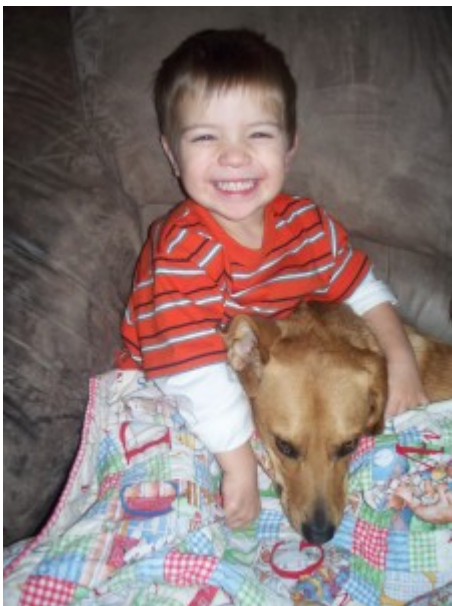


The Dude Is Growing!

My son had his 30-month ($2\frac{1}{2}$ years for you laypeople) check-up at the doctor today. All is well, though he wasn't very cooperative for the student doctor in training when it came to getting his nose and ears checked. And he had to get a shot, which of course was sad to witness. Unlike his 3 brave older sisters, he did cry, but he got over it quickly and proudly showed off his "owie" for the rest of the day. The little dude weighs 29.2 lbs. and is 2 feet and 10.5 inches tall.



A God Story

I love coming across God stories. Real life anecdotes which display the way God works in our lives, God stories can be experienced by Christians and non-Christians alike; it's just a matter of recognizing them and taking the time to be thankful and appreciate them.

I was at our babysitter's house last week picking up my kids,

and there was a little girl cuddling a dog. Being an animal lover, I had to say hello to the cute little furball and find out her name and age. The little girl's father said he didn't know the pup's age because they had found her, and then he said, "I have to tell you the whole story." So he begins his story, not knowing me or that I am a Christian who appreciates God stories. His story went something like this:

"My wife left me; she left me and the kids and even took our dogs, so these poor kids lost their mother and their dogs. I kept telling them I would get them a dog, but I had lots of other things to work out too. So for Halloween, we went to one of those 'trunk or treat' things at a church, and there was a little girl walking around inside the church with a puppy in her arms. I thought, something doesn't seem right there – why is this little girl walking around a church with a puppy, so I asked her about the dog. "We're not even sure what we're going to do with her – we just found her outside." the little girl told him. "Well," I told her, "my kids have been looking for a dog." We took home the little puppy, and she was mangy and starving, just skin and bones. We didn't estimate her to be more than 10 weeks old at that time, and she has been a part of the family for the last few months. She is thriving physically, and she has helped provide some of the healing the kids needed as they spent Christmas without their mom."

After hearing the story, it was magical to see the little girl cuddle her puppy. It warmed my heart to see them together, knowing that God brought this little puppy into the lives of a family who needed her – and brought a family into the life of an ailing little puppy who needed them as well. God works in wonderful ways, and being a witness to it is awesome – you just have to stop and look around; He is always there!

Crazy Cat Lady = Me?

Seems like it's been a long time since my last griping-about-Walmart blog post. Either I'm getting used to their secretive price-gauging ways, or I'm too busy in my personal life to spend as much time feeling wronged by the corporate giant. Maybe it's a little of both. But a few weeks ago, a couple of Walmart employees made themselves worth mentioning on my blog for their roles in turning a normally hectic pre-Christmas nighttime shopping trip with 4 little kids into quite an irritating adventure.

