

Fun At School

Some random kid-related stuff to report...

First, my “visitor” showed up to my Sunday morning class. I haven’t had the time to blog about it, but basically there is a parent who came to drop her daughter off a few weeks ago at the worst time possible, and the kids were all over the place (it’s not normally like that, a set of circumstances culminated to create the ‘perfect storm’ – long story). On top of that, her daughter is a 1st grader, which means that she has just come over to the north campus of church. Our first graders “graduate” from the preschool wing and move over to the other building when they get in 1st grade, and their curriculum changes. So this parent had concerns about what her daughter was learning and specifically where her weekly “coloring page” was. So she asked if she could come “observe” my class, and I was all upset and nervous. I sat and pondered this, I prayed about it, and I decided to give it my best shot and show this mother what a wonderful childrens’ ministry we have. I wasn’t even nervous, and I used the entire ride home from Illinois planning out my lesson for class the next day. And what happens? She is a no-show. Fast forward to the next week, which was in reality this past Sunday, and she shows up. Luckily I had kind of figured this would happen, so I was well-prepared again. But I also had 9 kids to look after – of course she couldn’t come observe when I had 4 kids last week when games and lessons are much easier... But I think it went well! I can’t speak for the “observer”, but the class ran as smoothly as it could have with 9 kids running around. She wasn’t just a statue standing in the corner making me nervous during class, but an active participant (after some encouragement by me) in the crafts and games. It is my hope that she came away from experiencing her daughter’s Sunday school knowing that our childrens’ ministry program at church is wonderful! We have so many components (there is music,

dancing, skits, big group games, small group games, story-telling and crafts – all in one hour every week!) and super volunteers who bring it all together which provides a variety of ways for kids to learn one lesson and virtue. I am so proud of how well my 1st graders are picking up on this month's virtue, which is "initiative". I know, a huge word for such small kids, but the lessons are broken down and relate to kids so well that they really are getting it – especially my 1st grader at home, which really surprises me!! So anyway, I just wanted to express my relief about how I don't have to worry about my "visitor" anymore. At first I was terribly upset, but after a lot of thinking and praying, it all worked out for the better! I was able to step back and take a look at our childrens' ministry and appreciate it even more when it was under scrutiny, so I am very thankful to God for opening my eyes and getting me through this.

Next bit of kid news – last week was National Eat Lunch at School week, so us parents were invited to eat with the littles. My husband and I folded ourselves into the kiddie-sized lunch tables and visited with the 1st graders. One problem I didn't see coming though – we brought little brother (he is 2), so of course he starts running around the lunchroom, but... Mom and Dad were so crammed into the little lunch tables that we could not get up to chase him unless someone else got up first – we were packed in like sardines! Finally we were able to get out and get him before he caused too much trouble, and we had a great time for the remainder of the lunch. I think Sammie really enjoyed haaving her family at lunch. Here are my 3 youngest at 'big kid' first grade lunch:



And at recess it was so neat to see some of my 1st graders from Sunday morning childrens' ministry!!

So after lunch in 1st grade, it was time to head to the fire station for a field trip with my preschool-age daughter and her class. I brought my 2-year-old along to this also because I thought he would enjoy it, and he did, even if it was a challenge trying to get him to hold still while the fireman was talking. But as soon as the fire gear came out and the fireman began to put on his boots, gloves, hood, hat, etc, my son was very attentive. After that, each of the kids got a turn "driving" the fire truck! My son made his way up to the front of the group and reached his arms toward the fireman – it was really neat to see because a few of the pre-schoolers, one being my daughter, were nervous about being lifted up by the firefighter and into the big fire truck. But once they saw the little dude have a turn and how much he loved it, they were all eager to try too!





So overall a great week! October is always so busy for our family, but I enjoy every minute of it!!

Zoo Snoozin!

