

Ghost Towns

One of the coolest places we ever visited was a ghost amusement park. It had been in existence for 100 years before closing down unexpectedly one year, leaving everything behind: rides, paths, old vehicles, buildings, food stands, restrooms, and even part of a ferris wheel remained poking out of the trees that had grown up and around it during the vacant years. I would love to go back there and especially bring some friends, but it's not really a place for kids to run around, so I'll have to wait until they're older or I have a babysitter for a few days...

But CNN ran an article on ghost towns that reminded me of the place; check it out, then follow the link to ghosttowns.com – they have a state-by-state listing of ghost towns. Turns out, there are 6 in my corner of Ohio alone!

LAKE VALLEY, New Mexico (AP) – *The howling wind across a remote landscape, a creaky metal gate or a run-in with a rattlesnake or gun-toting local are the things that attract ghost towners. They are history buffs who take their outdoor adventures with a dash of mystery.*

Monument Peak, which some old-timers call Lizard Mountain, rises over what's left of Lake Valley in southern New Mexico.

Just as traditional outdoors enthusiasts enjoy mountaineering or hiking, and tech-minded gadget lovers enjoy geocaching, ghost towners have their own agenda: seeking out, documenting and photographing towns that one day will cease to exist.

"We are a subset of the outdoors culture," said Clint Thomsen of Stansbury Park, Utah, who writes newspaper columns about the ghost towns he visits. "If you're willing to drive around 200 miles along dirt roads and find something that's definitely crumbled, you're definitely part of the breed."

Ghost towns are prevalent in the West with 100 to more than 200 per state, but even states in the Midwest and several

Eastern states have between 10 to 100 ghost towns apiece, said Todd Underwood of Prescott, Arizona, who hosts a Web site for ghost towners, <https://www.ghosttowns.com>.

Underwood, a chemistry professor turned pilot who estimates he has visited about a thousand ghost towns, said the site has helped coalesce ghost towners into a group that logs millions of Web site visits a month.

And for those who think ghost towning is only a Western phenomenon, ghost towners are quick to say that even New York has 14 ghost towns. Pennsylvania has what one ghost towners calls a ghost highway, a 13-mile stretch of Pennsylvania Turnpike complete with overpasses and tunnels near Breezewood that was bypassed in 1968.

A ghost town is a place that is a shadow of its past glory. This can include everything from accessible historical towns – like Jerome, Arizona, or Calico, California – to the ruins of forgotten mining towns, abandoned farm settlements or railroad stops that disappeared when the trains stopped coming. Towns that are remote, hard to gain access to and have very little remaining are known as “true ghosts,” Underwood said.

Underwood said he began ghost towning in 1976 with his father.

“We were really fascinated as to how and why people would just up and leave towns. We were steeped in the mystery of that,” he said.

That mystery is palpable at the abandoned silver mining town of Lake Valley, New Mexico, which was founded in 1878. The Bureau of Land Management property has a renovated schoolhouse filled with wooden and wrought-iron children’s desks, an ornate wood stove and an old school bell. A nearby church holds wooden pews and ornate woodwork railings.

But along the dirt roads, the wind moans and whistles through the dilapidated wooden houses and around crumbling stone ruins. The town’s slow decline from a peak population of 4,000

people in the 1880s began with the devaluation of silver and was accelerated by a 1895 fire that destroyed its business district. Lake Valley's last resident left in 1994 at the age of 92.

A typical ghost town visit usually begins with an offhand remark from an old-timer or a mention on a Web site, ghost towners say.

Before leaving home, they try to solve the mystery of why the town disappeared and, more importantly, how to get there by hitting the history books and topographical maps.

Ghost towners give only vague directions to newbies. They figure those who are willing to unravel their hints and work to find these places are more likely to respect them.

Then, a visit is attempted. Thomsen recalled arriving at what he thought would be the abandoned mining town of Gold Acres, Nevada, at 3 a.m., only to find from a surprised mining office worker that the old buildings had been bulldozed a few months before.

Other ghost towners described making a half-dozen trips before finding the town, but agreed the search is half the fun.

Though their motto is to "take nothing but photographs, leave nothing but footprints," there are gifts to be found – literally and figuratively – at ghost towns.

David Pike, who grew up in southern New Mexico and now lives in Washington, D.C., has rated nearly 20 New Mexico ghost towns on his Web site.

He says ghost towning has helped him understand how his environment affects him and taught him to live in the moment.