After wandering past empty shelf upon empty shelf and compromising my shopping list due to all of the out-of-stock items there were (and I'm talking everyday items, nothing gourmet nor exotic), my frustrations were growing. But finally I was finished in the grocery section, so I split off from my family and headed for the garden center. It might seem like a strange time of year to get those cement garden-border-blocks, but they are just over \$1 at Walmart, so I use them as a cost effective way to keep my puppy from digging holes under our fence. He digs a hole, I stick in a Walmart cement brick and solve the problem for under \$1.50 – done. It won't be long until I have a pretty little brick fence bordering my chain link fence. Except that my puppy dug a hole the other day, and just because it was December in Ohio (never mind the thunderstorms and rain we've been having), Walmart decided that they are going to lock up their cement bricks in the outdoor garden section and not let customers back there to get them. I get back there and find the door to the outside blocked with a bench (so THAT'S where they're putting the benches they removed from the entire store. Why Walmart decided to make seating scarce in their store is

beyond me. Don't shoppers stay longer and spend more money if there is a place to rest their feet? Don't they want to come back to a store that lets them rest while their shopping companion goes at it? But that's a whole 'nother post, I guess, even if I entertained the tangent). So anyway, I hunt down an employee and ask her about the cement bricks, and she tells me that the garden center is closed for the night and to come back another day. And this is AFTER I've already spent almost 2 hours in the store, wandering amongst empty shelves that it seems they don't know how to stock. It was difficult to explain to her that I had come there that night with all my kids and that this would not be happening again any time soon. Take a bunch of kids into a store that sells toys that time of year if you want to know how draining it can be – go on, I dare you to borrow some kids and do it next year. But the bottom line is, Ms. Walmart employee was not nice when she told me to come back another time, and she didn't offer to go back there or have someone else get me a brick or two or anything. She acted like we were both just stuck there in Walmart, and if she could deal with it, so could I. But guess what? She is GETTING paid to be there, while I have to PAY to be there – see the difference? She did not.

So what's with the Walmart policy of selling an item but not letting customers buy it? Are they hoarding cement bricks to build a top-secret Walmart price-gouging planning party fortress or something? Well, I was crabby that night, but I was not going to cause a scene; I don't like to be the scene-causing type. I had some good advice from a fellow tangenteer floating around in my head, "Walmart employees are people too", so I got over it and moved on. But by the time the second Walmart employee wronged me that night, I was *really* mad... The woman at the check-out did not want to take our coupon, even though it was clearly for the item we purchased. Not even worth writing about now; I might as well move on to the incident that inspired the title of this post – thought I would throw an amusing Walmart story into my grab bag of

gripes...

I had to run to Walmart on New Year's Eve. Yes, New Year's Eve, the day when even our normally not-so-full rural Walmart is filled to the brim with people who can't wait to get where they're going to stuff themselves, get drunk or do both at the same time. The mood in Walmart was festive, but I couldn't find a parking spot. I opted for one a mile away, especially because the weather decided it wanted to be more like May than December; it was in the 50s. I'm picking up some last minute New Year's goodies, and I notice that the mixed shelled nuts are on sale for only \$1 /pound. Cracking fresh nuts is one of my favorite ways to snack – hold comments on this please, this isn't Facebook, it's a mostly family-friendly blog ☐ – nuts are nutritious, one of the natural foods I believe the human body is meant to consume, plus I have a monster parrot that loves them. So I called Hubby, and he told me to buy 30 pounds. By the time I got done putting 30 pounds of nuts into sacks (still holding on the comments), my little boy had bitten through an orange I was going to buy (I put it back instead – haha, just kidding, I had to buy the dehydrated orange at the end of the trip), and I had fielded the same exact question from at least two different people: "What are you going to do with all those nuts?" I had some conversations about my parrot and my 4 kids, and then I had had enough and wanted out. Here's the funny part.

We returned to our friendly local Walmart on January 2, and my husband runs in and finds the same nuts for now only a quarter a pound!! I'm not going to think about how much money I could have saved, not going to do that; it's not the funny part. At a quarter a pound, they were out of the nuts, so my husband asked an employee if they had any more (wait, the 30 pounds I bought weren't enough?) to which he replied, "No, some lady came in here on New Year's Eve and bought most of them for all of her cats." My husband thinks that somehow my stories of us having a nut-eating pet parrot turned into Crazy Cat Lady Buys

Nuts among our local Walmart employees, and that's ok with me – I could be crazy cat lady. If only I weren't allergic to cats...

