

Brain Fart = Abandoned Child

I'll start right off with the excuses. I have a lot going on right now. My October is booked solid. I've adopted the philosophy to just take one thing at a time because if I try to think about it all at once, I will end up breathing into a paper bag. Last week, my focus was on my daughter's 2nd birthday party – inviting guests, buying supplies, getting the house ready, etc. I decided to put this week on the back burner last week and not try to do things to plan for our trip to Florida we're taking at the end of this week.

So this morning, I got up and when I went to check my oldest daughter's backpack for school, she said Dad had already signed her papers that needed to be signed – which is why I missed the memo. All was well, I thought, until the school called our cell phone. It was RIF week at my other daughter's school (Reading is Fundamental), which means parents can come in and read books to the class. Normally we would just drop off our daughter and be on our way, but of course today we stayed at the school for awhile to read books, which is why my other daughter's school called our cell phone – thank goodness we had picked up the lost cell phone at the corn maze place Friday night – see one of my [previous posts](#) if you're curious about the adventures of the cell phone.

So anyway, they were calling to tell us that today was Columbus Day, there was no school, and could we please come pick up our daughter. Talk about embarrassing. I realize it happens; everyone forgets something now and then, but why did it have to involve one of the kids? And I'm out of good excuses – I'm not pregnant anymore or recovering from surgery or anything like that... just an average, run-of-the-mill brain fart. It's not a big deal; we retrieved my daughter, and both she and the people at the school were laughing about it (and probably will be for years to come). But this really stinks because this is really bad for the way my mind works. I'm

obsessed with detail and constantly worried about forgetting things; I'm always trying to relax about these things but when something like this happens, there's a little voice in my head that says, "See? Look what happens when you weren't so obsessive about details!". Oh, well... the good news is today my oldest is perfectly happy spending time with her little sister, and likewise. So without our trouble-making middle daughter around (she had school today – or did she?!? I was at the school with her, but now I better double check!), they should get along quite well giving me some much needed catch-up time for housework and vacation packing. So why am I sitting here blogging?!?

Here's a footnote – it's now later in the day, I was able to sort thru some of the accrued clutter in our house, and I found a newsletter from my daughter's school. Guess what? October 13 is not listed under important dates in the newsletter for having a day off! So there! Not completely my fault! I can transfer 2% of fault to the school!

Blindness

[Blindness](#) is an interesting movie starring [Julianne Moore](#). Think [Outbreak](#), except this time the disease that's afflicting people at a record rate isn't fatal, but it causes sudden blindness. The movie was alright; I liked the ending, but there are a few scenes that are extremely disturbing to watch. As always, I don't want to go into much detail to avoid spoiling it for people. Julianne Moore is a great actress, and her performance in this movie is not an exception to her reputation as such. She plays a woman who does not contract the disease, therefore she still has her sight but she pretends like she doesn't in order to be able to stay with

her afflicted husband. There were several large flaws with the movie (and the husband's character), but it was entertaining and thought-provoking; never a bore. Would I recommend it? Probably not to the average movie-watcher, but if you like disaster films, medical dramas, or if you just want to see what a large city would look like if it were abandoned by all that could see, leaving only thousands of blind people, then check it out. But I'm warning you, the view of the city isn't pretty, and at times, neither was the movie.

Parents Just Don't Understand?

Some of you may remember the '80's song called "Parents Just Don't Understand" performed by a musical act called DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince – the Fresh Prince is known nowadays as an actor named Will Smith. But anyway, the song was about teen angst and how parents just don't understand teens. What I'm talking about is something completely different – see the below story about the woman who threatened to post naked pictures of her daughter's ex-boyfriend (the kids are 13!) on the internet as blackmail in hopes of getting the pair back together. Talk about parents just don't understand! This lady doesn't understand values, morals, or appropriate social conduct just to name a few things. Not to mention the fact that things don't seem to be wired right upstairs, and that's an understatement. My children will not be dating at 13, and they will not have cell phones for any purpose outside of emergency or family use only at that age. I would never try to get my daughter "back together" with a boy, especially at 13, and if I were ever unfortunate enough to come across such

pictures, I, like most people I'm sure, would turn them over to authorities instead of conspiring to use a child's mistake against him and put him in danger. And perhaps the kicker? The woman is a teacher. Well, *was* a teacher... There is so much wrong with this story, I'll let you sort out the details:

Chicago Tribune – October 8, 2008

An Elgin woman is under investigation in connection with a strange—and possibly criminal—campaign to reconcile her 13-year-old daughter with a former boyfriend.