"It's hard to ignore a metaphor when you're standing right in the middle of it," he said. "When you're standing in a building that was once something and now is slowly fading into

not being anything anymore, that's a stark reminder about appreciating what you've got when you've got it."

Pike said he visited a ghost town in southern New Mexico with his late father. He remembered his father had called out to him, but the howling wind blocked out the voice, which got Pike ruminating on the town's name, High Lonesome.

"He's been gone for a couple of years now and I still miss his voice," Pike said.

Laura Aden, who explores old mining sites with her husband mainly in Arizona's Tonto National Forest, says ghost towners are "the people who walk around with their heads down scratching the dirt, the crazy bunch of people who pick up nails and cans."

If she finds abandoned objects in the deserted towns, she offers them to local historical societies, which don't always want them. She's taken home some old tools to decorate her cactus garden, she said.

Ghost towners also compare notes on the danger of their hobby. They have to contend with rattlesnakes and other critters, running out of water or fuel, vehicle breakdowns and the hazards of abandoned mine shafts.

Underwood said he once entered a ghost town and sitting on top of a dilapidated house was a man with a gun pointed right at him.

"I turned around and left in a hurry," Underwood said.

Underwood encourages ghost towners to photograph the places they visit and post them on ghosttown.com as a way to document their historical significance and decline.

Often ghost towns are vandalized, they erode or are bulldozed over to make way for economic development.

"There is a time when this hobby will go away. You will not be able to go and appreciate these places anymore," Pike said. They are "slowly fading into nonexistence."

Ghost towns Worth a Mention

- 1. Lake Valley in southern New Mexico is a quintessential ghost town, said David Pike, who hosts a Web site that rates New Mexico ghost towns. The old mining town sits on Bureau of Land Management property and has several standing buildings, including a school house, general store and small church. "If a town is going to aspire to be a ghost town, that's the town that they should emulate," he said.*
 - 2. Carson, Colorado, is an abandoned mining camp that sits on the Continental Divide at about 12,000 feet elevation. "It's very remote. It's covered most of the year with snow. All of the buildings are left intact. It's almost like somebody just upped and walked away," said Todd Underwood, host of ghosttowns.com.*
 - 3. Frisco, Utah, is a favorite of ghost towner Clint Thomsen. The old silver mining town in southwestern Utah has several outdoor charcoal ovens that were used to make fuel for the smelter. There's also a cemetery and standing structures, according to ghosttowns.com Web site.*
 - 4. Spring Canyon in central Utah is home to several small ghost towns, abandoned mining camps and a ghost known as the "White Lady of Latuda," said Thomsen, who counted it among his favorites.*
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Talula Does the Hula From Hawaii

The title of this post reflects someone's actual given name at birth. Shame on everyone who ever gave flak about my cute little Disney – it could have been worse; much, much worse!

(CNN) – A New Zealand judge has made a 9-year-old girl a ward of the court so that her name can be changed from Talula Does the Hula From Hawaii, the country's national news agency reported Thursday.

Family Court Judge Rob Murfitt listed a series of unusual names that New Zealand parents had given their children, and said he was concerned that such strange monikers would create hurdles for them as they grew up.

"It makes a fool of the child and sets her up with a social disability and handicap," the New Zealand Press Association quoted the judge as saying.

Among the names Murfitt cited: twins named Benson and Hedges – after a brand of cigarettes; Violence; and Number 16 Bus Shelter.

Some parents had named children after six-cylinder Ford cars, the news agency reported.

The Registrar General of Births, Deaths and Marriages said in a statement that it had rejected names including Fish and Chips, Yeah Detroit, Stallion, Twisty Poi – a staple food in Polynesian cuisine – and Sex Fruit.

A lawyer for Talula Does the Hula From Hawaii said the girl is so embarrassed by her name that friends know her as "K."

Last month, a judge in the U.S. state of Illinois allowed a school bus driver to legally change his first name to "In God"

and his last name to “We Trust.”

But an appeals court in the state of New Mexico ruled against a man – named Variable – who wanted to change his name to a two-word phrase that contains a four-letter expletive and expresses opposition to censorship.

Toledo Blood

While I’ve been recently listing my many recent medical procedures and complications, it seems I forgot to mention the blood transfusion. When I found out I would need one after the surgery, my mom generously offered me some of hers, but the nurses politely refused her, saying our hospital gets its blood supply from Toledo. So, there you have it – I guess you could say I’m now an official Ohioan with Toledo blood and everything! Go Buckeyes!