Happy holidays from me and Walmart!



10 Years, 1 Year

December 18 marks two anniversaries of immense personal loss – 10 years ago today, my father-in-law passed away from ALS. Though some memories are still painful, a decade of time has numbed the pain of his loss a little, and it's easier to focus on the good times we shared and the countless wonderful things he did for people during his lifetime. Albeit selfishly, I sometimes wish that Vince was here to meet his 7 wonderful grandchildren, to realize our family's growing relationship with God and our spiritual journey, and to see how far his son has come in life. I think he would be so proud. [More about December 18, 2000 was written here.](#)

December 18, 2009 – Last year, on the day that was 9 years to the day after Vince's passing, our family dog Charity passed away unexpectedly. She was almost 12 years old but in seemingly good health. She was fine in the morning, gone by

dinnertime. Not enough time has passed to heal the pain of her loss since she was like a child to us, but there is no reason to dwell on such melancholy topics here in the blog.

I'm thankful that I have a busy December 18 this year, that it's on a Saturday and that I don't have to spend it alone. I'm writing this ahead of time and scheduling it to post itself on December 18 automatically in hopes of maybe not realizing this day of personal infamy until it's over. Will the entire day pass without me thinking about Vince or Charity? Probably not, they and other loved ones lost hold a special place in my heart, and I think about them most every day, especially in December. But December 18 this year will have joy of its own as family comes from far away to celebrate the season. I look forward to making happy memories for December, especially for the 18th, which just happens to be exactly one week before Christmas, a day I'm really looking forward to celebrating this year more than ever. Losing Charity last year was an awful thing to happen just before Christmas time, just as it was even more terrible to lose a parent / grandparent in our family just before Christmas 10 years ago. But when I lost Charity, and I realized that I was more curious about God's plan for me than I was looking to be angry with Him, I knew that I was on my way to having a wonderful spiritual relationship with Him.

For that, I am very thankful, and it makes me want to celebrate this Christmas season for what it truly is: a celebration of the birth of Jesus and an acknowledgment of the glorious love that God has for us.

Nothing Worse...

Than having to care for sick kids when you are a sick parent. Ok, so there are plenty of worse things, but this is one of my least favorite things about daily life, getting sick at the same time as my kids. The hits just keep on coming – is it December or what? (in case you aren't aware, this is in reference to my family's annual dose of uncanny bad luck that seems to show its ugly face every December)

This time around, it's a nasty stomach virus, which means loads of extra laundry and some very crabby kids. The two little ones were up all night last night, and even though Hubby was the one who got up with them, I was still awakened all night, so neither of us got much sleep. Today was a take-it-easy day, and somehow I found the energy to get through it while being sick and on little sleep. I'm slightly concerned about the little ones being kept up all night again because it's the night of our oldest daughter's birthday party, and we have 8 screaming, shrieking 5th graders running around the house. But they seem to be having a blast (while us sickies keep our distance), and that's what matters. Now I just have to figure out how to talk them out of wanting to watch Twilight Eclipse, which in my opinion, does not seem appropriate for a bunch of 10 and 11 and one 6-year-old.

In a way it stinks getting sick on the weekend- there goes any chance we have of a fun family outing tomorrow, and I'm going to be really upset if I have to miss teaching my Sunday school class on Sunday morning – those 1st graders are adorable, and we have so much fun together every week; I really look forward to seeing them. But on the other hand, getting sick on the weekend means that Hubby doesn't have to worry about missing work, so that's a positive.

Well, here's to hoping that we are well soon and that there is some way that the rest of the family (2 left standing) does

not come down with this. I guess if there was a weekend in December for the whole family to come down sick, this was the best one. We have my daughter's birthday party, but nothing that involves travel like the weekends in the rest of the month.