Authorities say she threatened to publish nude pictures of the boy on the Internet unless he contacted the girl.

The 42-year-old woman reportedly peppered the Sleepy Hollow boy, also 13, with phone calls, e-mails and thousands of text messages aimed at reuniting the young couple, according to a search warrant and affidavit filed late last month. The Tribune is not naming the woman because she has not been charged.

When those tactics failed, the woman threatened to publish photos online of the naked teen that he had sent to her daughter via cell phone, the records say.

"It's odd, to say the least," said Kane County State's Atty. John Barsanti, who said the woman is under investigation. "It's not a fact pattern we normally come up against."

The woman could face charges of child pornography, intimidation and harassment, the documents say. Police seized cameras, computers, cell phones and other items from her Elgin home and the private school where she works. The boy received 12,302 text messages from the woman between January and July, according to records. The boy's family contacted police in late August.

The girl's brother also took part, allegedly threatening to go to the boy's parents with the pictures unless the boy saw the

girl twice a week, according to records.

On Sept. 23, the woman left a message warning the boy she would “send the pictures and video of him to his teacher and minister to show them he is not a nice person,” the search warrant stated.

Oh, and this mother’s job at the school? She’s a teacher.

Teenagers Driving You Crazy?

Then drive to Nebraska and drop them off. For good. Seems Nebraska has a “safe haven” law like a lot of states, however, they are the only ones to have neglected placing an age limit on the kids who are left at the safe havens. These laws are designed to protect the safety of unwanted infants, encouraging mothers to drop them at hospitals instead of getting scared and doing something horrible and regrettable to the babies. Most states set their age cap at 72 hours, but since Nebraska failed to set a cap, they are seeing an influx of people dropping off their troublesome teens, including people who don’t even live in Nebraska! Read about it below:

(CNN) – Frustrated parents are dumping their teenagers at Nebraska hospitals – even crossing state lines to do it – and the state Legislature has scheduled a special hearing to try to stem the tide.

A 14-year-old Iowa girl was left Tuesday at Creighton University Medical Center in Omaha, Nebraska.

Nebraska’s “safe haven” law, intended to allow parents to anonymously hand over an infant to a hospital without being prosecuted, isn’t working out as planned.

Of the 17 children relinquished since the law took effect in July, only four are younger than 10 – and all four are among the nine siblings abandoned by a man September 24 at an Omaha hospital.

On Tuesday, a 14-year-old girl from Council Bluffs, Iowa, was abandoned at Creighton University Medical Center in Omaha, Nebraska, just across the Missouri River from Council Bluffs. The case marks the first time a parent has crossed state lines to abandon a teenager in Nebraska, authorities said.

“The few situations we’ve seen so far demonstrate the need for a change in Nebraska’s safe haven law,” Gov. Dave Heineman said in a statement Monday. “In the coming legislative session, I will advocate for changes that put the focus back on protecting an infant in danger. That should be our priority.”

All 50 states have safe haven laws, but only Nebraska’s lacks an age limit. Nebraska’s part-time Legislature is adjourned until January, but two state legislative committees will hold a joint hearing November 13 to discuss a remedy.

“They’ve got a huge problem,” said Linda Spears, vice president for policy and public affairs for the Child Welfare League of America. “It’s a pretty poorly constructed law to meet its original intent.”

When it was introduced in the Legislature, the bill had a presumed age limitation of 72 hours, said Todd Landry, director of the state’s Division of Children and Family Services.

“The original intent was to protect infants from the immediate danger of being harmed,” he said.

However, the law’s final language uses the word “child” and does not specify an age limit, leaving it open to interpretation. Other states’ laws specify the maximum age at

which a child may be relinquished, ranging from 72 hours in several states to 1 year in North Dakota, according to the National Center for State Courts.

"Clearly in these cases so far that we've seen, none of these children were in any immediate danger of being harmed," Landry said. "It is our opinion that the law does need to be modified."

The law is being abused, Heineman's statement said.

"Safe haven laws were not designed to allow families having difficulty with older youth and teenagers to abandon their children or responsibilities as parents," he said.