American Psycho Hellboy... Never Mind

We managed to fit in some movie watching this week while the kids are with Grandma, and I was attempting to put them all together in a clever blog post title, but it wasn’t to be. Probably my lack of sleep with the new baby and my recovery process has inhibited my creativity. I hope to be back in full swing soon, but it will probably take a few months, especially because once I’m feeling better, I have lots of

stuff around the house I need to catch up on and as much as I would like blog posting to come first, it doesn't. As people keep reminding me oh so helpfully, a c-section is major surgery ☐ Don't I know it.

So the 3 movies we saw this week are Hellboy 2, American Psycho, and Fortress.

I did not like [Hellboy 2](#). I actually would have left the theater, but I never got around to asking my husband if he wanted to and that was a good thing because he liked the movie. It gave me a good laugh when we were walking out of the theater and he told me he liked it because we always have the same taste in movies and I really didn't like this one. That also means I don't have much to say about it except that the Abe fish-like character reminds me of C3PO from Star Wars, and I can't believe the actor who plays Hellboy, [Ron Perlman](#), was also Vincent the Beast in the old [Beauty and the Beast tv show](#) from the 80's with [Linda Hamilton](#). I thought he was going to be some Andre the Giant huge guy wrestler type, but it turns out, he is just a regular actor. I suppose my impatience with this movie had to do with the fact that my infection flared up and I was raging with fever yet again in the movie theater. So even though I felt crappy and wanted to leave, I could not pass up a night out with hubby while the kids were away. Even if it was to see Hellboy 2... I'm just glad one of us enjoyed the movie.

Next up is a movie from the early 90's called [Fortress](#). It's set in the future – and it's always fun to see what people thought the future would be like when the movie was made over a decade ago – and revolves around a corporate owned underground prison (think Walmart does Alcatraz). The main characters are sent there when they break the “one child per couple” rule. They had lost their first child, and now they've been caught trying to have another, so they are both sent to prison, even though she is pregnant. This is a fun action-packed movie. When I looked it up on [imdb.com](#)

after we watched it, I learned that it is actually a kind of cult classic movie and there are actually multiple endings. Our version was the less happy of the endings, but I still liked the movie. It's kind of violent for early 90's, and if you look it up on imdb.com, don't let the keywords fool you. Let's put it this way, if I had seen the keywords first, I wouldn't have watched this movie, but in retrospect, I don't think there was really much adult stuff in it – just violence and gore, but they didn't overdo it like they do in some movies nowadays, like the Saw movies for instance. [American Psycho](#) on the other hand...

I will start by saying that [Christian Bale](#) was excellent in this movie. I wasn't so impressed by him when he was Batman in [The Dark Knight](#), but he definitely shows versatility and depth in this movie. He plays a Wall Street executive who is just about as big a jerk as one can be. Also, he has blood lust and likes to kill people in his spare time. The movie is very strange for reasons I can't quite put my finger on. For one, I was confused about what the movie was trying to be. I guess it's just a story about this man, an American Psycho. But at times throughout the movie, the music was strange, and it just didn't play like a normal movie. And then there were the constant 80's references. I guess it was supposed to take place in the 1980's, given the characters' huge cordless phones and constant talk of musical artists such as Phil Collins, Huey Lewis, and Whitney Houston. Why they would change the time period of the movie, I don't know, but they did a good job because if [Reese Witherspoon](#) (who is about my age and would have been a kid in the '80's) wasn't in it, I would have been convinced the movie was actually filmed in the '80's. And I have to say the end confused me a lot. I won't say more because I don't want to spoil anything, but if anyone who reads this has seen this movie, maybe you can answer a question I have. I don't think I'd recommend this movie since there are many disturbing scenes and it didn't seem worth it to me to sit thru them for what you get from the rest of the

movie. I don't think I'm going to put it on my list of baddies however, but then again, Hellboy 2 isn't going on there either. Just 2 movies I didn't really like and wouldn't see again, but I don't feel like I wasted my time watching either of them, and that's always a good thing.

The Mole – Week #7

The following is a synopsis of the Mole episode that aired Monday, July 21, 2008. It contains spoilers – do not read ahead if you don't want to know who was executed!

