting crime in Gotham City, not posing for pictures on the streets of New York. Here is one of the Cookie Monsters – look carefully and you can see Elmo to the right:



We got suckered by some street vendors and sampled their wares of smoked meat, hot dogs, and art. My husband bought a caricature of our oldest daughter and a sign with our youngest daughter's name in calligraphy, but walking around with those souvenirs was like writing "suckers" on our foreheads – we got hit up for everything after that, from purses to sunglasses to comedy show tickets. Actually, we kind of got "had" again – when my husband bought the \$5 sign for our daughter, the artist started putting a frame on it, which would have upped the price to \$20. My husband kept saying, "no frame, no frame!" but all of a sudden, the artist no longer spoke English, so he went ahead and framed it and charged us \$20. My husband did not pay him the full \$20, but I know it was still more than the \$5 it was supposed to have cost – oh well, you only visit New York once, at least in our case – I won't go back, at least not with little kids!

So then we boarded our tour bus, and that was really neat, informative, and offered gorgeous views of the city at night.



Ok, the picture obviously doesn't do it justice, but here is my 2-year-old daughter seeing her first skyscraper:



It was kind of chilly, and we tried moving down to the first floor of the bus, but the view did not compare with what we could see on the top, so we ended up moving upstairs again. The city was gorgeous at night, but when we went over the Manhattan Bridge, it was so high up, it was kind of freaky! Being on the top of the bus and looking down, you couldn't even see the road, just the water below, and I couldn't help but think how easy it would be to just leap over the side... not that I would do that of course, I'm just saying.

After the bus tour, we tried to find the Waterways bus – the one that would go back to the ferry station, but we had some trouble. We ended up sitting on a street corner for about two hours. We stopped a passing taxi, figuring we'd just pay the expense just to get us and the kids off the streets of New York, but we couldn't even all fit in one taxi. I was strongly against the idea of splitting up in any way, shape or form, so our next idea was to stop a passing horse and carriage. While asking the very friendly Irish driver directions to the ferry bus, his horse took a gi-normous leak right there on the street, but at least the girls were momentarily entertained. We declined the \$70 horse and buggy ride, and finally the Waterways bus arrived – my husband practically jumped in front of it to stop it since the previous one had passed us by, but it worked – the bus actually picked us up!

Overall, an interesting night in New York. And it's not like

I expected people to be overly nice. I certainly didn't expect it to be like my hometown, where you can't walk down the street without strangers saying hi and you can't walk around with kids at night without people offering you a lift. But it was still an adjustment – every time we'd ask how to get to the Waterways bus, people would just point off in a general direction and grunt, even police. And it was amazing to me how a family with 4 small children could set up camp on a street corner for 2 hours without one soul taking notice – I swear, we could have moved there and no one would have known nor cared. By the end of it all, I can't believe how sick of Times Square I was... Oh, and I forgot to mention, while we were searching for the Waterways bus, we came across a small deli that was actually recommended to us by our tour bus driver – Z Deli. The place had amazing falafel and gyro sandwiches! And their prices were reasonable, especially for New York City – no, reasonable is not even the word for them. I'm talking \$.99 slices of pizza, and the huge gyro sandwich was only \$3.99! Its only shortcoming was the lack of places to sit, but the guys who run the place went out of their way to accommodate us (in anti-New York style, it seems), letting us dine at their "internet cafe" area.

So after the "miracle bus" picked us up, took us to the ferry station, and we rode the ferry and picked up the hotel shuttle, it was very late and we were exhausted. It exhausts me just to type out the story, as it probably exhausts the reader to absorb my excruciating details, so now's a good time to cut this volume short – more later...

This Town's Got Talent AND Faith

I already wrote about our 3D movie-going experience in my previous post, so I will skip that part of the weekend here, but I neglected to mention the cool restaurant we found because I didn't want to enlarge an already lengthy post...