The parents may not always be to blame, the Child Welfare League's Spears said.

"The original safe haven laws were created for young moms who are having babies who didn't know how to get help. I think these are families with older kids who don't know how to get help and who are in desperate need," she said.

Most state laws fail to provide for research into who is abandoning babies and why, league spokeswoman Joyce Johnson said.

"Those are the kinds of things we've been wondering about and saying we need to know more about, and you'll never know if you just have a law that says you can anonymously leave a child somewhere, no questions asked," Johnson said.

New Jersey, she said, is an exception. That state's safe haven law provides funding for research and evaluation as well as \$500,000 a year for public awareness, according to a September 2007 report by a New Jersey safe haven task force.

A woman who dropped her 15-year-old nephew at a Lincoln, Nebraska, hospital told CNN affiliate KETV last month that she and the boy's guardian could no longer handle his behavior

problems. Watch woman explain why she left 15-year-old at hospital »

The woman, Cathy Poulin, said she tried discipline and medication, but nothing worked. The boy's mother died several years ago, and his father left him, she said.

"We had to go to the next level," Poulin said. "He can be made to get help."

The Omaha man who left his nine children, ages 1 to 17, at Creighton University Medical Center was overwhelmed by the sudden death of his wife after the youngest child was born, he told KETV.

"I was with her for 17 years, and then she was gone. What was I going to do?" Gary Staton said. "We raised them together. I didn't think I could do it alone. I fell apart. I couldn't take care of them."

Staton is just the kind of parent whom safe haven laws fail to help, Johnson said.

"He was grieving, he didn't have a lot of money, and all those children – he was trying to figure out how to feed them, how to clothe them, and deal with the grief of losing his wife. He needed help," she said.

Heineman and Landry urged Nebraska parents who are having trouble coping to call the United Way's 211 resource line or Boys Town, a nationally known nonprofit child services organization based in Nebraska.

Other options include community and faith-based support groups, crisis hot lines, treatment centers and other services, Landry added.

By Jim Kavanagh

The Office – Season Premiere!

WARNING – SPOILERS AHEAD! THIS POST DETAILS THE HAPPENINGS DURING THE OFFICE PREMIERE – YOU’VE BEEN WARNED!

I can’t believe I didn’t get around to writing about the Office season premiere until now! For goodness sakes, it aired almost two weeks ago! It all began when our kids were acting up so much that we didn’t catch the premiere episode when it aired on tv the Thursday night before last Thursday night. Still with me? Doesn’t really matter... just skip to the part of the post you like. Thinking we had set our computer to tape The Office premiere or that we could find it online, we didn’t fret too much until it was time for bed and we still hadn’t found it. Finally got ahold of it late Friday night after some corn maze fun, stayed up way too late to watch it, followed by a busy weekend, a chaotic week, and another bustling weekend before I got a chance to write about it! So anyway, here is my take on The Office’s premiere episode. I always like what tvguide.com has to say in their tv show blogs, so I copied and pasted their tv show blog synopsis of the premiere and that’s in italics. I will interject my own comments throughout the article, and those are in **BOLD CAPS**. A brief break for the Vice Presidential debate last Thursday, and then some more funny new Office episodes begin this Thursday!!!

Last season ended with cliff-hangers galore: Andy proposed to

Angela, Jim was thwarted from proposing to Pam, Michael committed to playing babydaddy to Jan's mystery spawn, and – this really killed me because my DVR cut off early and I only found out about this the next day – the cameras, those ubiquitous Office cameras, caught Dwight and Angela boinking minutes after she accepted Andy's proposal. The writers developed great storylines last season, and this premiere episode did a great job picking up those threads and setting up some great arcs for this season. **(AGREED! AT THE RISK OF ALIENATING POTENTIAL VIEWERS, I WILL SAY THAT THIS SHOW IS A COMEDY WITH SOAPY CHARACTERISTICS GIVEN ITS CONTINUING STORYLINES AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT. BUT IF YOU'VE NEVER WATCHED THE OFFICE, DON'T LET THIS OBSERVATION DISCOURAGE YOU! MOST TV SIT-COMS HAVE CONTINUING STORYLINES – YOU JUST DON'T ALWAYS REALIZE IT!)**

*****SPOILER ALERT*****

Thursday's premiere was chock-full of big shockers: Jim's proposal to Pam at a rest stop, Ryan's return as a receptionist bent on revenge **(IT'S GREAT FUN TO SEE RYAN AT THE BOTTOM ONCE AGAIN – EVEN MORE FUN TO SEE HIM AT THE BOTTOM NOW AFTER HIS SMARMY ATTITUDE ALIENATING HIS CO-WORKERS)**, and Dwight and Angela's secret affair – consummated in an out-of-the way warehouse closet. Lots to talk about, so let's get started.