Last week I got an email from my friend Carol – she had planned a field trip to the zoo for a ‘Zoo Snooze’ and a few of her students backed out at the last minute. Since the trip was pre-paid, the spots were paid for, and Carol wanted to fill them – so she thought of me, her friend, the zoo lover, and I of course JUMPED at the opportunity!

I took my two oldest daughters since the age requirements for the trip excluded my 3-year-old Disney and of course my almost 2-year-old, who I wouldn’t have wanted along anyway. Poor Hubby had to stay home with the little ones, and how I missed him! (and the little ones) But other than that – Best. Zoo. Trip. EVER!!!

Because of legality reasons, my daughters and I were not allowed to ride the school bus with the rest of the group. So my friend Carol graciously arranged for us to ride with one of her student’s parents who were chaperoning – they were the nicest people! They were actually going to take their pickup

truck, but upon learning that they'd have 3 hitchhikers, they switched vehicles to their SUV without complaint – how accommodating! We followed the bus to the zoo, and we hiked across the zoo carting our sleeping bags, pillows and backpacks, and I was EXCITED beyond belief!! We set down our stuff in Nature's Neighborhood (where the birds were screaming) and walked over to the primate building where we got to watch the primates after zoo hours and listen to a zookeeper talk about her interactions with the primate families. We then went into the Museum of Science building (this is at the Toledo Zoo, don't know if I mentioned which zoo it was...) into a classroom in the basement to listen to a worker tell about 3 animals – a box turtle, a salamander, and a rat (my girls were more than happy to volunteer the info that they had FOUR pet rats at home!). After listening to facts about the animals, we got to touch them, and I had already promised myself I would touch it no matter what – not a big deal, I love animals, so I don't have a problem touching regardless of species... except for my fear of frogs, but had there been a frog, I was going to touch it! We switched classrooms and did the same thing with 3 more animals: a cockroach, an agama (type of lizard – cute!), and a fox snake. Because the group sizes for Zoo Snoozes are supposed to be 25-50 people, they had actually paired our group of 11 with a rather large school group from Northern Michigan. When we were in the classrooms doing the animal activities, they separated our groups, and I was so glad because it would have been difficult for our kids to see and touch the animals if we were still combined with the huge Michigan group.

Next we went to the Carnivore Cafe (used to be an exhibit building that housed animals and they left some of the cages up for kids to eat in – they get a big kick out of this) for our snack of pizza, raisins, juice, and animal cookies.



the kids eating in an
animal cage at the
Carnivore Cafe

We then went for a night hike, and walking around the zoo in the dark under the full moon was amazing. We could hear the lions roaring, the snow leopards making cat noises, and when we walked past the cheetah exhibit, they were quite active. One sprayed a tree, and then he began stalking us, slowly walking toward us and then running at us and jumping on the fence! I didn't have my camera out when he jumped at the fence, but here he is stalking us – listen for the little cheetah “meow” at the end:

The zookeeper said that the cheetahs like to stalk toddlers who can barely walk, and they especially have fun with this during the zoo's Halloween celebration when parents bring their kids who dress up like cute and cuddly things – like little bunnies or other tasty cheetah snacks.

So we took a night hike to the aquarium, and it was neat to see the keepers turn on the lights for us. Even the fish were acting differently at night – some fish appeared that we don't normally see during the day when we come, and others were swimming in schools when they don't usually do that during the day.

After the night hike, we made enrichment treats for the animals – there were four to choose from: melon bombs for the elephants (you make holes in watermelons and stick carrot sticks in there), pumpkin cookies and paper towel tubes for the primates, and snack bags for the elephants. My oldest daughter made primate tubes, and Sammie and I made elephant snack bags – you put an apple, a pear, and a handful each of peanuts and popcorn in the bags and roll them shut and decorate them. We were incredibly surprised the next morning when we watched Louie the elephant (and it was his 7th birthday!) take our treat bags and pop the whole things into his mouth (bags and all!) without even opening them first! Here is a video of Louie eating our bags – too bad I couldn't get out from behind the girl with the ponytail:

After making the enrichments, we went back to a classroom and played an animal training games using a training clicker – I have to get myself one of those and follow the puppy around for a day or two to housebreak him! Wonder when I'll find the time for that? After the game, it was finally time for bed, and we got to choose if we wanted to separate from the Michigan group. We chose yes, leaving them to sleep with the screaming parrots – I get enough of that at home! And sure enough, they reported to us the next day that the birds were up and screaming at 5am. I would not have been too happy about that, especially since we didn't get to bed until 1am! So we took our stuff and slept in one of the classrooms in the basement of the Museum of Science which was pretty neat – it's a well-kept 1930's Works Progress Association building, and we got to wander the winding basement hallways back and forth to the bathroom. Never mind that the building is home to hundreds of frogs and toads – they were upstairs, and I didn't give them any thought.

I think I will end it here and save day 2 of the Zoo Snooze for another post – this turned out to be a rather long post, and even though it's difficult for me to understand, not everyone loves zoos as much as I do. I don't want to bore the heck out of anyone!

Graduation part 2

Well, I was up a little early to find a job for the day, and I find myself with a little time so I will try to write this before I leave. So why a part two? Simply put, I subbed for 8th grade yesterday. Actually, the teacher does both 7th and 8th, but she was part of the 8th grade graduation. Why, oh why could she not be part of the 7th grade field day instead?

□ 7th grade was either doing field day or a field trip. But 8th grade had graduation practice. All day. Oh the things I get paid for- did I really need to be there, especially since another teacher seemed to be filling in anyway? Well, it's their money. □

The morning was simple. Announcements followed by the students being called to their respective places. Once in the gym, the principal announced how the day would go, then we went into the rehearsal. They started with something simple- standing on cue. "Row one stand up. Row one sit down. Row two stand up..." Then random rows called after all fifteen rows practiced. Next they added the turn to face the outside to the standing. "Stand..1..2..Turn." Again, practice for all the rows. Next up was filing in and out. Or rather, out and in since they were already in their seats. They had to master the art of the square turn. Okay, so they were *told* how to do the square turn, and practiced it leaving, but there wouldn't be enough time to actually master it. Once we were out, the need for the teachers became significantly more apparent. Ever deal with 350 restless eighth graders? Fortunately there were enough of us to handle things. Finally, once we entered again they were ready to actually line up and practice taking their diplomas. One by one, name by name just like Sunday's real performance. Only they had to stop for name corrections. At this time, they also had to practice sitting down on cue as well as listening for their cue to stand up, which was when a particular student's name was read.

Well, I am out of time for now so I will just post this first part of the day for now. Part 2¹/₂ this afternoon when I return.

I feel stupid...

Well, today I was a floater at a middle school, meaning that I would sub for different teachers throughout the day as they went to meetings. When I arrived they gave me a list. Four classes. Were they serious? I thought I had it fairly easy yesterday with five classes (in middle school six is typical, with a planning period, team meeting- subs not invited, and lunch). In this district one period is homeroom, making a total of ten periods of which a sub usually works seven when homeroom is added in. This meant that I had **three** extra periods off! A half-day of work for a full day's pay! Then again, this is me we're talking about. I didn't feel quite right about this so I asked at the office a few times if I was needed elsewhere during these breaks. They didn't have anything as was typical, so it would seem that I would get all the time off after all. However, in the afternoon the teacher I was subbing for for 7th and 10th periods decided she could use me after all to help out while she tried to get some other work done. I stress *tried* because in fact since she was in the room her students still came up to her and asked questions. By the way, they were doing research in the LMC so I mostly babysat as I couldn't answer a lot of the questions since I didn't know all the expectations of the project. Still not bad- a very easy day.