Friday night after seeing My Bloody Valentine 3D in Maumee Ohio, a suburb of Toledo, we noticed a restaurant across the street called Nick's Cafe who advertises breakfast all day. My husband and I are both Eggs Benedict connoisseurs – we really appreciate a great-tasting serving of Eggs Benedict, which is a breakfast dish consisting of English Muffin halves topped with Canadian bacon, poached eggs, and a layer of Hollandaise sauce. In our pre-parenthood days, we explored the country and sampled various versions of the dish along the way to our traveler's goals; whether they were destinations of business or pleasure. A requirement of great Eggs Benedict is homemade Hollandaise sauce, and by 'homemade', we (unlike many of the restaurants we tried) don't mean mixed up in the kitchen from a package. You need a double boiler to make it, and good Hollandaise sauce has nothing to do with a powder or a package. In all of our travels, we never found anything that even compares to the Hollandaise sauce at Uptown Cafe in downtown Arlington Heights, Illinois. We've visited numerous restaurants in our quest, and we've called some of them ahead of time, but even if you ask if their Hollandaise sauce is homemade, many will say yes, even if we don't agree on the definition of homemade. Such was the case Friday night at Nick's Cafe in Maumee, Ohio. They said their hollandaise sauce was homemade on the phone, but oddly, when we arrived, they wouldn't let us taste a sample. That was a first! Of the dozens of restaurants we've visited in search of the perfect Eggs Benedict, no restaurant had ever denied us a

sample! On Friday night, my husband bravely ordered the Eggs Benedict at Nick's Cafe without trying the Hollandaise sauce ahead of time, and disappointingly, it was of the non-homemade, out-of-the-package variety. He did say that the Canadian bacon on the Eggs Benedict was great, but it unfortunately cannot rescue the dish if it uses packaged Hollandaise. So negative Eggs Benedict experience aside, the reason I would highly recommend this place is for their Mediterranean cuisine. And regular readers of my blog (and of those email forward all-about-you quizzes) know that this is my favorite type of food, therefore I am a huge critic. But Nick's Place in Maumee has excellent gyros, Tzatziki sauce, and Greek salads. Gyros are only good when they're off the spit and even then, it's easy for them to taste too salty. Not the case at Nick's Place; if you like Mediterranean food, I **highly** recommend their gyros and Greek salads – incredible.

But I must move on to Saturday afternoon, when we took our kids to see the movie, [Hotel for Dogs](#). I've been waiting for this movie for months, which is probably why we didn't want to cancel our planned outing there on Saturday even though Kid #1 went off her rocker. Seriously, the kid went berserk and I was really tempted to give her "the talk", especially after I noticed a pimple on her cheek... (well, one of 'the talks' anyway – the one about womanly bodily changes – she's 9 years old and I would rather we talk about puberty stuff *before* it happens to her). But anyway, she'd probably be *mortified* if she knew I was posting this on the internet (what are mothers for?), so I better get off this tangent... After the episode Saturday morning, our oldest really didn't deserve to go to the movie, but it's difficult in a large family to not 'let the bad apple spoil the bunch'. Our younger girls had been very good all morning, so why keep them (or me!) from going to the movie? Our oldest was punished for the tantrum by having to go without a Kid's Pack (popcorn, pop, and candy) at the movies, and to her credit, she was mature about the consequences of her actions. However, soon after our arrival

at the movie theater, the tide changed and our 2-year-old became the problem. I don't know why we keep trying to take a 2-year-old to the movie theater, but every time, it's regrettable. Actually, it's been this way since even *months* before she turned two... I guess we keep hoping that one of these times, she'll actually settle down enough to enjoy an entire movie without driving anyone crazy. So anyway, I'm trying to keep our 6-month-old busy and quiet while attempting to watch Hotel For Dogs and not disturb our neighbors, and my husband is busy with our handful of a 4-year-old, so next thing we know, our two-year-old is drinking my Mountain Dew. Of course she loves it, but even *before* the Mountain Dew she's had a sugar-infused Kid's Pack, and now she's practically bouncing off the walls. She smiles and announces in a loud voice, "**I take clothes off!**", so now I'm trying to put my son back in his car seat so I can stop his sister from stripping off her clothes right there in the movie theater... Too late. She is down to her diaper by the time I get both hands free, so my husband covers her with a coat. For some reason, she's willing to wear nothing but a coat and a diaper in the movie theater, and somehow we make it through the rest of the movie without having to leave. So as for Hotel For Dogs, I liked it (I think – I actually didn't see much of it)... it's a cute, predictable fun movie, and if you're a dog lover, there's plenty of canine eye candy.

