Good Movie, Bad Title

I stopped my blog posting of reviews for every movie I've been watching — you'll know why when you read a post I'm writing for next week called Farm Frenzy. But I saw a movie last night that is totally worth mentioning — "The Uninvited".

The movie has a really bad title, I'll admit that. But what a good suspense thriller it turned out to be! The best one I've seen in a long time; maybe one of the best thrillers I've ever The movie is scary at times, creepy at others, and constantly fast-paced and riveting. The movie was not at all what I expected when I came in, and I left the theater very pleasantly surprised. The plot centers around a teenager named Anna who is just getting out of the psych ward after a 10 month stint as a result of a suicide attempt. earlier, her mother was terminally ill and bedridden, her father was having an affair with her nurse, and there was a terrible fire that took the life of her mother. When Anna gets out of the hospital, her father's girlfriend (her mother's nurse) has moved into her house, and it doesn't take long for Anna to begin to suspect the new woman in her family's life is up to no good.

I can't begin to explain the mind-bending plot — there's much more to it than I've explained, but I really don't want to go into too much detail. The point is, I highly recommend this movie. Especially if you like suspense thriller movies, this one is a must-see. Seriously, with respect to its genre, it's a near-perfect movie. My only problem with it is its weak and undescriptive title — good movie, bad title, but a must-see, nonetheless!

I Know Who To Blame For This Economy

WAL-MART! I can find many ways to blame Wal-Mart for the way the economy is tanking. Time for my latest beef about the We went over there Friday morning because my husband didn't have to work until after lunch, and we need an oil change. So we thought we'd get the oil change done together this time, which made me really happy because normally it's just me and my two children (ages 2 and 7 mos.) who have to kill around 2 hours there every 3 months (or sometimes even If you're thinking that spending 2 hours at more frequently). Wal-Mart with 2 little kids while trying not to spend a lot of money is both exhausting and frustrating, you aren't very far off the mark. So anyway, Friday I thought I had company for the oil change, but even so, who wants to spend hours at Wal-When we pulled up, I was pleasantly surprised to see that there weren't any cars waiting, so I thought we might actually be out of there in under an hour — WRONG! time they quoted us was an hour and a half! But we needed the oil change and were kind of trying to kill time until the area restaurants would start serving lunch, so we decided to go for it, especially since they've opened an H & R Block in the Wal-Mart for tax season. Taxes and an oil change — kill two birds with one stone, or so we thought... We get to the other side of the store where the makeshift H & R Block is, and we find out it's not open until 1pm. So we went back to the Automotive Department to sign in our car anyway, and that's when we discover that an oil change at Wal-Mart is now \$30! That is a \$7.50 increase in price over the last 3 months! So no taxes to get done + expensive oil change + long wait = forget it! And I will add the fact that Wal-Mart sucks at oil changes. Almost every time I'd come home with the car, it would act funny or something else would be wrong with it. Once they forgot to put the air filter back in, several times they

didn't replace the wiper fluid when it was checked off on the to-do list, and a few times I had to go back and have them revacuum the interior of the car because they said they did it but clearly had not. Those were the days when oil changes were still so reasonable in price that we got the full monty of services, including the vacuuming and the refilling of fluids — not anymore!

We called other places around town, and we found that Wal-Mart is now the most expensive AND takes the longest. But at the other places you needed an appointment, so we'll have to wait until next week — no problem if I don't have to go back to Wal-Mart! Plus I'd rather support the little guy anyway (ever hear the country music song "Little Man" by Alan Jackson? It's a good one and I highly recommend listening to it if you're frustrated about Wal-Mart's world take-over). And that brings me to why I'm blaming Wal-Mart for the awful economy...

They're putting all the little guys out of business, so there go the jobs and the competition in the retail world that was keeping product and services prices reasonable. Wal-Mart sets the pricing trends, unfortunately. Mark my words, as soon as the little guys in town get wind that Wal-Mart upped their oil change prices, they will follow suit and you won't be able to touch an oil change for under \$30. And worse yet, I read in the newspaper just yesterday that Wal-Mart is the only retail place that posted profits for January. In fact, they're doing even better than Wall Street predicted for them, which in this economy, makes them stand alone in that respect.

The state of our economy is so bad right now that I suppose it's not logical to blame just one entity. But moaning about Walmart is a good venting tool, and they p*ss me off!

