

BLACK Raspberry – A New Meaning

Labor day weekend was a busy one, but it was packed with lots of fun family time. On Saturday, we packed up the kids and drove out to South Bend Indiana which is kind of a hike but worth it as you'll see in a minute. They have a nice little zoo there, the Potawatomi Zoo, and our Toledo Zoo membership gets us in free in South Bend also. There is also [Megaplay](#), a fun place for the kids (and adults!) to play. But this is the first time we've been to Megaplay when my son is old enough to play there, and he thought the ball pit (perhaps one of the last remaining in the world?) was just about the best thing he's ever seen! After Megaplay, we were all starving, and some research on the internet before we left told us that a favorite place of ours on the way back from South Bend (Dakota's in Elkhart Indiana) had closed. So we were left to find something new, and that we did – there is an excellent BBQ place right across the street from Megaplay. They had the best dessert I think I've ever had: pig ears, which is some kind of fried dough with butter and brown sugar or something else yummy sprinkled on top. I'm not normally a dessert person, but I probably would have taken on all 4 of my kids for a pig ear. It wasn't necessary though, since I ate theirs while they were in the bathroom ☐

Last time I blogged about Megaplay, I think I mentioned how the strip mall where it's located looks like it's from the 80's. I don't know how else to describe it, but every time I'm there, I feel like I've been in a time warp. It's difficult to explain, so I tried to take a video, but it didn't turn out. Next time...

Sunday was kind of a restful day, and each of our two oldest daughters had friends over. They were well behaved friends, and we had fun.

On Monday, my husband had to work unfortunately, and rather than try to pass all day with all 4 of my kids at home, we took off for the Toledo Zoo. I know, 2 zoos in 1 weekend? But what can I say, I am a zoo addict. The only problem was that the zoo was MOBBED – probably the most crowded I’ve ever seen it. Good for the zoo, but not for the mom there by herself with 4 kids trying to navigate a large double-stroller through the crowds. We couldn’t get near the great apes to see them, and the rest of the animals weren’t doing much of anything except for the hippos. Toledo has an underwater viewing glass on the hippo exhibit, and their two extremely large hippos kept swimming past. One opened his mouth underwater, and the other one rose out of the water, opened his mouth REALLY wide and shook his head back and forth; it was great. The hippos made the entire trip worthwhile. Not that a trip to any zoo could ever be a waste of time for me. Even if I can’t see that many animals, there is just something about zoos that make me feel happy and peaceful. Besides, the kids got to play on the playgrounds for a long time, so they were happy too. The only problem was we had such a big day that all of the kids fell asleep on the way home. And the 4:00 nap did not set them up to go to bed at a decent hour to get enough sleep for school on Tuesday after their long weekend. Oops...

We got back home only 10 minutes late (there was traffic! Labor Day, who’d a thunk?) for our dinner date with Dad. Last week we discovered that Friendly’s restaurant has kids’ nights, which means that kids eat free with purchase of adult meals. That means for our family of 6, we leave with a bill of just over \$20 to eat out, and that includes all we can drink (kids too, and they don’t have to get water – they love this!) AND dessert for all of us. But while we were eating, the lights kept flickering; they went out but came back on again. But then they flickered again and went out for good (we still don’t know why, there was no storm or anything). But luckily we had already eaten, so we didn’t really have

anything to worry about. The kids were a little frightened, and of course all of a sudden the 3 girls had to use the bathroom, which had the employees scrambling for a flashlight for us to use. As I held the flashlight for my kids in the bathroom, we had a little talk about Amish people and how they live and how maybe the rest of us are too dependent on electricity. I made a bad joke about my black raspberry sundae since I was eating it in the dark, and that's where I got the title for this post.

So overall, a great weekend, though I should add one thing. At Friendly's, my husband overheard a college-age kid at the next table mutter something rude after our family prayed before our meal – "Jesus freaks". I feel badly for him that he has to think that about people who appreciate taking time to thank God for their blessings throughout their days. We were quietly minding our own business, so his comment was completely unnecessary. We do our thing, he can do his. I didn't even say anything when he and his friends were casually tossing around the f-word during their meal, even though my kids were sitting right next door. But people are people, and as I said, I feel badly for him. Besides, God gave us an opportunity to really help someone before we left the restaurant, and I hope that maybe our kindness can show the light of God to others. Maybe the mutterer was still there to witness God at work.