The episode begins with the announcement of a corporate weight-loss contest, a still-unengaged Pam leaving for Pratt Design in New York ("what up, 2-1-2?") and Angela beeping Dwight for some Office lovin', right after Andy serenades her with a personalized version of Rihanna's "Umbrella" ("Angela-ela-ela"). Honestly, I would page Dwight for a booty call if somebody did that to me, so I'm definitely not going to moralize.

Meanwhile, Michael is in the "friend zone" with Holly, and, according to Jim, "killing it" because "she's kind of a dork."

Cut to the “wicka-wicka-wicka” bebop (I think that’s what the kids call it), and you appreciate that there’s a special chemistry there. (I also loved the “Acting!” and Yoda impersonations in last season’s finale.) Clearly, Jan and the baby are going to complicate matters, but since Michael may have found in Holly the only woman with whom he could possibly have a healthy relationship, I’m rooting for them. The writers, though, seem hell-bent on making his journey with Jan and the baby as difficult as possible. I’m looking forward to the ride. (I SO WANT MICHAEL AND HOLLY TO END UP TOGETHER – THEY’RE PERFECT FOR EACH OTHER AND SHE SEEMS TO ACTUALLY LIKE HIM. HE KEEPS BEING SO CLUELESS ABOUT IT THOUGH, ITS FRUSTRATINGLY FUN TO WATCH!)

As for Jim and Pam: The writers really have it in for them, don’t they? First, unrequited love. Then, Jim leaves and returns with a girlfriend. When he comes back, Jim is almost killed by Roy – thank God for Deputy Dwight and his can of mace! – and now, a long-distance relationship? Really? The Office has been great at avoiding clichés, and I hope it continues to do so by not sucking Pam into a complicating “friendship” with some college dude. (I WAS NOT HAPPY TO SEE THE FRIENDSHIP WITH THE COLLEGE DUDE. PAM HAD BETTER NOT PULL A “ROSS” (REMEMBER THE TV SHOW FRIENDS?) AND CHEAT ON HER SOULMATE – SHE AND JIM ARE MADE FOR EACH OTHER, AND I THINK THE SHOW WOULD BE JUST AS ENTERTAINING IF THEY GO AHEAD AND LET THESE TWO GET MARRIED. IF THEY WANT TO FOLLOW IN CHEESY SITCOM FOOTSTEPS, THEN ADD A BABY OR TWO DOWN THE ROAD, BUT DON’T BREAK THEM UP!)

And now on to my favorite scenes:

The return of Ryan

I found myself clapping out loud, it was that awesome that a humbled, court-ordered-community-service-oriented Ryan returns as Pam’s temp fill-in. Ryan’s out for some weird revenge angle, as evidenced by his menacing goatee, his black attire and his anti-Earl list, which includes Jim and – strangely

enough – Kevin. I’m sure Michael will figure out a way to keep him around longer, but I wonder if the once-humble intern truly has turned irrevocably to the dark side. (I THINK SO – RYAN WAS NEVER A NICE PERSON. SURE, THEY MADE YOU FEEL SORRY FOR HIM WHEN HE WAS A TEMP THE FIRST TIME, BUT HE WAS STILL A JERK.)

“So you think it’s a choice?”

The patented Office awkwardness of Oscar and Holly having the “I’m a lesbian... No, I’m actually not” exchange was fantastic. It certainly didn’t reach the cringeworthy heights of last year’s classic dinner-party episode, but it still managed to make me laugh and squirm like no other show on TV does. For some reason, that appeals to me. (THIS SCENE WAS HILARIOUS AND ONE OF MY FAVORITES – NUFF SAID!)

“That wasn’t a tapeworm.”