Random Kid Stuff

The other day, my husband reminded me of a cute story about something our oldest daughter did when she was younger, probably around 4 years old. He said I should write it down somewhere so we don't forget about it, so I decided to write something about all four of our wonderful kids, starting with the oldest and going down. Here's a visual:



TAYLOR — About 5 years ago, we began finding the letters "WCPL" all over the house. The letters were always written together like a word, and they were everywhere — walls, books, VHS movies, chairs, everywhere. We couldn't figure out what word our then-4-year-old was trying to spell, so we had a talk about not writing where we're not supposed to, cleaned it all up, and moved on. A few weeks later, I took my daughter to the library to check out some books and movies, and that's

when I saw the labels on the VHS cases — WCPL = Williams County Public Library! She had noticed that all of her books and movies that came from the library had those letters on them, so I guess she figured things were supposed to be labeled WCPL — hehehe!

SAMANTHA — Sammie is a very unique child. She can be a real spitfire, but she just has this incredible spirit about her... But she'll ask me questions that I have no idea how to answer. When her older sister was her age, she would ask the normal kid questions about life and how things work, and even if she didn't phrase her questions correctly, it was always easy for me to figure out what she wanted to know and where she was coming from. Not true with Samantha! Since half the time I don't know what she's asking about, I can't think of any of her confusing questions to share here on the blog, but I will say that she is the type of kid who asks the embarrassing questions in public — and loudly. We went to a nursing home to sing Christmas carols during the holidays, and there was a gentleman in a wheelchair who suffered from a muscle illness that made his tongue swell. He loved the caroling and really got into it, singing quite loudly. got Sammie's attention. She asked me, "Does your tongue hang out because you get so old?" She just has such a different way of looking at things... This is the same kid who asked me one time (really loudly of course) why someone was wearing purple underwear in the bathroom stall next to us!

DISNEY — It's funny because Disney and Sammie look very much alike, almost like twins years apart. But their personalities are night and day. The other day, Disney, our 2-year-old, looked up at the sky and said, "Airplane! See it, on ceiling?" Awwww....

CHRISTOPHER — I remembered something I forgot to mention about my son's 6-month doctor visit. The nurse said he should be eating 3 meals a day — something that seems obvious, but I'm actually really glad she mentioned it! When you have a baby

and you're used to popping bottles in his mouth all the time, you forget that when he's old enough to be eating solid foods that he needs meals just like big people! My son loves all kinds of food; he tries to grab as much as he can, and he shoves it into his mouth with his little fists. As he gets older, I'm starting to notice the difference between girls and boys, especially when it comes to their eating habits. Boys are messier and more enthusiastic eaters, while girls tend to be dainty and more picky. But again, maybe these are just differences in my kids, rather than a difference based on gender, who knows. And from what I remember, all the kids started out not being picky about their food — they were just so happy to be experiencing flavors after an entire life of only formula!

I have been blessed with 4 kids, and they have 4 very individualistic personalities. It's really neat to watch how they interact with each other. Well, except when the interacting involves fighting!

My Lobotomy

I just finished reading an engrossing memoir entitled *My Lobotomy*. It took me a really long time to read it because I had to put it on hold since another book I had requested from the library came in. I was number 223 on the waiting list for the other book, so when it came in, I had no choice but to put down *My Lobotomy* for about a month. I was reluctant to put it down though, because Howard Dully's life story is fascinating. The book details a kids' life growing up in the 1950's and 1960's under the thumb of his 'evil' stepmother. As cliche as it sounds, there really is no better way to describe Howard's stepmom, but 'evil' is my adjective for her,

not his. I find it very surprising and admirable of Howard that his memoir never takes a direction of self-pity, blame, nor hatred toward any of the people who were responsible for the trauma he endured as a child and young man. Rather, the narrative is written very matter-of-factly, and it follows Howard on his fascinating, though tortuous journey through the United States mental health system in the 1960's.