Hope your Labor Day, your "last hurrah of summer", was safe and happy. Here are some pictures from our wonderful weekend:



Ok, and I have to include the following pictures for the Star Wars fans. Megaplay has all these life-size cardboard cut-outs of Star Wars characters hanging up. Sorry the pictures aren't better, but I took them from far away since I was trying to fit as many into the pictures as possible. Look for them high on the walls, near the ceiling:



And my favorite of the cut-outs – I've always liked Marvin the Martian:



My Favorite Amphibian

Recently, a friend and fellow tangents blogger wrote a [blog post regarding her bucket list](#) – for those who haven't seen nor heard about the movie of said title, a bucket list is comprised of things you want to do before you die. Her post got me to thinking about my bucket list, and maybe I'll post it in the future. For now, I know that one of the items on my bucket list – or many items, depending upon how I write it – will involve seeing certain species of animals; many of them endangered and rare. If seeing rare animals is on my bucket list, then I can cross off one item – last week I got to see several specimens of the [Kihansi Spray Toad](#) – an animal that is considered *extinct* in the wild!



Given my intense fear of them, I never thought that a frog or a toad would be on my list of animals to see – but the Kihansi Spray Toad is actually kinda cute! For me, it seems that the more brown and dry the amphibian, the more it creeps me out – not including salamanders, which I don't have a problem with at all. I'm not at all frightened by the beautiful blue Poison Dart frogs or other colorful species, which is strange since those are the ones that tend to be poisonous and harmful to humans. Weird. So anyway, I think the Kihansi Spray Toad

is both extremely fascinating and very cute!

The Toledo Zoo is the only place in the entire world where people can view these special little toads who were first recognized as a species as recently as 1996. Not only that, it is estimated that over half of the earth's entire population of the toads live in Toledo. I am so glad I decided to venture over to the Museum of Science in the Toledo Zoo last week to see the spray toad! It was the highlight of my zoo visit; all of the other animals were kinda lethargic. Oh, there is one more thing – my 10-year-old daughter got pooped on by a bird in aviary! She was a really good sport about it, and it just **plucked** right out of her hair – no harm, no **fowl**. My daughter's unfortunate accident:



It was neat to see the local wildlife congregating in the unused Hippo-quarium. It's too cold for the hippos to be outside, but the ducks have a nice place to swim – who would have thought about what a group of ducks look like from under the water?



My 3 daughters fit into one giant egg!



This was taken on a different day, but I had to put in this cute picture of my 2 youngest. My little guy is learning to say "CHEESE!" for the camera ☺



Putting The Fun Into Labor...

Well, it was a last-minute attempt at a Labor Day outing with friends, and even though we strayed from our original idea of going to a Lake Erie-area haunted house and drive-thru zoo, we had LOTS of fun!

We went to the Toledo Zoo, always a great zoo, even if this Labor Day Saturday of 2009 equated to being one of the most crowded we've ever seen that zoo. It was just over 80°, so the animals weren't all that active, but we did get to see Louie, the "baby" elephant (who is now 6 years old and awaiting the completion of construction of his very own zoo exhibit area) lying down and taking a break, which was cool. We also saw one of their huge hippos swimming in the underwater hippo-quarium, which is always a treat because you can see a humongous hippo swim right past up close. After the zoo, we ate at one of our favorite places in the Toledo area – Nick's Cafe on Reynolds (not sure if it's actually Toledo or the suburb of Maumee). But the place is just north of Ohio's turnpike, I 80/90, and they have great food and almost *unimaginable* portion sizes – are they used to feeding GIANTS?!? Unfortunately for Nick's, the place was empty, but this is (just) one of the reasons we go to Nick's when we're in the area – they have GREAT food. Besides, **you** try withstanding the crowds to get a table at the Olive Garden on a Saturday evening, especially with 4 starving kids!