Now, some may think the title of this post applies to the above paragraph since I asked for extra work instead of just saying nothing and sitting in the lounge all day. Well, it always pays to not get on their bad side- I already don't take TA positions which pay about \$30 less per day- and besides, I would have missed the situation I am about to write on. □ Well, what happened was during one of the periods a couple of students came in who weren't a part of the class. Remember, this was the LMC and not a classroom. That would be very strange if random students just came into a classroom where

they were not a part of the class... Anyway, I wasn't aware of this at first and so questioned them when I saw they were not doing the research with the rest of the class. They told me they were here while their class was on a field trip. Were they being punished? Nope. They were seventh graders in an eighth grade math class, and all the eighth grade was on the field trip. Now I thought I was pretty good at math being in algebra in eighth grade, but here they were, two seventh graders in the eighth grade class. And to make matters worse, this seemed to be the top eighth grade math course, algebra 2. That's right, 2. I didn't take algebra 2 until my sophomore year (they split the two courses with geometry in the middle, which I took as a freshman). These two seventh graders were *two* years ahead of where I was when I was in middle school. They expect to be bused to high school next year for math as they apparently were bused to the middle school when they were in 5th grade... I guess if this keeps up they will be taking calculus in their junior year instead of in college, unless they bring themselves even further ahead in the next three years. Definitely two top engineers in the making.

Taylor, Teeth, and Toledo

Our poor little 8-year-old daughter, Taylor, was born on the short side of the genetic crapshoot when it comes to teeth. The poor kid has cavities, teeth that are fused together, and other dental problems. They wanted to do so much dental work on her that our small town dentist referred us to the big city of Toledo to get it taken care of. So, yesterday saw an all day excursion to Toledo so the poor kid could undergo some major dental work. It actually went quite well; she handled everything like a trooper. I'm sure the laughing gas and

novacaine somewhat helped the pain, but when it was all said and done, she did freak out a little about all the blood. After that whole ordeal, we wanted to make the day special for her, so we made a quick stop at the zoo between dental appointments. We only had about an hour, so we didn't get to see our favorite animals, but we did have time to check out the reptile house, which, crazily enough after all of our visits to the Toledo Zoo, we had never been in. It was a typical reptile house, full of snakes, lizards, and frogs (even though they're not reptiles, zoos always put them in the reptile house I've noticed), but what I really enjoyed was the crocodile. I can't tell you the last time I saw one of those, especially indoors. It was huge, and unlike their cousins the alligators, crocodiles are not friendly nor docile. They are very aggressive animals, and you can almost see it on their faces. The Toledo Zoo also has a Chinese alligator, and I was wondering if Chinese alligators are similar to American alligators in temperament. I know the Chinese alligator is smaller and much more rare, but I wonder if that is where the differences end... I'll have to do some research.

After the second dental appointment, we made a stop at Chuck E. Cheese, gauze packed mouth and all. The kids had a blast, although it wasn't very crowded, so Chuck E. didn't venture off the stage for a visit, much to my 3-year-old's disappointment. But I came to a realization that it was our youngest-for-now's first visit to a Chuck E. Cheese, at least her first one where she was old enough to enjoy it. Since we live in the boondocks, we just don't find ourselves at Chuck E. Cheese nearly as often as when we lived in the Chicago suburbs like when our oldest was a toddler. But that's quite alright, the place is expensive, and going infrequently really teaches the kids to appreciate the times we do make it there. Over the years, not much has changed there... when I was a kid, they called it Show Biz Pizza, and I was able to find pics of the old characters for others my age who like nostalgia.



The main character for the chain, a bear named Billy Bob (top right picture), really scared me as a kid... for some reason, he had long claws, which can be really scary for a kid. In Kindergarten, we got to go on a field trip to Show Biz; they took us behind the scenes and “undressed” one of the robots and took us back into the room where they have all the control panels for everything. Why they wanted to show a bunch of 6-year-olds that the characters were actually robots is still beyond me, but it was a very cool field trip and something I still remember.