Howard Dully was forced to undergo a lobotomy at the tender age of 12. Basically, his stepmother resented him because he was a reminder to her of his real mother, his father's widow. So stepmother Lou was determined to get rid of Howard any way she could. When the lobotomy didn't turn him into a vegetable, she shipped him off to loony bins, insane asylums, or mental institutions, whichever term would best describe these places in the 1960's. This is a picture of an anesthetized 12-year-old Howard getting an ice pick lobotomy:



Lou convinced Howard's father and a doctor named Freeman that Howard was mentally ill. Well actually, Dr. Freeman did not need much convincing. He was the 'father of the lobotomy' and was eagerly looking for patients upon whom he could practice his 'procedure'. The procedure consisted of sticking an ice pick into one's eye sockets and swirling it around — seriously. And poor Howard was forced to endure this 'operation' as a kid at the age of 12. His memoir details every aspect of his life; it's riveting, heartbreaking, and finally triumphant because Howard is now a full grown man who seems like a genuinely nice guy, especially given everything he's been through and had to come to grips with in his life.

The book starts at his birth and chronicles his early life

with his doting biological mother; taking the reader through all his trials and tribulations with stepmother Lou, the lobotomy, his struggles with addiction as a young adult, and finally on his search through his medical records and the touching interviews he conducted with his own father about his role in the events that shaped Howard's life. The book also includes the many notes taken by Dr. Freeman after his meetings with Howard and his family, which offer a very interesting and unique perspective...

After I finished this book, I was curious about many of the things I had read about, so I conducted a little research of my own, and I found recordings Howard made about his story for the National Public Radio, as well as some more information about Dr. Freeman and his ice-pick lobotomies... Fascinating stuff, and I encourage you to check out Howard's story — the book is My Lobotomy by Howard Dully. Like I said, it's truly amazing to me that after all he's been through, Howard just seems to want to know why it happened, rather than who to blame for it... an extremely commendable type of attitude which is growing increasingly rare in this day and age and was very refreshing to read about. Thanks, Howard, for such a compelling read!

Birthday Miracle

A few months ago, I learned I had a second cousin in Florida who was killed in a horrific car crash. She was on her way to a fun outing with her daughter when out of nowhere, a drunk driver (mid-afternoon on a weekday — not that there's ever any appropriate time to drink and drive, but still) who was going the wrong way on the expressway hit her car head-on, killing her and gravely injuring her young daughter. The little girl

persevered, came out of her coma and re-learned to walk and talk. She was recently in the news again because she just turned 5 years old and sadly, she still thinks her mother is coming back. Her courage and strength is inspiring, so I'd like to share this clip of her on the Florida news. Please keep Summer in your thoughts and prayers. Click here to see the news story about Summer's 5th birthday. And please, please, if you're going to drink, always have another mode of transportation set up ahead of time!

Super(fun)Bowl

I am much more of a baseball fan than a football fan (see my countdown timer to the first game of Cubs spring training to the right). But I will admit that I love watching football; mainly because my husband loves it, and I love to see him enjoy things that make him happy. Oh, that and the fact that whenever he watches football, it's become sort of a tradition with us that he gives me excellent backrubs! So while I couldn't care less who won yesterday's Superbowl,(although I chose the Cardinals to root for because it's always fun to pick a team and scream and shout and get into the game) I did have a great time watching it.

We had decided to have a get-together; a fun evening filled with friends and food (too much food! We had to have pizza for dinner again Monday and will have it twice more this week just to get rid of all the extras!). Because I have 4 kids, I didn't get to see all of my favorite part of the Superbowl — the commercials. But that's ok, I'm sure I can catch them online somewhere if I'm so inclined. The ones I did see were pretty good — I especially liked the Potato Head one (think it was for tires). It just cracks me up when Mrs. Potato Head

changes into her 'angry' eyes, hehehe! I also really liked the careerbuilder.com commercial with the moose head on the wall — I won't spoil the rest of it because I recommend you go out and find it yourself if you haven't seen it. I missed the newest E-Trade.com commercials with the talking baby, so those I will have to find because I always enjoy those. Oh, and I'll have to see the latest chapter in the saga of the Budweiser Clydesdales…

As for halftime, I'm not a fan of "The Boss", so I wasn't paying attention to Bruce Springsteen's performance. glad to note, however, that he didn't incur a wardrobe malfunction ala Justin Timberlake and Janet Jackson circa Superbowl XXXVII in 2004. Also during halftime, there was a special 3D event. We had picked up enough pairs of 3D glasses for the party at a store ahead of time (we actually got enough to last us until Superbowl L!), but in my opinion, they should have given a few minutes warning for people to get their glasses ready. We had ours ready because they did mention it in the 2nd quarter, but I didn't get a chance to get my regular eyeglasses to wear underneath, which guaranteed an absence of 3D for me. But other people seemed pretty impressed... I have seen the preview for Monsters Vs. Aliens in the movie theater and it looks really funny — I'm looking forward to that movie coming out.

