

Interesting Day

Well, I really have to get to bed as I will be working at a middle school tomorrow and they start over an hour earlier than their elementary counterparts. 8th grade special ed- so I am sure to have something to write tomorrow. As for today, I was in a multiage room, 4th and 5th grades specifically. This is the second time I have subbed for this class and there is one thing a bit unusual. There are not one, not two, but **three** students in that class who are really big for their age. They are fifth-graders, but they look like they would physically fit right in in seventh grade. So were they held back a year? Well, that was what I was wondering, but nope! The teacher just happened to have a list with their birthdays (well one wasn't on the list- she must have transferred in after the start of the year) and the two boys at least are the right age for fifth grade. Now of course I have encountered the occasional large or small student for their age, but three in one room is just pushing the odds. I would have to check if they live near power lines or some such situation affecting their growth. They drink the same water as I do so I know that isn't the reason...

On another note, the classroom is in a new section of the school and so is one of the few rooms that are air conditioned (no big deal this time of year of course) though the district has finally approved air conditioning for all the schools now starting next year. The classroom was also quite large and had a widescreen LCD TV. Nice. Of course the LCD TV is wasted on them as they have the DVD player/VCR connected only through ordinary video- someone give them some component cables, please!

The last abnormal thing for this class I was in was they have a special foreign-language program there- they were learning Japanese! This made for an easy morning for me since before Japanese they had music and gym. I even learned how to write

my name in Japanese (Katakana I believe it was called).
Pretty neat.

This town SMELLS

You think you know where I'm going with this, but it's actually not a complaint. A lot of places have their own smell. I've driven through towns in Georgia that smell like peaches. Gary, Indiana smells like what I can only describe as "burning rubber french fries" – a term I invented as a kid, and I haven't been able to think of a suitable replacement description that doesn't involve a 4-letter word. A place in Idaho I visited one time smelled like mint – there was a mint field nearby...

In the town where I live, we have a number of factories. You might think because of this, our noses would meet the same fate every morning as the poor residents of Gary Indiana, but fortunately for us, one of our largest factories manufactures **CANDY!** So, our town literally smells like candy almost every day. Chocolate some days, unidentified sweetness on the others... it is wonderful and really puts a spring in your step! Ahh, now there's a post that's short and sweet! ☐

Ohio VS. Illinois – weather

From time to time, I will be talking about what it's like to live in various places throughout the midwest because I have a lot of experience in that area. We've lived in central

Illinois, northern Illinois, and various suburbs of Chicago. We also lived in Lincoln, Nebraska and rural Ohio. Of all these, I love rural Ohio the best! But it is really interesting how different things like dialect and attitudes can vary from place to place, even places that are only hundreds of miles apart and in virtually the same climate. One thing I'm still getting used to in rural Ohio is their attitude about weather. I spent my childhood in Illinois, specifically the suburbs of Chicago, so I am used to the attitude of snow days being a rarity. I wonder what the average is there, but I would guess it's one per season or even less – they will not cancel school unless the schools are buried. There was one time when my mom's car was snowed in, she couldn't get it out of the driveway, and so she wanted to take the school bus with me to school – she worked at the same school I attended. So I did what any mature 12-year-old would do – I cried. Foolish, maybe yes, but I figured I had suffered enough with her working at my school – why should I have to face the humiliation and ridicule of her riding my bus? It had nothing to do with how cool I thought I was; it was more about how MEAN kids can be... I was so afraid of what the kids would say or do once they found out my mom was riding the bus! So anyway, lucky for me, she got her car out, and I was saved. But my point is, her car was stuck in the snow, yet they hadn't cancelled school. Here in Ohio things are MUCH different. We are on our 6th snow day already this season! And I've lost count of how many 2 hour delays we've had – which luckily (for them, not me) the kids don't have to make up. Coming from Chicagoland, I had never even heard of a 2 hour delay before we moved here – they don't exist there. But in Ohio – they are quite common, most of the time because of fog – FOG! We actually have fog days! School has been CANCELLED because of fog... it was really hard for me to get used to at first... you'd think we live in a swamp or something! Oh, wait, – that's just it... this area used to be the Great Black Swamp before it was turned into farmland a few hundred years ago. So I guess that explains it... but I would

be willing to bet that if Illinois had a fog problem, they still wouldn't cancel school. I don't know anything about Nebraska's attitudes about weather and school since we didn't have a school-aged child while we lived there. I don't really have an opinion about who is right or who is wrong – it's not that Ohio devalues education or anything like that... they are just over-sensitive about childrens' safety when it comes to weather (is there such a thing?), and the school days and curriculum are made up in the end so they're not behind. I'm just enjoying my role as an amused spectator observing the differences in weather attitude between different regions.