After dinner, we were going to head to another nearby Toledo suburb for a free exotic animal / magic show, something right up our alley. But the combination of the big weekend, crabby kids and crowds at the zoo caused our driver and his wife to veto that great idea, so luckily we hadn't told the kids since it sounded like fun and they would have been disappointed (no

matter their exhaustive state) to miss it. But we've learned that over-doing it with little kids along is **always** regretful, and so we happily prepared for our journey home after we gorged ourselves and piled leftovers into boxes at Nick's. But we grew distracted by a strip-mall across Reynolds from Nick's Cafe, and that's how we finally discovered what Nickel World of Toledo really is...

We had seen it in the strip-mall before, but we had always busily assumed that it was the 2009 incarnate of the early 20th century 5 and dime store. On Saturday night, we discovered that Nickel World is actually a family entertainment place, filled with **many** arcade, skill, and video games! They have a unique business model – they charge an entrance fee of \$2.50 per person, and then they sell \$5 bags of nickels for use on the games. Most of the games are just one nickel to play, some are two, and there's even a large selection of FREE games! The place is so cool; what a great concept! For about \$25, our party of 4 adults and 5 kids were easily entertained for at least an hour, PLUS the kids took home quite a bounty of prizes with the 5,000 tickets they were able to rack up in just that hour! Nickel World has just about every type of video game you can think of – two types of Skee-ball, multiple Crane Games, ball-roller games, basketball shooting games, racing games, Bozo Buckets, even air hockey as well as FREE! vintage arcade games like X-Men, Bust-A-Move, Dueling Dragons, and many more... We had a GREAT time, and Hubby and I are dying to return on a date night to fight, race and out-shoot each other without distraction from the kids! The only thing is that they are closed on Tuesday nights when we have our date nights... oh well, perhaps we can reschedule. If **you** are in the Toledo area, you **have** to check out Nickel World on Reynolds (US 20) – a rarity for an awesome value in family entertainment in this day and age of recession! And while I'm on the topic, Nickel World reminded me of another cool arcade-type place in South Bend, Indiana. [Megaplay](#) has two indoor mini-golf courses, as well as lots of

video games (some of the classics are free) and even an inflatable jousting area where they hold tournaments. I've never had the pleasure of participating in something like this, but it looks like lots of fun. If only I had discovered this sport before my sense of balance expired... I did see an indoor inflatable jousting space at another place in Toledo that we visited a few months ago. This place was pretty cool – they had adult-sized bouncy slides and ladders to climb, and my husband and I bounced down the slides and ran around like little kids until the unfortunate voices of reality (muscle strain and fatigue) made it loud and clear that we had better take it easy... But I can't remember the name of that place or where exactly it is, and I can't find it on the internet. Probably a bad sign that we were the only ones there at the time, I hope it hasn't closed down, but that's a lot of why it was so much fun – my kids weren't getting run over by eager older kids, and hubby and I weren't laughed out of the place by nasty teenagers...

So... back from my tangents. We had a really nice and safe Labor Day weekend free from any of the [speed traps we encountered in previous years](#). Hope yours was safe and fun also! God Bless!

Happy Easter!

I was right about something – I said it was going to be a great weekend and it was, even now, Sunday afternoon, when it's time for the Easter comedown the kids get when their sugar highs from all that candy wear off!

We celebrated our 10th wedding anniversary (again!) Friday night with a game night, and as usual, we had lots of fun!

Without announcing it to anyone, I decided to have a sort of Mexican theme, which simply meant making a taco dip and margaritas. It's not like I usually have themes for game night; I just happened to read a recipe for the taco dip earlier in the week, then we almost got the kids a snow cone machine which inspired the margaritas. Even though we didn't get the snow cone machine, my husband said we have a little device that crushes ice; except when it came time for the margaritas, he decided he didn't want to crush the ice, and we ended up with glasses full of crushed popsicles (?) instead. So anyway, I don't remember telling any of my friends it was Mexican game night, but about 4 of them showed up with salsa and/or taco dip! When the last person arrived a little late and brought salsa, we gave her a standing ovation – hey, most of us are theater people; it seemed like the thing to do! I forgot to mention that before the game night, we went to Walmart where they had an Easter bunny to visit. My youngest daughter was afraid of him, so that explains how I got in the picture:



Saturday the community theater had their first-ever Easter egg hunt. We were actually going to go to the drive-thru zoo / safari park in Port Clinton, Ohio, but we decided to stay and support the theater's egg hunt instead. And that was a great decision – the egg hunt was a blast! There were organized games for the older kids while the toddlers hunted, but our little 2 ½ year old daughter, Disney, was a little shy about

picking up the eggs. The eggs had prizes in them, ranging from candy to tickets for large prizes to coin dollars – and Disney got one of those! The older kids enjoyed a variety of games; including a relay race where they were to race to a table and finish two boxes of Peeps – no hands allowed! It was a riot!



The kids enjoyed doing an actual egg hunt, unlike at our town's annual Easter egg hunt where they've resorted to throwing candy on the floor of the middle school gym rather than try to plan around the weather every year and do it at a playground where they can actually *hide* the candy. They even sold lunch, which was great because after the hunt, we were ready to take off for the zoo and the kids had already been fed!

So we got to the Toledo Zoo and it was a little less than two hours before closing, so we had to pick and choose exhibits to see. Our oldest daughter really enjoys the Aquarium, so we began in there, and made our way around the back half of the zoo, ending with the great apes. The orangutans were bedding down for the night, and the gorillas were eating – allowing for some great up close views since a few of them chose eating perches right in front of the viewing glass. Because the weather is getting nicer, many animals were outside, and we enjoyed activity from the tigers and sloth bears – one of which is our "friend" and enjoys smelling us through the glass and playing with dangling car keys and hats. My favorite

animal of the day were the hippos – the Toledo Zoo has full-size, humongous hippos (not the smaller pygmy variety found in many zoos), and Saturday they were hungry! The keeper had them cordoned off while he put out their food, and we got to watch as he let them at it, one by one. The poor hippo who had to wait got anxious and was opening his mouth really wide and rolling over in the water – hippo version of begging, I guess... but after seeing that huge animal charge and buck in the water like that made me realize just how dangerous a boat ride on the Nile River would be!

The zoo closed, so we went to a few of my favorite types of stores – \$1 stores, which was lucky I thought because I was sure they would close around 6ish on a Saturday. I thought I remembered that about stores from my youth – I remember being disappointed about not being able to stay at the mall later on Saturdays... but I'm glad I was wrong and they were open until 9 because I was able to stock up on some snacks and birthday party goodie bag trinkets for our soon-to-be 5-year-old's upcoming party. When we got home, I was dead tired, but I did catch the end of an awesome Chicago Cubs game before playing Easter bunny. The Cubs came from behind the Milwaukee Brewers to tie up the game and then win it with an Alfonso Soriano home run – that guy is on fire this year!! We got the kids' Easter baskets ready and hid the non-perishable eggs and went to bed.

Sunday we let our baby wake us – usually my husband wakes with the baby and lets me and the other kids sleep in when possible. But today I wanted to be up in time to hide the real eggs, so we put our two youngest in the bath, started the coffee, and began hiding eggs. But not soon after, our oldest starting coming down the stairs, so we had to re-direct her and give her a “job” to do upstairs while we finished so she wouldn't see us. We had a great time, but my camera's battery died, so I don't have any pictures of that...

Then it was off to church to learn about the real reason we

celebrate Easter (how did coloring eggs get involved anyway? Maybe something to look up later when the kids are in bed and the Cubs are creaming the Brewers!). I never get bored at church, but I do get awfully tired – today my coffee wore off despite the energizing music and the pastor's entertaining sermon involving hot dogs and Jesus, of course! I guess I just get so relaxed since I don't have to worry about any of the kids for an hour – that's a good thing! We did go to bed late last night though... maybe I'll catch a nap while the kids play Easter bunny to their pets. They are hiding carrots in plastic eggs for their rats and hiding dog treats in eggs for their dogs. The bird got a new toy also, but he screamed at me while I was doing laundry again, so he's back on the sh*t list. My friend is running an 'ugly pet contest' for a play she's in, and I think I'm going to enter the bird for revenge – he's molting and his feathers are nappy right now – HA!

Happy Easter everyone!