Well, anyway, much fun was had by all. We had originally intended to make this a game night / Superbowl party, but by the time the big game ended, there wasn't any time for board games. Next time! And oh yeah, I should report that the Pittsburgh Steelers won the Superbowl, in case you're using my site for a news report [

Am I The Only One Who Didn't Know This?

I received an interesting email forward from my mom last week, and I'm sharing it on my blog because it's a helpful household tip that most people I asked didn't know about. I had actually heard this Heloise-worthy hint before, but I had forgotten about it. Here is a copy of the email forward:

I had to go into the kitchen and check this out for myself. Who looks at the end of an aluminum foil box? You know, when you try to pull some foil out and the whole roll comes out of the box. Then you have to put the roll back in the box and start over. The darn roll always comes out at the wrong time.

Well, I would like to share this with you. Yesterday I went to throw out an empty Reynolds Wrap foil box and for some reason I turned it and looked at the end of the box. And written on the end it said, "Press here to lock end."

Right there on the end of the box is a tab to lock the roll in place. How long has this little locking tab been there? I then looked at a generic brand of aluminum foil and it had one too. I then looked at a box of Saran wrap and it had one too! I can't count the number of times the Saran wrap roll has jumped out when I was trying to cover something up.

[poll id="8"]

Sick Of Being Sick

The past week and a half in our house has been awful. It all

came to a head last Friday when our two-year-old got sick in the car. Last weekend, when she wasn't sleeping, she was throwing up or in the words of Chandler, played by Matthew Perry on the tv show Friends, "visiting a town a little south of throwing up...". Later in the weekend, her baby brother was afflicted with the same illness, and now we had huge messes Big sister Sammie got it later in the week, but luckily, the little ones started feeling better. Add in a snow day and a couple of weather delays, and our house was chaos for what seemed like forever. On top of everything, I had some sort of extreme fatigue. I was so worried about it that I even made a doctor's appointment and went in, where the doctor ran some blood tests and even gave me a neck xray since I had a strange achiness accompanying the fatigue. I guess it didn't occur to me that I could have the same virus that struck down the kids, mainly because I didn't have the same (disgusting) symptoms they had, but I did look up some stuff on the internet in an attempt to scare diagnose myself. The good news is, my xrays and blood tests came back normal (well, I'm actually still waiting on one of the tests, but it's Friday and the nurses are out to lunch and won't be back until Monday afternoon what is that? Can I have a job like that?), but the tests that did come back show that there is nothing wrong with my thyroid or my iron levels, both of which I thought were possibilities. So that's good... I guess. If there was something wrong with my body chemically, we'd be able to fix it, and then I'd have the energy I need to keep up with my 4 Now that most things came back normal, I don't little kids. know where to start to feel better... Although I do feel much better today, but still no where near normal, and that makes me think it might be the illness my kids had after all. it was a bizarrely lengthy version of the stomach flu, and it will take us weeks (at least!) to catch up on all the work that didn't get done in the week and a half of illness, sigh.

My husband had to take off from some of his work so he could watch the kids while I rested, and especially with all the

laundry we've had to do around here, Mt. Washmore is once again threatening to take over the second floor of our house. All this catching up, and I'm still exhausted... My husband seems to think I have sleep apnea, mostly because I snore often and loudly and I'm always needing more sleep. I forgot to bring this up to the doctor, but if I ever get ahold of her and that last test comes back normal, maybe we can go from there... I do seem to need an awful lot of sleep to function. Well, anyway, that's my story — sorry if I grossed anyone out (especially body-function-joke-hater Derek), but I thought people should know where I've been for the last two weeks. At least the kids are feeling better — it was beyond sad to see them crabby, lethargic and not able to keep anything down... Is it time for summer yet?!?