Take care of yourself and your family in this, the lovely month of December!!

An Afternoon With The FBI

It seemed like something out of a movie, our visit to the local FBI office yesterday. Except that it wasn't a movie, and the office wasn't exactly local...

Let me back up. It's December, and don't you know, that seems to signal a yearly torrent of bad luck thrown our way. Shortly after turning the page on our calendar this month, we found out (among other things) that my husband's website (and our family's livelihood) had been attacked. And I don't mean a little harmless virus or an annoying spam attack – it's a DDoS – simply put, someone targeted this website, and essentially used thousands of computers around the world to overload this website and crash the server. It's enough of an incident to capture both the interest of the local media and the FBI, both of whom politely requested interviews yesterday. So we drove out to the city, found the government building that houses the FBI offices, walked inside and checked with the doorman who wanted to know who we were there to see.

"I have an appointment with Mr. X at the FBI (*name changed for privacy*)."

said my husband, and once it was confirmed that he was on the list, the doorman stated that he "would get us

up.” He led us to the elevator and punched in a special code – can’t just push the floor number for the FBI these days it seems. We got off the elevator and waited around for a few minutes, entertained by the FBI’s 10 Most Wanted posters. One in particular caught my husband’s eye. “Doesn’t that look like our neighbor?” He asked me, and I had to agree. I began to read the description and was surprised to see that it did seem to describe our neighbor – he’s into sports like golf and dirt-biking, and it’s strange because my husband and I would often notice the neighbor packing up his car for weekend trips and coming back, unloading things like helmets, golf clubs, and lots of other sporting equipment. Such is life when you don’t have kids, we thought, and I guess you should know that the reason we pay so much attention to this neighbor’s activities is because he happens to have a nasty cat that terrorizes our neighborhood. So while keeping tabs on [that darn cat](#), we’ve observed some of our ~~most-wanted~~ neighbor’s behavior. The kicker of this whole coincidence is that the Wanted-by-the-FBI guy was listed as possibly having bi-sexual tendencies, and that fits in with what we’ve seen about our neighbor as well. Don’t get me wrong, I don’t think it’s him, but it was an entertaining wait, to say the least.

So then an agent comes out of a door and asks if we’ve been helped. We said not yet and repeated the name of the agent we were there to see. We were led to a door, and there was a sophisticated series of security measures that the man went through to enter (not going to repeat them here on the internet out of respect for the security of the FBI – not that I even knew what he was doing anyway). In this small waiting area, there was a metal detector, which began to go crazy every time this guy went near it – I forgot to mention that he’s carrying 2 or 3 very large bags. He disappears behind a door, and the man we were supposed to meet with appears and introduces his assistant – a lady carrying a notepad, a pen, and oh yeah, I shouldn’t forget to mention the large gun she was packing tucked into the back of her skirt. What kind of

assistant is that?!?



Two of the most famous fictional FBI agents in pop culture history: Agents Mulder and Scully from the X-Files. Ok, so our agents were not Mulder and Scully, but I couldn't resist making the comparison.

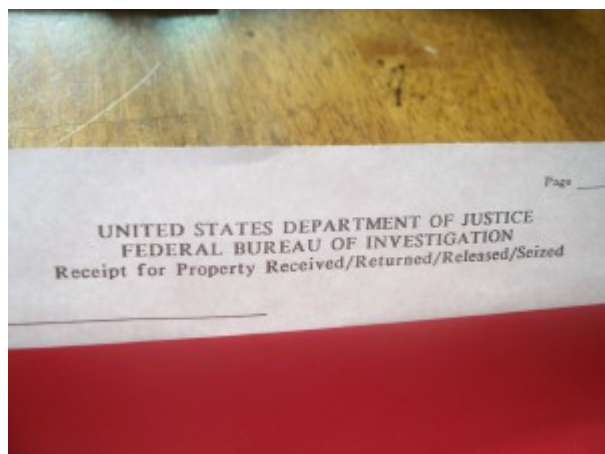
So we go into a conference room of sorts, and the interview begins. The agent and his assistant are not unfriendly, and they want to know the facts of the case. They are both taking notes, but probably most surprising to us is the absence of laptop computers – these FBI guys (from the cyber crimes division) are taking notes with pens on Steno pads, and that's not even a joke. But it is hilarious.