My daughter is away this week and didn't get to see this episode, so we won't have her guess. Darn, she was really getting into the show too, and it was fun to see an 8-year-old's perspective on it. But anyway, I thought Craig and Nicole both seemed very mole-y during the challenge; there were times when it seemed that they both tried to sabotage the numbers they were collecting. I didn't notice any suspicious behavior from anyone else. Then there was a game where the contestants answered questions about their loved ones, and another contestant was re-quizzed about their answers. The loved ones appeared in a train, and If they got enough answers correct, the doors would open for a reunion. So of course whoever the mole is didn't have the heart to sabotage this one – which means it's NOT Nicole. Just kidding. Anyway, the train doors opened for everyone, thank goodness, and the anticipation was pure agony to watch; especially Mark's wife (in 19 years of marriage we've never been apart this long) and Paul's wife and especially his little girl. I knew there was absolutely no way they would disappoint a little girl like that, and I wonder what they would have done if enough questions were not answered correctly?

I'd have to say Nicole's mom is a bad influence on her – she really wanted Nicole to quit and even justified her reasons for doing so (it's not really quitting, it's not like this is your job). It's clear that Nicole really cares a lot about what Mommy thinks because she lied and said she was going to throw the quiz, and she also apologized for disappointing her mom by not quitting. So I'm guessing that she can just explain it away to Mommy later by saying, "I disobeyed you because I was the Mole so I couldn't quit the game." And, if she can lie that easily about throwing the quiz, it will be no surprise that she was lying the whole game about being the Mole.

So, the guesses remain:

Taylorhis – Nicole

Chris – Paul

Jamiahsh – Paul

Bale Bails Out

I couldn't resist re-printing the following news item about the star of The Dark Knight, Christian Bale. Note the part about police not wanting to question him so they don't interfere with the premiere of the movie. Seems he took his Batman fight training a little too seriously?

LONDON, England (AP) – Batman star Christian Bale was arrested Tuesday over allegations of assaulting his mother and sister, police and British media said.

"Dark Knight" star Christian Bale pictured in London Sunday ahead of the movie's European premiere

The 34-year-old actor spent four hours at a London police station before being released on bail.

British media had reported that Bale's mother and sister complained he had assaulted them at the Dorchester Hotel in London on Sunday night, a day before the European premiere of his latest film, "The Dark Knight."

The Sun newspaper said police did not question the actor Monday because they did not want to interfere with the premiere of the movie.

Asked Tuesday whether Bale had been arrested, a London police spokesman did not refer to him by name but said: "A 34-year-old man attended a central London police station this morning by appointment and was arrested in connection with an allegation of assault."

The spokesman spoke on condition of anonymity because force policy did not authorize him to be identified. British police do not name suspects before they are formally charged.

The force later said in a statement that the man had been released on bail pending further inquiries and told to return on an unspecified date in September.

U.S.-based representatives for Bale didn't immediately return messages seeking comment. Repeated phone calls to Bale's London representative went unanswered.

Wales-born Bale first made a splash as the child star of Steven Spielberg's "Empire of the Sun" in 1987. His screen credits also include "American Psycho," "The Machinist" and "Batman Begins."

In "The Dark Knight," Bale reprises the role of wealthy playboy Bruce Wayne and his crime-fighting alter-ego Batman, a brooding vigilante superhero still scarred by the murder of his parents.

The Warner Bros. film, which stars the late Heath Ledger as Batman's nemesis The Joker, took in a record \$158.4 million at the box office in its opening weekend in the U.S. last week.

The Dark Knight

We ventured out to see the midnight showing of [The Dark Knight](#) last week, and I haven't written about it until now because I've been so busy, but I figured I better make some time for it before I forget, so here it goes...

It all began when we found out our little local theater would be showing it at midnight, and since we're usually up with the new baby at that time, we figured why not be in a movie feeding the baby instead of at home? So we got together a group who wanted to see it, and that's when we found out the movie was 2 hours and 40 minutes! Oops, the baby is never up THAT long but too late to back out now! Besides, after all the hype involved, I was actually looking forward to it.