The Amazing Spider-Man

Returning to the genre of superhero franchise movies, one of the most successful series of movies in the last decade has been the three Spider-Man films. I believe that what has made these films so special is that they each retain the same core cast: Tobey Maguire (Peter Parker/Spider-Man), Kirsten Dunst (Mary Jane Watson), and James Franco (Harry Osborne). Plus, Sam Raimi has been the director of each of the movies. So many times a franchise fails because it goes through multiple directors. The four main people involved in these films have each stated that if any of the others were to leave then they would also. I do not think a good Spider-Man movie could be made if any of them were to step aside.

Each of the films develops the three characters in new ways, primarily the main character. The original film shows how Peter becomes the webslinger and begins to accept the sage advice of his Uncle Ben: "With great power comes great responsibility." *Spider-Man 2* finds the hero attempting to find a balance between his life behind the mask and that of

Peter Parker. *Spider-Man 3* takes Peter on a journey of his dark side and forces him to see how far his power can take him.

So many times action/adventure movies are just that: action, adventure but no character. With a director such as Sam Raimi who really cares about the characters he is putting on film, the three Spider-Man films thrived. Not only do audiences thrill to the escapades of “your friendly neighborhood superhero” but they also see into the life of Peter Parker and the characters around him.

Imagine

WOW... that is all I can say about the final singer on American Idol tonight (and I know that I am going off on another tangent here). When a 17 year old hopeful performs one of the most difficult songs from any era as if it were made for him then it deserves some acknowledgment. This is the first night I have actually had a chance to enjoy an episode with play practices going on and such. There were probably 3 of the top 10 guys whom I would even consider voting for (I do not vote). However when young David Archuleta came out and nailed John Lennon’s “Imagine,” I thought that he is sure to be one of the final contestants. Strangely, the performer chose to start on the final verse of the song. Randy Jackson even commented on the choice. Contestants are only allowed so much time to perform so David brilliantly chose to sing the verse that meant the most to him. The young man’s tone, range, and overall execution of the classic song just sent chills throughout my whole body. I find it totally flabbergasting how a 17 year old (who was not alive when John Lennon wrote and sang the classic) could even attempt such a remarkable,

challenging piece. I'm not sure that I would even try to master such a memorable selection.

*Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world*

2nd Grade

This will be a shorter post this time around I think. Today I worked in a second grade classroom. This is stretching my comfort zone a bit, but toward the end of the year they are becoming more like third-graders as they grow. Unlike yesterday I was the sole adult in this room, which is the norm for regular classrooms. The other second-grade teacher, a rare male primary teacher, was very helpful in making sure I knew what was going on and checking up on me when he could. As this was hardly my first time in a classroom I didn't need too much help, but he did make sure I knew about an assembly at the end of the day that for some reason didn't make it into the plans and gave me some tips about the class as well. Even though this was also a no-specials day (if you don't count the assembly) it was rather enjoyable. I had only a break a lunchtime, but was able to do an acceptable job with the plans. I didn't finish the reading plans, but typically a teacher writes more than can often be taught to make sure there is no time the students aren't engaged. The fact that

the plans were well-written and detailed was a bonus. Not to pick on any gender, particularly mine, but I find that most often women leave more detailed plans than men. This is not always the case of course but it is typical. The only real downer for the day was that I had to stay longer than normal because again there were no breaks other than lunch, so I didn't have time throughout the day to leave all the notes I wanted so I had to spend time after school instead. Fortunately this school was in my home town so I still got home at a reasonable time.