It's The End Of The World As We Know It... And I Feel Fine

Every few years, it seems that people are worried about an Armageddon date. They chose some sort of date based on something and promptly report it to the media as the date the world will end. Nine years ago now, it was Y2K — do you remember how many people built shelters, stockpiled canned food and emergency supplies? I was due to have my first child as the 'millennium baby', and I was worried something catastrophic would happen; at the very least, the lights would go out in the hospital or something. My daughter arrived a few weeks early though, on December 21, 1999, so we were at home safe and sound to ring in the new year — and surprise, surprise, nothing happened. So it's not a shocker that people have pinpointed a new date for the Apocalypse; this time it's based upon an ancient Mayan calendar — well, some scholars'

interpretation of it anyway. What will you be doing in 2012? According to some people, you should live 2011 to its fullest, because that's all we're going to get! The following article is from cnn.com and was written by A. Pawlowski.

Just as "Y2K" and its batch of predictions about the year 2000 have become a distant memory, here comes "Twenty-twelve."

The sun shines through the door of the Seven Dolls Temple, in the Maya ruins of Dzibilchaltun in Mexico.

The sun shines through the door of the Seven Dolls Temple, in the Maya ruins of Dzibilchaltun in Mexico.

Fueled by a crop of books, Web sites with countdown clocks, and claims about ancient timekeepers, interest is growing in what some see as the dawn of a new era, and others as an expiration date for Earth: December 21, 2012.

The date marks the end of a 5,126-year cycle on the Long Count calendar developed by the Maya, the ancient civilization known for its advanced understanding of astronomy and for the great cities it left behind in Mexico and Central America.

(Some scholars believe the cycle ends a bit later — on December 23, 2012.)

Speculation in some circles about whether the Maya chose this particular time because they thought something ominous would happen has sparked a number of doomsday theories.

The hype also has mainstream Maya scholars shaking their heads.

"There's going to be a whole generation of people who, when they think of the Maya, think of 2012, and to me that's just criminal," said David Stuart, director of the Mesoamerica Center at the University of Texas at Austin.

"There is no serious scholar who puts any stock in the idea that the Maya said anything meaningful about 2012."

But take the fact that December 21, 2012, coincides with the winter solstice, add claims the Maya picked the time period because it also marks an alignment of the sun with the center of the Milky Way galaxy, and you have the makings of an online sensation.

Long Count 101

- The Long Count calendar was one of several created by the ancient Maya.
- It consists of the following units of time:

kin = one day
uinal = 20 days
tun = 360 days (18 uinal)
katun = 7,200 days (20 tun)
baktun = 144,000 days (20 katun)

- The calendar shows the number of days elapsed since the beginning date: August 13, 3114 B.C. (some scholars think the date is actually August 11, 3114 B.C.)
- The dates are written as numbers separated by periods in the following order:

(baktun).(katun).(tun).(uinal).(kin)

- July 20, 1969 the date of the first moon landing would be written as: 12.17.15.17.0
- December 21, 2012, would be written as 13.0.0.0.0 and the day after that as 0.0.0.0.1

Source: Howstuffworks.com

Type "2012" into an Internet search engine and you'll find survival guides, survival schools, predictions and "official stuff" to wear, including T-shirts with slogans such as "2012 The End" and "Doomsday 2012."

Theories about what might happen range from solar storms triggering volcano eruptions to a polar reversal that will make the Earth spin in the opposite direction.

If you think all of this would make a great sci-fi disaster movie, Hollywood is already one step ahead.

"2012," a special-effects flick starring John Cusack and directed by Roland Emmerich, of "The Day After Tomorrow" fame, is scheduled to be released this fall. The trailer shows a monk running to a bell tower on a mountaintop to sound the alarm as a huge wall of water washes over what appear to be the peaks of the Himalayas.

'Promoting a hoax'

One barometer of the interest in 2012 may be the "Ask an Astrobiologist" section of NASA's Web site, where senior scientist David Morrison answers questions from the public. On a recent visit, more than half of the inquiries on the most popular list were related to 2012.

"The purveyors of doom are promoting a hoax," Morrison wrote earlier this month in response to a question from a person who expressed fear about the date.

A scholar who has studied the Maya for 35 years said there is nothing ominous about 2012, despite the hype surrounding claims to the contrary.

"I think that the popular books... about what the Maya say is going to happen are really fabricated on the basis of very little evidence," said Anthony Aveni, a professor of astronomy, anthropology and Native American studies at Colgate University.