I would like to proclaim, in this, my initial Office blog, that Creed is my hero. He may be my favorite sitcom character of all time. Kelly says she swallowed a tapeworm to lose weight... that Creed sold her. Cut to Creed: “That wasn’t a tapeworm.” The only question that remains, and I’m afraid of the answer: What was it? (I AM A BIG FAN OF CREED ALSO – HE IS AN AWESOME CHARACTER, SOOO FUNNY. MY FAVORITE CREED LINE IS WHEN HE SAYS “YEP, IT’S CRAZY. IT’S CRAZY.” IN THE EPISODE WHERE DWIGHT WANTS TO COOK A GOOSE IN THE OFFICE. IT DOESN’T LOOK NEARLY AS FUNNY IN TYPE; YOU HAVE TO SEE THE EPISODE. AND THEN THERE’S THE EPISODE WHERE CREED DYES HIS HAIR AND STARTS USING SLANG TO APPEAR YOUNGER – CLASSIC!)

“I’ve replaced Angela as head of the party-planning committee.”

Phyllis reveals her Machiavellian side with this power play. As she caught Angela and Dwight doing their illicit dirty deed, her little upward smile indicated at the very moment she caught them that the party-planning committee chairmanship was all hers. You go, girl!

The big shocker: Jim and Pam get engaged!

On exit 17 off of what I can only assume is the New Jersey Turnpike, Jim drops on one knee and pops the question. I'm really glad they didn't drag it out and save the engagement for some sweeps or finale ploy. The unexpectedness of the proposal, and how unassuming it was, really kept true to the nature of their relationship. For me, this is one the main reasons why this show is so great: The writers don't betray their characters. (AGREED!)

So, what did you guys think? Was the Season 5 premiere worth the wait? (IT WAS GREAT, BUT NEVER WORTH THE WAIT CUZ THAT MEANS THAT WE HAVE TO GO WITHOUT THE SHOW!) What did you think of the engagement? (VERY HAPPY ABOUT IT – CALMS MY FEARS ABOUT THAT RANDOM COLLEGE DUDE A LITTLE BIT – I WAS FEELING JEALOUS FOR JIM!) Did you see it coming or were you, like me, totally shocked? (I WAS SHOCKED, DIDN'T SEE IT COMING AT ALL, BUT IT WAS SOMETHING I WAS REALLY HAPPY ABOUT. I'M GLAD THEY DIDN'T SHOW IT TO US IN A PREVIEW!) Finally, what were your favorite scenes? (THE OSCAR / HOLLY EXCHANGE AND THE CREED / KELLY TAPEWORM INCIDENT WERE MY FAVORITES – KELLY LOOKING SO SICK AND PASSING OUT WERE PRICELESS! OVERALL, AS SO OFTEN HAPPENS WITH TV SHOWS, THE SEASON PREMIERE DID NOT DISAPPOINT IN THE SLIGHTEST! CAN'T WAIT UNTIL THURSDAY!!!!!!)

Disappointment Is An Understatement

I am still a Cubs fan; I will admit it. Even after the 2003 Steve Bartman episode, after the 100+ (now it's officially time to add the + to 100) year World Series drought, and the

disasterous playoffs of the 2007 and now 2008 seasons.

I just cannot believe the season is over. The season started off so promising this year, and picked up momentum all summer, only to leave us bewildered and disgusted in October once again. So what happened that made them look so terrible during all the playoff games?!?

You know what? I don't even want to talk about it. At least I don't have to worry about missing the World Series while I'm in Florida! Frickin' Cubs. Maybe next year... UGH!

Farm Adventures – Part 2

One thing I forgot to touch on in my previous post is the danger of corn mazes. Maybe I'm just a paranoid person – well, that I already know – but I was wondering how come there's never been a major disaster at a corn maze? I mean, what if the thing goes up in flames? It's a concern I was able to stash in the back of my mind during our visit Friday night; mostly because the particular maze we visited seemed safe. They have a watch tower in the middle of it along with various emergency exits and "corn cops" to help guide you out should an emergency occur. But the first corn maze we visited a few years ago had none of these precautions, and I couldn't help but let my mind wander, exploring various disasterous scenarios in my head. "Maybe they're not very flammable." my husband said about corn mazes, but that theory was dispelled the other night when we saw all the signs warning about how flammable the corn maze was. Well, anyway, nothing horrible happened, thank goodness, and I've never heard of disaster befalling a corn maze, so until something happens, we'll be able to enjoy the pastime of corn mazing for years to come.