Student Teachers

One of the easiest types of jobs a substitute can take is a job that has a student teacher. Typically, the student teacher does all the teaching while the sub just helps as needed. I have even encountered positions in the past where the teacher leaves a special instruction on the website that says "bring a book." □ I actually subbed for this teacher a couple of weeks earlier and so I knew what to expect. It was a classroom with mentally impaired children, ranging from a boy in a wheelchair who could really only cry out (he spends much of the day listening to music) to a couple of students who are mainstreamed into some specials but still have pretty severe language problems (reading and writing, and in some cases, talking). Also on hand were two assistants, so between us there were two students per adult. As expected I spent much of the day helping rather than teaching, but that is actually expected in this type of class even when there is no student teacher. In that case the assistants take over because they know where each student is at, which really varies dramatically, and what to expect from each student. Without the people in the room who know this a sub can never know if

the work the student is doing is really acceptable or if (s)he is just blowing off the work. For some reason I tend to get this sort of job often, whether mentally impaired or just learning disabled, in this district. It may just be that these teachers have more meetings due to the nature of their job, or it may be that the preferred subs have the opportunity at the regular jobs first, or that the regular classroom teachers tend to create a preferred list while the special education teachers don't.

Actually, I should really explain what I mean by "preferred." In this district there are two types of preferred subs. The first is on a list made by each teacher of who to call first if a substitute is needed (conversely, I believe they also have a do-not-call list for teachers they never want to see back in their classrooms again). The other type of preferred sub is the 120-day (can work 120 days per school year in the district), or certified substitute. These subs are actual certified teachers either looking for a full-time position but subbing in the meantime or are retired. The system looks for the individual preferred teacher first, and if none are available calls on the 120-day subs, and finally resorts to the 90-day subs. I am a 90-day sub. This means I am not certified as a teacher, but have simple substitute certification for which anyone with any bachelor's degree can apply. I do not fault them for this system at all. In fact, they are completely up front as to the way it works. Yet, I do get calls and see the jobs posted online. The only thing that rubbed me the wrong way was when they applied for a waiver so they could use 120-day subs for more than 120 days. Essentially, some subs are liked so much by the various schools and teachers that they are pretty much called every day. Of course, the one year I know of when they *didn't* have the waiver I don't know if they had trouble getting subs- perhaps they did. Therefore I will withhold judgment on this.

In any event, this is just one district. Other districts have

different rules of course.

Snow Day!

Yet another snow day is upon us... that makes #6 for us this year, and it's now officially time to start making them up in the summer. Which I guess is good news for me, because the kids now have at least 1 extra day to attend school in the summer, near the time when the baby is due and I wouldn't know how I'm going to handle all 3 of them alone anyway! But for today, we are stuck here, buried under about 6 inches of snow which is still falling. My gem of a husband had already shoveled twice – it's our "date night", and he says he wants nothing to stop the car from taking the kids to the babysitters later. But I feel badly for him cuz it just keeps snowing and burying our sidewalks yet again. And speaking of being buried, our garbage is no where to be seen – oops! Once a month where I live, we have big garbage day, when you can put all your garbage out for free, no special bags or stickers needed. So today was ours, and even though none of the neighbors had theirs out, we put ours out, like idiots... my idea. So now it's buried, and I don't know how they're going to pick it up. Don't think the neighbors would be too happy if we leave it there until next month!

So the kids are already fighting, and Dr. Phil isn't even over. I still have to make lunch, get my load of laundry in, finish this post, and make sure the kids pick up the mess they made all morning. If I get all that done and I can bundle the kids before it gets too cold and windy outside like they are forecasting, we might go sledding. I'm not a big fan of the snow days; it throws our whole schedule off, but at least they'll be going one more day in the summer – disappointing

for them = freedom for me!

Tis the season to be Mary

Ok... it is not Christmas time. However, as we are under a dreaded Winter Storm Warning I felt like talking about one of my favorite Yuletide movies. As I was playing Scene It with my niece earlier this evening, this question was raised: "In the National Lampoon Vacation movies, what was the nickname of Clark Griswold's son?" Of course anyone who has seen the misadventures of the Chicago suburban family knows the answer: Rusty.

Christmas Vacation is my favorite of the four films (yes, there were four... let us not forget the travesty that was *Vegas Vacation*). It shows the hapless Griswold clan as they do their best to entertain their whole extended family (both sides mind you). Everything from chopping down the family Christmas tree to the reading of "A Visit from St. Nick" on Christmas Eve. My favorite scene from this classic has to be Clark hanging from the eavestrough attempting to staple lights onto the roof. I can imagine my father doing the same thing... even attaching his coat sleeve to the roof and sliding down with the collapsing ladder.