Since almost a week has passed and I'm on little sleep, some of my memory of the details have faded, so this will be a very vague review. I'd have to say the movie was exactly what I was expecting. I was hoping it would be a little better, especially after all the media hype, but it was exactly what I thought it would be – and that's not anywhere NEAR the 9.6 people gave it on imdb.com. Since I'm not a huge fan of superhero / comic book movies (yet I keep going to see them; not sure what's up with that), I really wasn't expecting this to be one of my favorite movies ever. [Heath Ledger](#) did have a VERY good performance as the Joker, but was it Oscar-worthy? I personally don't think so. I do think he will win it though, but let's just wait and see if he is nominated and

who he is up against. And it's not like I ever agree with who wins those things anyway; for me it's just a good excuse to throw a fun party ☐

But back to the movie... there was a lot of violence. I can't believe what they're allowed to call PG-13 these days. Although I suppose it wasn't really anything short of what you'd see on tv, and there was actually little to no blood and gore, so maybe that explains it. The children I saw in the theater were all asleep by the time the movie was over anyway. And yes, I did think the movie went on too long – it wasn't a short 2 hours and 40 minutes, and it didn't really fly by. As my husband pointed out, way too much dialogue for a superhero movie; friends agreed and added that the Batman movies are like that. I've only seen the Tim Burton [Batman](#) from 1989, which I'm told is just a different take on the whole thing and doesn't really fit into the timeline anywhere, and I've also seen [Batman Forever](#), which I really enjoy. So that brings me to my 2nd favorite villian next to the Joker – Harvey “Two-Face” Dent. I just love what [Tommy Lee Jones](#) did with the character in Batman Forever, and I was pleased when I realized that Harvey Dent was going to turn into Two-Face in The Dark Knight, but overall I was disappointed because [Aaron Eckhart's](#) Two-Face was pretty lame compared to Jones'. The makeup was pretty good, although I actually enjoy the more comic book look that they gave Tommy Lee Jones versus the scary look they gave Eckhart for the newest film.

[Christian Bale's](#) Batman was alright, though I couldn't stand his gravelly Batman voice – it reminded me of the Friends episode where Joey is selling cologne at a department store... If you're a fan of the show and you know what episode I'm talking about, find it and listen to his cologne adversary say “Hombre?” – sounds just like Christian Bale's Batman and every time he spoke in the movie I was tempted to giggle as I thought of that hilarious Friends episode. [Maggie Gyllenhaal](#) was pretty good too; although in scenes with both her and

Heath Ledger's Joker, it was weird for me to think that he played her brother's gay lover in [Brokeback Mountain](#), but that's Hollywood for you, it's cyclical.

And since we're on the subject of Heath Ledger's Joker, it was very impressive. Not the kind of movie or role I'd pick for being Oscar-worthy, but that's my personal opinion and like I said, we'll just see happens as Oscar time draws near. He was pretty scary, and I'd have to say Hollywood can mourn him as a good actor because when I was in the hospital less than a week ago, I watched [10 Things I Hate About You](#) (the hospital's limited cable selections + baby up at night = what else do I watch but this bad movie?). Ledger was in that movie, and he couldn't even shed his Australian accent back then! Seeing where he was in that movie versus the Joker did give me appreciation for his work (as the Joker, not in 10 Things...).

And another reason I was excited to see this movie was that I had heard that 80% of it was shot in my former hometown (well, sort of, I grew up in the suburbs), Chicago. It was neat to see all the familiar landmarks, although they did try to anonymize the city so it could be recognized as Gotham City instead of Chicago. I was especially looking forward to the special effects involved in the Gotham City Hospital scene since I read an article about it ahead of time, but I have to say I was a little disappointed in how it actually looked on screen. I don't want to spoil anything for anyone who hasn't seen this movie yet, but I will say that the vacant Brach's Candy Factory on Chicago's west side doubled for the Gotham City Hospital. And seeing the Joker in a nurse's dress was pretty funny in itself...

Overall, I had a lot of fun seeing this movie. I think much of it had to do with the midnight showing and attending with a large group of friends. The movie was exactly what I expected, although I can say I was hoping for better... but again, I'm not a fan of comic books, and I've never read one in my life.

Flashback!

In the last few days, my recovery from the emergency c-section has not been going well. I awoke from a nap Thursday night feeling awful, but luckily my medication kicked in, and I was able to enjoy the midnight showing of The Dark Knight – more on that later. Friday we met Grandma in South Bend Indiana which is halfway between Chicago where she lives and Ohio where we live to transfer my kids for a week's vacation with Grandma. I felt awful all day, and I started shivering in the restaurant. I knew there was something really wrong when I went outside into the 90° oven and actually *enjoyed* it – uh oh.