So onto the rest of the weekend... Saturday was the day of our town's Fall Fest, so we walked the kids up to the town square, enjoyed the ambience and picnicked for lunch. We ran into a few friends, and came home with an extra kid who spent the afternoon with us when we visited a local alpaca farm. Here are the kids enjoying the bouncy castle at the fall fest with their friend.



Before the alpaca farm, we visited another local farm where they have an annual Halloween display – it's really neat. They go all out for Halloween, and they even made a little train for the kids to ride that's pulled by a tractor. Every family that visits gets little Halloween toys, home-grown apples, and a plate of cookies to take home – and it's all free; done by nice people who just want to share Halloween with their visitors. Last year we asked about donating money so they can continue their yearly traditions, but they said their insurance company said they can't except cash but baking supplies and Halloween props would be appreciated. My parents visited with us last year and enjoyed the Halloween farm so much that they gave me some baking supplies to donate, so Saturday while we were out that way in the country, we dropped them off. Of course, they wouldn't let us drop stuff off without taking home a plate of homemade cookies... these are the nicest people. Their home is sparsely furnished – yes, they invite everyone in for a visit – which leads one to think that if they have extra money, it's spent on baking supplies and Halloween stuff. Also, the woman is in a wheelchair, but

none of that stops them from putting up this elaborate Halloween display every year and baking hundreds of cookies to give away. When we went to their place for the first time a few years ago, we had just moved here from Chicago, and I'm embarrassed to admit that we were confused. In the suburban Chicago area, there just aren't many nice people doing things solely for the enjoyment of others, especially at their own expense. People like that are few and far between and in an area that's so over-populated, you're lucky if you run into anyone like that.

Wow, I find myself having to recover from yet another tangent! So anyway, after the Fall Fest downtown we went to the alpaca farm. Saturday was National Alpaca Farm Day, meaning that any alpaca farm who wanted to participate had an open house on their farm for people to visit and learn about these animals. Not only are they cute, but they are profitable as well. Their fur sells for \$12/oz, and one alpaca can yield 140 – 160 oz per year! And it's a method of farming that I approve of since it doesn't injure nor kill the animal. This farm had a 3-week-old baby alpaca (top picture below), and another one due any day, which is also fascinating because the expecting alpaca didn't even look pregnant. The farm also had a wild mustang that they had just rescued from Wyoming (bottom picture below). Apparently the wild mustangs out there are running out of pasture and food, so people are bringing them to farms so they don't starve. This gorgeous animal had never touched a human being until a few weeks ago, and his first contact with humans was them putting him into a trailer and driving him across the country – that must have been frightening for him. But you couldn't tell by looking at him. He was so well-adjusted and was coming up to all the people who were visiting. They said he had gained lots of weight since he had arrived on the farm also, so that's great.



There is just something about being on a farm that makes me feel peaceful. The rolling countryside is beautiful, and I don't even mind the stench of farm animals. I would love to have a farm some day, providing we had enough money to pay a staff to maintain it. They are lots of work I know, and I don't know the first thing about running a farm. But someday I think I'd like to try, and if that's a route we explore in the future, alpacas will definitely be part of the venture!

How Hot Is TOO HOT?

I was working on my second post about my weekend at the farms, but my attention was diverted by the following news story. Since I know a few people who really enjoy spicy food, I'm sharing this as a warning to you!

An aspiring chef died after eating a super-hot chilli sauce as part of an endurance competition with a friend.

Andrew Lee, 33, challenged his girlfriend's brother to a contest to see who could eat the spiciest sauce that he could create.

The fork-lift truck driver, who wanted to cook for a living, prepared a tomato sauce made with red chillies grown on his father's allotment. After eating it, however, he suffered intense discomfort and itching. The following morning he was found dead, possibly after suffering a heart attack.

Toxicology tests are being conducted to try to establish if he suffered a reaction to the food.

An inquest was told that Lee, from Edlington, England, was in perfect health and had just passed a medical examination at work. He was a keen cook and would often prepare meals for his parents. It is believed that Mr Lee had never prepared a dish as hot as the one he made the night before his death.

Lee's sister, Claire Chadbourne, 29, said that he took a jar of the sauce to the home of his girlfriend, Samantha Bailey, and challenged her brother Michael, 29, to see who could eat it. "Andrew just ate the chillies with a plate of Dolmio sauce," she added. "It was not a proper meal because he had already eaten lamb chops and potato mash after work.

"He apparently got into bed at 2.30am and started scratching all over. His girlfriend scratched his back until he fell asleep. She woke up and he had gone. It is incredible. Who would have thought he could have died from eating chilli sauce? We don't know of anything else that could have caused his death. The postmortem showed no heart problems.

"He loved cooking for his friends. He always said he wanted to be a chef but didn't want to start at the bottom."

An inquest was opened and adjourned in Doncaster last week.

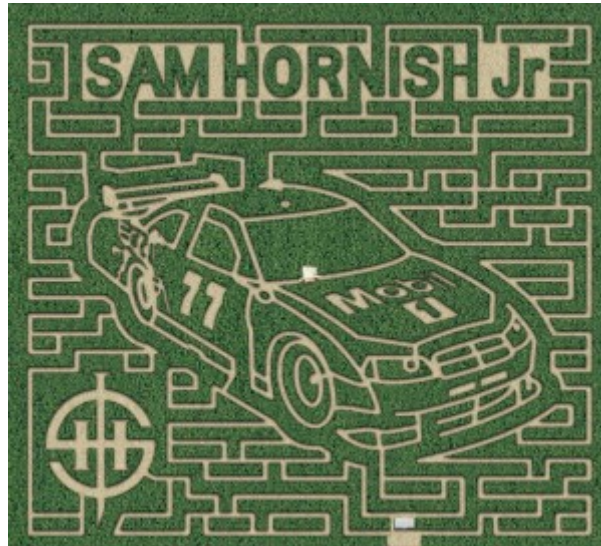
A Twisted Episode of Survivor

I had a wonderful weekend. It all started with another visit to a haunted house on Friday night. Although I enjoyed my previous haunted house experience at Ghostly Manor earlier this year, I just wasn't feeling the Halloween vibe enough to subject myself to scariness – I didn't sleep well the night before and little sleep makes me feel claustrophobic – weird. But anyway, the haunted house was actually a haunted corn maze and they had other things to do at the farm, so I enjoyed myself immensely hanging out with my kids and the coolest teenager I know. There is just something about farms that make me feel an inner peace; something that was illustrated again during the weekend – more on that in my next post.

Literally a cornfield in the middle of nowhere, [Leader's Family Farms](#) has things to do to keep all ages entertained. There were even a few things we didn't even get a chance to try after spending so much time being lost in the corn maze. Next time I will have to check out the hayride and the coop shoot – I have a special affinity for hayrides because they remind me of the week-long vacations to a dude ranch I took with my family as a kid. But one thing about Leader's that really impressed me was their ability to make appealing and fun attractions without the large budget or the mechanical reliance that a major theme park would have. The "Barnyard" or family area had several things for the kids to play with: bouncy castles, a zip line, haystacks to climb on, a hay maze, slides – all physical activities which would guarantee kids' exhaustion giving the parents some "mommy-daddy time" at the end of the evening – the problem is everything was physical for Mommy and Daddy too, and like the DJ noted, "I don't know who is getting tired out more – the parents or the kids!" But that illustrates my point about the ability to entertain every age group without spending big bucks – and that is true for both the patron *and* the establishment. Actually, let me back

up for a minute and go off on a tangent – the purpose of the site, right? □ Why do they call it a hayride when you're actually sitting on straw? I learned from a display at the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo that hay is green and made from grass. Straw is yellow and made from wheat. So the kids were climbing on *straw* stacks, they played in a *straw* maze, and people were enjoying *straw* rides... doesn't have quite the same ring to it as hayrides, I guess...

But back to Leader's – they had a DJ, who hosted Karaoke and played wedding-style audience-interactive songs like Hokey-Pokey, The Chicken Dance, YMCA, and Shout. I was trying to teach Disney (my almost 2 year old) the YMCA, but she only liked the part where we clapped. Maybe next time we will get down on the dance floor – this time my other girls were too shy and tired was I. My insanely brave (or psychotic, depending upon who you ask) 4-year-old Sammie was intent on going into the haunted house, and my husband was actually going to take her in, but before she could even enter, she was frightened away from the experience by the scary music alone. We got a cell phone call just as we were entering the corn maze, and so we retrieved Sammie and let her enjoy the experience of the corn maze, which ended up being what I would describe as a twisted game of Survivor. Take 4 kids, all under the age of 9, into a corn maze and wander around in the dark for over an hour. No bathrooms, no snacks, and you only have enough stroller for two of them, so the other two have to walk. It was fun, but also quite an experience. I would love to go back and explore the maze – without kids though. And when I got home, I looked at an aerial photo of the thing, and now it all makes more sense. Here is where I spent my Friday night:



You enter at the small white building at the bottom of the picture and go left. Where we really started losing it was around the back tire and the spoiler of the race car. You can see how many forks and circles there are in the paths in that area. And again, while in the thing, I had no idea what it looked like because I didn't think to check a map before going in. I would also bring a flashlight next time; well, maybe not if I didn't have kids to worry about. We were using our cell phones for light, but then the other half of our group who went into the haunted house called to see where we were and when I said I didn't know, the cell phone lost service – adding to the stranded feeling we were experiencing. I must have stashed my cell phone on top of the stroller really quick because my daughter had turned backwards in her seat and was falling out, so after I fixed her, I frantically searched for the cell phone with no luck – apparently it had fallen off the stroller in the corn maze. So when we finally got out, I had to tell the staff that I lost my cell phone in there. As they laughed at me, they asked if it was on vibrate or silence mode – “Of course it is!” I said, because it would have been too easy to find it otherwise, and let's face it – a lost cell phone in a corn maze wouldn't be funny if you could call it and hear it ring. So a small black silent cell phone lost in a corn maze in the dark? Forget it. They did call me the next day though, saying that they did eventually find it,

probably with the light of day. Well, anyway, the corn maze with 4 little children in the dark was quite an experience. Not horrible, but not recommended... quite an experience – I can only describe it as having felt like I came through an ordeal after we got out... it was kind of like being stranded in the wilderness, not knowing when rescue would arrive. Sure, there are “corn cops” and all you have to do is yell, but I don’t know how they’d hear you and I honestly didn’t want to be the group that yelled for help. We did it on our own, and for that, we got the satisfaction of accomplishment.

Well, I’ve rambled about that long enough... I had fun. I loved the serenity of the farm at night, and it was a beautiful night weather-wise. It was cool but not cold, and being in rural Ohio meant that we were navigating the maze under a canopy of thousands of stars... I would love to go back and explore the maze without worrying about the kids being hungry, thirsty, having sore feet or having to go to the bathroom. And someone remind me that if I have any more kids, a corn maze is NOT a good activity for a pregnant woman – too much walking and not enough bathrooms. This post is so lengthy I’ll have to save our alpaca farm adventure for the next post... stay tuned!

My Kids

Everywhere we go, I get the comment, “You must have your hands full.” Since I usually only have my younger two with me while the older two are in school, people have no idea how right they are! Here are some recent pictures of my angels – they grow so fast and this is for relatives and people who haven’t seen them in awhile:

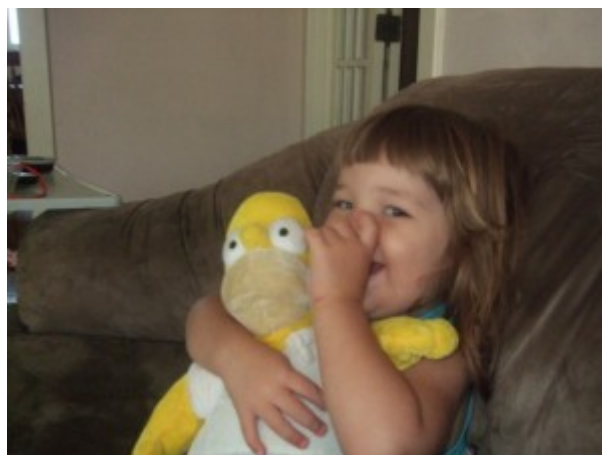
Christopher is a Cubs fan, of course!



Good thing I checked on Christopher during his “tummy time” – this is what I found and he wasn’t even making a peep!



Disney loves her Homer doll even though she calls him “SpongeBob”



Here are all 4 of them together: Disney is almost 2, Sammie is

4, Taylor is 8, and Christopher is 2½ months



Christopher doesn't have the hang of holding his own bottle yet



*Everyone says Sammie and Disney look like twins, years apart.
Sammie really wanted us to take this picture
of them holding her Samantha sign – no one had the heart to
tell her it was backwards*