The entire day had a Men in Black-like feel... If you've seen the movie, then you remember the part where Will Smith is recruited to be a man in black – he goes to this bland looking government building that turns out to be very sci-fi on the inside with all the security measures and things like that. Such was the case here – lots of doors, signs about authorization, keypads, things like that, very sci-fi, and my husband told the agent so at the end of the interview. Mr. X seemed to chuckle (we wondered on the way home, are FBI agents trained to drain themselves of personality?), and he told us that we could just take the elevator back downstairs, no special code needed – thanks for the advice.

All in all, a very interesting trip. Made me want to do things like see Salt (a movie about the FBI) or read [Special Agent: My Life on the Front Lines as a Woman in the FBI](#)

again. Did the FBI interview do any good for my husband's business? We don't know yet. It depends if they catch the people who are doing it. The FBI disclaimed several times that it doesn't seem as if the damages the business has incurred will be recovered, and we of course are praying otherwise. Whatever happens, this is part of learning to trust God's plan for us, isn't it? Easier said than done. I'm really hoping that the stress on my husband dissipates soon...

And oh yeah, a little souvenir from the FBI (the property we gave them was received and not seized, in case you are wondering):



Mars, Venus, Whatever You Call It

It seems like men and women can be from different planets at times. During a series at youth group called "Lovesick", we were shown the following videos, and they illustrate the differences between the opposite sexes hilariously – Enjoy!

cartoonconversation-outtoeat.mp4

Back To Blogging

It seems like I haven't had the time to blog as much as I'd like to lately. Put it this way – Halloween ended over a week ago now, and I still have a draft sitting here detailing how my family spent what's probably our 2nd favorite holiday. I think I will quickly summarize and get it churned out next, hopefully.

One thing that's been taking up my blogging time is laundry. When the seasons change, my laundry responsibilities increase from about 3 loads per week to 6 or 7. That's because my family of 6 is now wearing pants instead of shorts or sundresses, many of us dress in layers in the fall which adds sweatshirts to the mix, and then there are the added number of blankies that the kids use when it turns cold outside. The good news of all this is that when spring turns to summer, I find myself with about half the laundry I've gotten used to doing in the winter – kind of a fall back, spring ahead-type thing for laundry, I guess. But more laundry folding and less blogging for me in the mean time.

And that reminds me, a funny thing happened at church yesterday. When my class got back to our classroom after large group, there were 2 new kids sitting there. I introduced myself, and we were just getting started when their dad came to the door, seemingly embarrassed and very apologetic as he asked for his kids back – turns out their family had forgotten to set their clocks back an hour, so they were actually there for the next service ☹

Our family remembered to change our clocks, but we didn't get

to appreciate the extra hour of sleep it was supposed to bring – kids have biological clocks, they wake up at the same time every day regardless of what the clock says or what time zone they are in. This is especially good advice if you're going to travel with kids across time zones – don't fool yourself into thinking that your kids will adjust to the local time when you travel, or you could be in for a not-so-pleasant surprise. My wonderful, thoughtful husband is always the one who gets up early with the kids, but I had to be at church at 8:30 yesterday. Also, I was up all night with a killer headache – now that was strange.