Aveni and Stuart are both writing their own books explaining the Mayan calendar and 2012, but Stuart said he's pessimistic that people will be interested in the real story when so many other books are making sensational claims.

Dozens of titles about 2012 have been published and more are scheduled to go on sale in the coming months. Current offerings include "Apocalypse 2012," in which author Lawrence Joseph outlines "terrible possibilities," such as the potential for natural disaster.

But Joseph admits he doesn't think the world is going to end.

"I do, however, believe that 2012 will prove to be... a very dramatic and probably transformative year," Joseph said.

The author acknowledged he's worried his book's title might scare people, but said he wanted to alert the public about possible dangers ahead.

He added that his publisher controls the book's title, though he had no issue with the final choice.

"If it had been called 'Serious Threats 2012' or 'Profound Considerations for 2012,' it would have never gotten published," Joseph said.

Growing interest

Another author said the doom and gloom approach is a great misunderstanding of 2012.

"The trendy doomsday people... should be treated for what they are: under-informed opportunists and alarmists who will move onto other things in 2013," said John Major Jenkins, whose books include "Galactic Alignment" and who describes himself as a self-taught independent Maya scholar.

Jenkins said that cycle endings were all about transformation and renewal — not catastrophe — for the Maya. He also makes the case that the period they chose coincides with an alignment of the December solstice sun with the center of the Milky Way, as viewed from Earth.

"Two thousand years ago the Maya believed that the world would be going through a great transformation when this alignment happened," Jenkins said.

But Aveni said there is no evidence that the Maya cared about this concept of the Milky Way, adding that the galactic center was not defined until the 1950s.

"What you have here is a modern age influence [and] modern concepts trying to garb the ancient Maya in modern clothing, and it just doesn't wash for me," Aveni said.

Meanwhile, he and other scholars are bracing for growing interest as the date approaches.

"The whole year leading up to it is going to be just crazy, I'm sorry to say," Stuart said.

"I just think it's sad, it really just frustrates me. People are really misunderstanding this really cool culture by focusing on this 2012 thing. It means more about us than it does about the Maya."

He Said WHAT?

The continuing saga of Illinois' embattled governor just keeps getting more and more interesting. As his impeachment trial opened yesterday, Rod Blagojevich took to the tv airwaves to defend (?) himself. I saw clips of a few of his tv appearances, and that's why I included the little question mark above. It didn't seem to me that he was doing a good job of defending himself. In fact, the ladies on The View noticed the same thing, with them noting, "Seems like you're doing yourself more harm than good." The View ladies then

hilariously chided the governor, asking him to say "I'm not a crook" — Richard Nixon-style. Blago refused.

And of course by now you've heard about the Oprah for Senator announcement he made on Good Morning America — Blago has admitted that he actually considered Oprah Winfrey to fill Obama's old Senate seat. I'm not even going to go there — there were too many other gems that came out of Blago's mouth yesterday. Among them:

On his Larry King Live appearance, Blagojevich launched into a bizarre analogy involving cowboys and steer to describe his situation... I'm not going to go into detail; it was quite lengthy, but it's worth looking up on youtube or somewhere if you're so inclined. WHAT was he TALKING about?!?

Back to Oprah for a minute. According to Blagojevich, Oprah has more influence than all 100 United States senators combined. She does have lots of dough; as well as an uncanny ability to get women to diet and save money. But she doesn't have the power to declare war or pass legislation that changes lives... so no, Blago, not even close on that one.

Also on Larry King Live, Blago was shown clips of Saturday Night Live where they make fun of him, namely his thick mane of hair. "He looks like one of those Fisher Price toy people with its hair on backwards!" Too funny! But Blago didn't think so. "What show was that?" he asked. But a few sentences later, he talked about how they can make fun of him during skits or whatever and that he didn't care. But if he had never heard of Saturday Night Live as he acted, how would he know it was a show comprised of skits? He was just trying to insult Saturday Night Live by acting as though he had never heard of it!

And throughout the governor's press junket yesterday, he kept repeating — "The fix is in" referring to the "fact" that the Illinois House is impeaching him because they're out to get

him — not because he did anything wrong. I agree with Blago on one aspect — his impeachment in inevitable. In the mean time, I have to admit how fun it is to watch this guy in action and marvel at the fact that he was ever elected to such a major public office. I think he might be certifiably nuts!