When I got back to Ohio, I had an appointment with my doctor for her to take out my staples (yes, they had to actually use *staples* to put me back together, yuck) and that actually went well. Hardly hurt at all, just a little pinch, and it didn't take long. I brought up my symptoms to my doctor and she said everything was normal, and I believed her because when I had my other babies, I would heal up right away, so I figured these were all just side effects from the cesarean. But I took another nap when I got home and when I woke up, I felt like I was dying – that's really the only way to describe it. We took my temperature and it was 102.7°, so of course I had chills, the sweats, headache, and pain. A quick look on the internet gave us the diagnosis: mastitis – a common infection often suffered by breast-feeding mothers. We called the doctor and they wouldn't prescribe any antibiotics over the phone, so we headed to the hospital for the 2nd time in a week...

The admissions people panicked when they saw us coming in with the baby, but we quickly explained it wasn't him, thank

goodness. Anyway, after a quick look, the ER doctor confirmed our internet diagnosis and sent us home with a prescription. But since all the pharmacies were closed in our town, they gave me some medicine right then and there. "Name and birthdate", they always ask at the hospital before they give you your meds, and I was like, FLASHBACK! I thought I was done with this for awhile! But for spending a Friday night in the ER, it wasn't so bad; we were actually in and out in an hour. If this had happened in suburban Chicago where I used to live, it would have taken 3-4 hours to wait our turn in the ER, and they would have wheeled a few body bags past us while we were waiting. So today, I feel much better comparatively, and since the girls are with grandma, I slept until 11:30, so I'm sure that also helped. The antibiotics seem to be working already, and it was nice to wake up and not feel like I was dying, something that hasn't happened for a few days. I also feel better that now I think my recovery from everything is headed in the right direction, whereas when I felt crappy and didn't know why, it was discouraging because I was thinking, will I ever feel better?

My husband is peeved at my OB-GYN for not checking me more thoroughly during my visit with her yesterday. I agree; I did mention my symptoms and she was too dismissive, but being a man (especially one who won't listen to doctor's orders – if the doctor tells him to do something or recommends some sort of exam or test and he doesn't want to do it, he just won't) I don't think he understands how important to me it is to have a woman OB-GYN, and she is the only one in town. Besides, I do like her, she is gentle and she has been through 3 c-sections herself, so she knew exactly what to tell me about what to expect. If we do have any more children, there will be some debate about which doctor we will use. Well, anyway... off to Walmart to get my *third* prescription this week!

Scooby Update

I would like to thank everyone who offered help to us when we recently had to face the unplanned decision to find another home for one of our beloved pets. Our dog Scooby, had bitten one of our kids in the face. I sent out a plea via email to everyone I knew looking for a new home for Scooby since she was not a vicious animal, just so overwhelmed by fear and tension all the time that a house with kids was not a good home for her. Lots of people wrote back to me offering support and great tips to help find her a home, and I'd like to thank everyone. I'd also like to let you know that there is now a very happy ending to the story. Scooby was adopted by a board member of the humane society where we took her. She was taken home, and the board member just fell in love with her. She has a fenced in yard and some other dogs to play with, which is just perfect because Scooby LOVES to run and she also LOVES other dogs – it was just kids that made her nervous.

My 8-year-old daughter is a little upset, only because we told her we could go visit Scooby and we never did. We just didn't want Scooby to smell us and get excited about coming with us until she had found a happy home of her own. Now that she has, we don't know who it is that adopted her, and my daughter is sad because she really wanted to see Scooby. It's gotten better for her though, and it's tough for an 8-year-old to understand, but we've explained how Scooby is truly better off where she is now.

So thanks again to everyone who offered their help. It was a heartbreaking decision, and I am certainly not one who is in favor of "getting rid" of animals... but I think anyone in my position with 4 kids would understand how a dog with a history

of biting cannot be a part of our household. Thanks goodness she was able to find another forever home!

Congratulatory Dinner

Our small hospital does offer at least one benefit when you have a baby there: the congratulatory dinner. They have a woman who caters a dinner, and the nurses give you a choice if you want baby to join in or be babysat at the nurse's station to give mom and dad a "date". Although the setting is in the hospital, they take you down to a special room that overlooks the city, and we're not talking about hospital food! This is gourmet, delicious, and for dessert, a cake to celebrate baby's arrival. The dinner was so good when we had my 21-month-old that I told my husband we have to take pictures next time because it was hard for our friends to believe that food this good existed in our small town. But it does, and here are the pictures to prove it! I only wish they sold it in the hospital cafeteria on a regular basis – now that would totally redefine the term "hospital food"! By the way, those are giant shrimp in the picture that tasted like lobster; complete with a vat of butter for dipping. And that isn't a bottle of wine but sparkling grape juice, in case you were wondering why they would give a breastfeeding mom a bottle of wine ☐