One nitpicky bit though. Speaking of Rusty (as well as Audrey, the daughter), they seemed to age differently in each movie. The young man seemed to decrease in age between *European Vacation* and *Christmas Vacation*. Rusty was played by Jason Lively (?) in Europe and by Johnny Galecki (before he was cast as Darlene's boyfriend on "Roseanne") at Christmas. I often wondered why the change in age. It's not as if Chevy Chase, Beverly D'Angelo, and Randy Quaid could decrease in age. Just

a minor quibble to an otherwise hilarious holiday tradition.

Oscar Party

We had an Oscar party last night. It was a lot of fun! We asked the guests to bring a \$5 item from home they would have put in a garage sale. Everyone filled out a ballot, and whoever got the most correct guesses (my husband out of sheer luck, can you believe it? He doesn't know anything about the Oscars! Congratulations Honey!) chose an item first, followed by the person with the next most correct guesses, and so on. So, we got a cool looking food chopper. Haven't tried it yet... I didn't do too badly on the guessing, I got to choose fourth... but I was disappointed because the item I really wanted (needed, actually) had been taken by then... but I am happy with the food chopper, I'll have to see how it works. What I really wanted were the set of metal padlocks, it sounds weird, I know... but we have this escaping parrot who needs all the doors on his cage padlocked – there are 3 – and he can bite thru plastic padlocks. The other day he got out of his cage and chewed the light switch plate off the wall... so I'm afraid we're going to come home one day to fried parrot. But, who would have guessed that the padlocks would be in such high demand. Not my husband, who did get to choose first but thought the padlocks would be left for me to choose, so instead he chose the food chopper for me – awww. But I really recommend doing award show parties, sports-watching parties, etc. this way, it's lots of fun, and it's really interesting to see what kind of stuff you end up with.

But enough about us and our party, let's move on to the real party... I didn't really see any of the red carpet this year – oh darn – cuz we were busy playing a game and then we watched

Barbara Walters interviews, which I don't usually watch. I did see Hillary Swank, who I mistook for Halle Berry – don't know what that was about, but she looked really different, barely recognizable. I thought the show was supposed to start at 8, but it started closer to 9, which could explain why our poor friends were stuck here until midnight on a work night! I thought Jon Stewart did pretty well as host. He was pretty funny, but my favorite Oscars host is Ellen – I really wish they'd have her back. I got 8 of the 24 votable categories correct. Not an outstanding score, but among our party of about 10, I think it was about average. The only award contenders I saw this year were *Gone Baby Gone* and *Juno*. See one of my previous posts for a review of *Gone Baby Gone* and you'll see why I wasn't broken up about it losing out on its Oscar chance. I was glad to see *Juno* win for one of the screenplay awards – it was a really well written movie, and I recommend it to anyone who is not a teen. If you have a teen, watch out, and do not let them see this movie, as it totally glorifies teen pregnancy, makes it seem easy, and will most likely have them saying, what's the big deal, I can handle it, no problem. Enough of my rambling, here are the Oscar winners in case you can't find them anywhere else for some weird reason:

Best Motion Picture: "No Country for Old Men."

Lead Actor: Daniel Day-Lewis, "There Will Be Blood."

Lead Actress: Marion Cotillard, "La Vie en Rose."

Supporting Actor: Javier Bardem, "No Country for Old Men."

Supporting Actress: Tilda Swinton, "Michael Clayton."

Director: Joel Coen and Ethan Coen, "No Country for Old Men."

Foreign Language Film: "The Counterfeiters," Austria.

Adapted Screenplay: Joel Coen and Ethan Coen, "No Country for

Old Men.”

Original Screenplay: Diablo Cody, “Juno.”

Animated Feature Film: “Ratatouille.”

Art Direction: “Sweeney Todd the Demon Barber of Fleet Street.”

Cinematography: “There Will Be Blood.”

Sound Mixing: “The Bourne Ultimatum.”

Sound Editing: “The Bourne Ultimatum.”

Original Score: “Atonement,” Dario Marianelli.

Original Song: “Falling Slowly” from “Once,” Glen Hansard and Marketa Irglova.

Costume: “Elizabeth: The Golden Age.”

Documentary Feature: “Taxi to the Dark Side.”

Documentary Short Subject: “Freeheld.”

Film Editing: “The Bourne Ultimatum.”

Makeup: “La Vie en Rose.”

Animated Short Film: “Peter & the Wolf.”

Live Action Short Film: “Le Mozart des Pickpockets (‘The Mozart of Pickpockets’).”

Visual Effects: “The Golden Compass.”