Following the movie, I went to a local talent show based upon the popular "American Idol" TV show. Some great friends graciously stayed with the kids, and my husband also stayed home to catch up on the work he missed last week during the 2-hour-school delay and the school closing we have on Friday and Monday. He works from home, and it's all I can do to keep the two little ones out of his hair every day – add the older two to the mix and all Hell breaks loose – any chance of getting anything productive done flies out the window. So, a strange occurrence at the talent show – me, myself, and I for a change. I did attend with friends, but it's not like I would

bother Carol next to me with my philosophies on music or the tone of one's voice; that would be something to make my husband endure. And it was bizarre to simply sit back and listen and watch the show... For those hours, I had absolutely **not one thing** else to do besides enjoy the show... such a change of pace for me and much appreciated. Not that I would want to experience that all the time, but it was very nice for one night...

Adding to the relaxation for me was the spiritual tone of the evening. I had known the event would be sponsored by a local church, but I didn't realize that we, the audience, would be praying to both open and to close the show; as well as the fact that the majority of the acts were religion-themed. As I said, for me, it was refreshing and relaxing, but I think they should properly advertise such a theme if they do this again next year. Less open-minded people may have been displeased. My dear friend and the entire reason I was a part of this concert experience in the first place, performed wonderfully and I was pleasantly surprised to be able to pick out her voice from the rest of the delightful group with whom she performed. Despite my best efforts to vote for them, however, they didn't win the competition, and the top prizes went to a drama group from the church who sponsored the event (!), a very talented violinist, and a well-known local talent who is only a Junior in high school but who has already been a vocalist with the Toledo Opera going on her 3rd year. Besides seeing and hearing my friend perform, my favorite part of the evening was when a boy who was part of the drama group that won burst into tears. Their skit was acted out to music, and it portrayed a young girl being bullied by 'temptations' but ultimately triumphing over sins and choosing Jesus. The group got a standing ovation after they performed and because they were from the church that sponsored the event, it was no surprise when they won first prize in the competition, but the kid asked the crowd, "I just want to know that everyone was moved – was everyone moved?" There was applause and verbal

affirmations, and the next thing I knew, the kid had burst into tears and it slightly reminded me of the movie [Leap of Faith](#)... But it was sweet and real, and I was glad to be a part of it. Even though the talent show did a poor job of advertising the theme of the show; thereby the religion kind of snuck up on its patrons, it was a welcome and calming change of pace – at least for this member of the audience. And even though I wasn't aware that I needed it, the evening restored my faith while proving to me yet again what a great place it is in Northwest Ohio to raise kids – we have so much talent and so many opportunities here for our youth!

Windy City White House

“Windy City White House” is more of a reference to our visit to the Windy City rather than a blog post about the recent election – it's over and done with, and although I won't talk much about the outcome, I am happy to not have to hear about it on the news anymore. While in Illinois, my mother-in-law kept talking about what huge news it is that Obama was elected and how his pick for Chief-of-Staff, Rahm Emanuel is a fellow Chicagoan – making it a ‘Windy City White House’.

But back to our family – it's my blog, after all. We scheduled an early Christmas with our family in Illinois this past weekend (the early Christmas theme is something that seems popular with tangents.org bloggers), and overall, it was great. There are a few reasons we decided to do things this way – 1) We're sick of the hustle and bustle of opening our presents from Santa and then rushing off to Illinois on Christmas Day – add to that having the flu during this trip twice and UGH. Best to travel *before* flu season. 2) My daughter was off school Friday for parent/teacher conferences