I am very lucky to be able to say that I very rarely get headaches. If I don't get enough sleep, I will have a dull ringing in my head, but nothing like Saturday night's doozy that was actually waking me up throughout the night. Luckily it went away (with help) before I arrived in my classroom full of 1st graders. But I have to wonder about the cause of this colossal headache – could it perhaps be some kind of weird virus that had me laid up all weekend? Saturday I was knocked flat on my back by a sudden and severe mysterious back pain. It began on Friday, when I decided to take my kids to the zoo since they had a day off school. By the time we were ready to leave, I couldn't bend over and had to ask for help to tie my shoes. I thought maybe it was a pulled muscle or something, maybe a cramp that would work itself out – I couldn't remember injuring it. But I did not enjoy myself nearly as much as I usually do at the zoo ☐ And

thank goodness Hubby decided to come with or I don't know how I would have been able to handle 5 kids (my daughter's friend came along) by myself without hardly being able to bend or move right. When we got home, Hubby had some work to catch up on, and I fell asleep on the couch while waiting for him – something I haven't done for ages which makes me realize that I didn't feel too well on Friday. Then Saturday dawns, and I can't get out of bed because of the extreme pain every time I tried to bend. So I stayed in bed until 1:30 – played my cards right and got lunch in bed too ☐ – when we absolutely had to leave to meet our youth group kids for a service project. I got the easy job – waiting for the kids who were late – while the others raked leaves and picked up litter, and while I took it easy, my back started to feel better. But then came the headache which was to plague me all night. What makes me think this is a virus is because of all the stuff going around lately, plus the fact that my sister had this same exact sudden backache a few weeks ago – could it be a contagious 'backache virus'? I owed my parents an email, but I couldn't get in front of the computer with my sore back, so I called them from bed Saturday morning, and that's how I found out about my sister. Anyway, my point is, it was a busy weekend, but also one where I couldn't get to my computer even if I had had the time, hence the slow pace of the blogging.



And speaking of things going around... my parakeet JJ is feeling much better. He's even chirping again!! He hasn't lost his balance while sitting on his perch in days, and his physical appearance is starting to

look healthier. The lady at the pet store said that if a little bird is fluffed up and at the bottom of his cage like JJ was that it's almost always too late to save them, so I feel really great that my little guy seems to have another chance. I guess I should have bought this really cool looking toy I saw the other day, but my husband and I have a policy that we try not to buy anything unless we have an immediate use for it. This thing was a \$10 cabinet – you install it in your living room or somewhere; it's a nice looking wood cabinet, and it opens into a little play yard for small birds. Ugh, just writing about it makes me want it, but the store was an hour away, and JJ is a cage bird – I don't know that he would come out to play in a play yard. I think of him as so fragile, so it would be difficult for me to make him come out; I sure wouldn't want him to get sick again.

Well, anyway, I've rambled enough – guess I just wanted to share my relief at getting well and of being able to blog again. Until that overdue Halloween post...

Soul Mates

I just love it when our pastor's sermons speak to me, which is actually quite often as he is a powerful speaker. A few weeks ago, he was speaking of the relationship between Paul and Timothy, and the discussion that followed was of kindred spirits and soul mates.

This sermon made me think of my husband – we've always known we were made for each other. And that leads to a funny story: just a few days before we heard this sermon in church, I was at the library looking for a movie to pick out for Hubby and I to watch that night. My eyes fell upon UHF, a goofy late 80s

comedy starring Weird Al Yankovic. I thought to myself, “He won’t want to watch that.” and I passed it up. Later that night as we were picking a movie to watch, my husband says, “I feel like watching UHF, but we don’t have it.” I could not stop laughing as I told him about how I thought of him in the library that day, and we had a good laugh together. He had seen UHF years ago but not since and never with me (I had never seen it). It’s not like it was one of his favorite movies or one he often felt like watching, and we had probably never even discussed it together. Yet of all the movies just to randomly pop into our heads that day, we shared a random thought that was UHF. ☐

Love You Honey



Recycling Is Important...

Especially when you are this cute – my two youngest helped carry in the recycling bin on garbage day, chanting “Teamwork, teamwork” all the way! Awww!!