3) We wanted to beat the rush and other travelers. Overall, it was a really great decision, although the trip was last minute, and so we did forget a few of the presents which we'll now have to send. We left Ohio on Friday morning and after a bit of traffic-sitting (of course), we got to my grandparents house about 40 minutes past schedule. But no matter, they're fully aware of the traffic problems plaguing their area. We were treated to a delicious lunch of my grandma's sloppy joes (love 'em), and the girls got to open presents. My grandpa gets tired really quickly, and so we didn't stay too long there, and then it was on to our hotel. My husband uses hotwire.com and got us a suite at the Sheraton for \$49 – a nice price for the area. When we pulled up to our hotel, we were pleased to see it was the same hotel where we spent our wedding night – that was a nice surprise. My mom and my sister brought her two boys over for some swimming, and we all had a blast even though their indoor pool was chilly. Luckily, I had thought to turn up our room's thermostat so when we got back to the room we didn't freeze, although it was quite crowded trying to get 10 hungry people changed out of bathing suits and trying to order pizza at the same time. It was a suite, but it was probably the smallest suite I have ever seen, and we had 6 little kids and 4 adults in there. My mother and sister wisely decided that they couldn't wait for the time it would take to get pizza, and they got something to eat on the way home. That was a good idea because my mom had to get up early the next day and didn't want to be out too late. They know their area well enough to realize that pizza delivery on a Friday night would take over an hour – and they were right. My poor kids were starving and I had to raid my diaper bag. I found a little bag of oyster crackers and two small bags of peanuts, so I divied everything up 3 ways (Survivor-style) and it quieted them a little until the pizza came. Overall, the kids were kind of spastic all day, especially my oldest for some reason... My husband blames the tension of the Chicagoland area, but then again, he hates it as much as I do. We love seeing family, just wish we could

visit them somewhere else!

Saturday morning we were up bright and early to meet my mother-in-law for breakfast at Uptown Cafe in Arlington Heights – the place has the best eggs benedict in the nation. And I know this because way back when, before we had all these kids, my husband and I used to travel constantly, and one of the things we would look for was good hollandaise sauce. We never found any that came close to Uptown Cafe's. And the owners remember us – we used to go there a lot when we lived in the area; I was pregnant with my first daughter. They are surprised every time they see us because we usually have a new baby or two. After breakfast, we went back to my mother-in-law's house, and I felt badly for dropping in on my husband's sister and her family without any notice. This is one of the details that was overlooked in the last minute planning. But it was ok; I didn't have my gifts for their 3 kids, so I'll have to send them. But our kids had lots of fun playing together, and it's important to me that my kids know their extended family, especially since a lot of hatchets have been buried over the years on this side of the family.

Next, it was time to see our good friend, the author of the sublife blog on tangents.org. It was great to see him, especially on his own turf, but he's right in his blog – there really wasn't much time for chatting. The kids wouldn't have allowed us to just sit and talk peacefully, and we wanted to take them somewhere fun, so we went to an overflowing Chuck E. Cheese. After waiting in line to park, I realized that I hadn't seen our camera since I took a picture of the kids on the luggage rack at the hotel that morning. Sound familiar? Yes, I have terrible luck with digital cameras. And worse, this one was not mine – I had borrowed it from Jamiahsh for the trip, so I was sick about losing it. Luckily for me, it turned up when we got home though – YAY! I was especially upset because I knew that I had put it in my diaper bag – I really thought someone had taken it. Pessimistic of me, you'd

think, except that we did have our tokens stolen from our table at Chuck E. Cheese with my husband less than 5 feet away. Takes all kinds to steal game tokens from little kids, doesn't it... at least they didn't also steal my digital camera. We got lunch at a Vienna Beef hot dog place in Arlington Heights called Jimmy's – highly recommended you get real Chicago-style beef sandwiches and 'dogs if you're in the area – YUM!

The ride home was uneventful – the kids slept most of the way, thank goodness. We did manage to stop and get me my crave case of White Castles, and so our car reeked of steamed onions – thank goodness we weren't pulled over or we may have gotten a ticket for disturbing the peace. Maybe I wouldn't have stopped if I'd known what White Castles would do to a 2-year-old's diaper. I tried to deliver some to my friend Carol who graciously pet sits for us, but for some reason, she neglected to pick them up. My husband says that not everyone likes White Castles. We picked up the slyders (as White Castles are known) in Dolton, Illinois; not the best area, but it just off the expressway so we made it unscathed. Ironically, something made me talk about Dolton just before the stop; I was telling my husband how it's gotten to be a really bad area and that I knew a family that had left there in the '80's because it was getting so bad, so imagine it now. Then we saw a sign that said "Dolton Bowl" right across the street from the White Castle, and we laughed at the irony. But overall, a nice trip, especially considering the area where we had to take it. One positive thing I will say about the area is that they have excellent food.

Three quarters of my kids on the luggage cart:

