

Small World

Well, we missed our yearly trip to Disney World this year, so it feels like ages since I've been on the Small World ride. That isn't what this post is about anyway.

13 years ago when we started dating, I met my future husband's mother, father, and grandmother for the first time at his grandmother's house. She lived beside a lake, and I have fond memories of walking their new 8-week-old adorable Cocker Spaniel puppy Murphy around the lake with my new boyfriend, with whom I had already fallen in love. A few years later, we were married, and my father-in-law was tragically diagnosed with ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease). The disease is awful; one's mind remains intact while muscles in their body begin to fail. My father-in-law was soon confined to a wheelchair, and one day while his caretaker was taking him for a walk, his beloved Murphy ran into the street and was hit by a car while my father-in-law was forced to watch, completely helpless. Murphy was taken to the vet, and miraculously, she had no major injuries.

After my father-in-law passed away, one of the tough decisions we had to make was what to do with Murphy. My mother-in-law worked all the time and didn't feel it was fair for Murphy to be alone much of the time; she thought my husband and I should take her. I would normally do my best to take in an animal in need, especially a dog as sweet as Murphy and especially back then when I had only one child. But at the time, there was so much going on that it was impossible. I will spare many details, but among other things, we had a new baby, there was a crisis with our business, and we knew we would have to be moving in the near future – it's difficult to find an apartment (especially in the Chicago area where we lived at the time) with the pets we had – one dog and one cat – let alone with adding another dog to the mix. So it broke my heart because I knew my father-in-law would have wanted Murphy

to stay with us, but I said no.

We did our best to find her a good home; we spread the word, and my mom put up fliers at the school where she worked – someone heard about the story of Murphy's "dad" and was interested. So she took her home, and months later, we heard that she had been made a part of their family; even getting her own professional Christmas pictures taken.

All was well, 10 years passed, and from time to time, my husband and I would think about Murphy. The woman at my mom's work moved on to another job just a year or so after taking Murphy, and they fell out of touch, so we often wondered what became of them. It had seemed like we had made the right choice and that Murphy had found her family, but you just never know...

And then today I got this email from my mom:

Hi Lisa,

Thought you would want to know....Murphy (Vince's dog) passed away last week. She was with the same family all this time. They are very broken up as she became part of their family. The way I found out....their son came in to school for a conference on his 6th grade daughter. Small world.

Love, Mom

Of course I am sad to hear that Murphy passed away, but I am also relieved to know that she was part of someone's family all this time. It's a relief to know that her getting hit by that car didn't have an impact on her long-term health. I have closure knowing that she lived a long and happy life, and I can finally say that I know we made the right decision all those years ago. I think Vince would have understood and been happy about Murphy's new family.

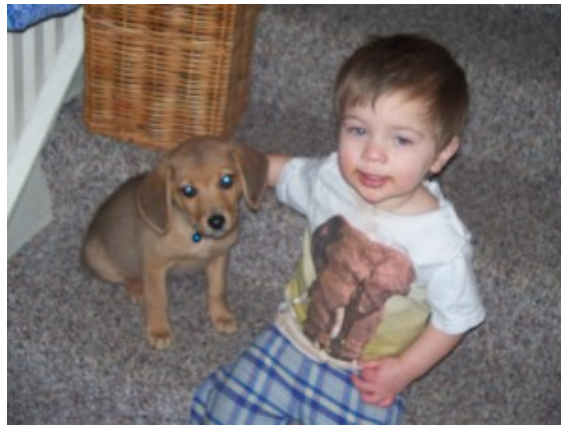
Polly DOES Want A Cracker

I used to think that parrots had a secret pact to make fun of the many asinine humans who idiotically blurt, “Polly want a cracker?” every time they spot one of the beautiful birds. I’m not sure from where the custom originated, but I always thought it was a stupid, albeit irresistible, thing to say to a bird. But that sentiment changed last week when I actually offered our Scarlet Macaw a saltine cracker – he acted like it was the best thing he ever ate! He even learned the word “cracker” and was uttering it by the end of the day. And come to think of it, they have a Scarlet Macaw at a local pet store, and one of her favorite words is also “cracker”. So next time you see a big bird and you feel the temptation to say, “Polly want a cracker?” be prepared to fulfill what that bird probably considers a promise!

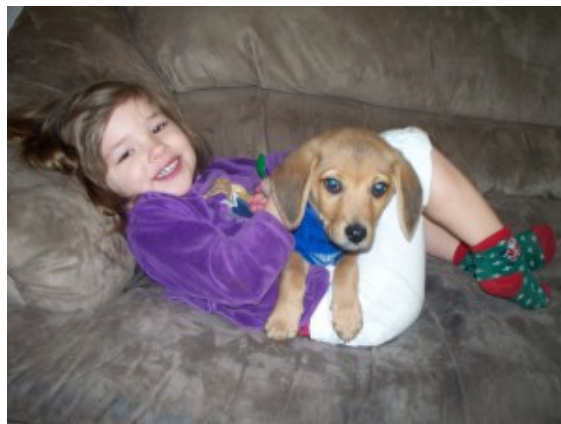
Just for fun, here is the earliest known reference to “Polly want a cracker” from 1937 – I dig how the mom parrot is a housewife complete with apron – clearly before the feminist movement ☐

Cutest Puppy In The World

After almost a week of having our new puppy, I finally got him to hold still long enough for some adorable pictures – enjoy!



Gizmo will follow me up the stairs, but then he gets overwhelmed and can't go up or down! My 19-month-old son gave him a hug to comfort him; how cute is that?!?



This is Gizmo and my daughter Disney - our friend gave us a cute

little blue sweater for him, so now he doesn't shiver quite so much when he goes outside!



He wants so badly to be able to jump up on the couch, but he's not big enough yet. Won't be long; we can notice that he is growing bigger EVERY single day!!

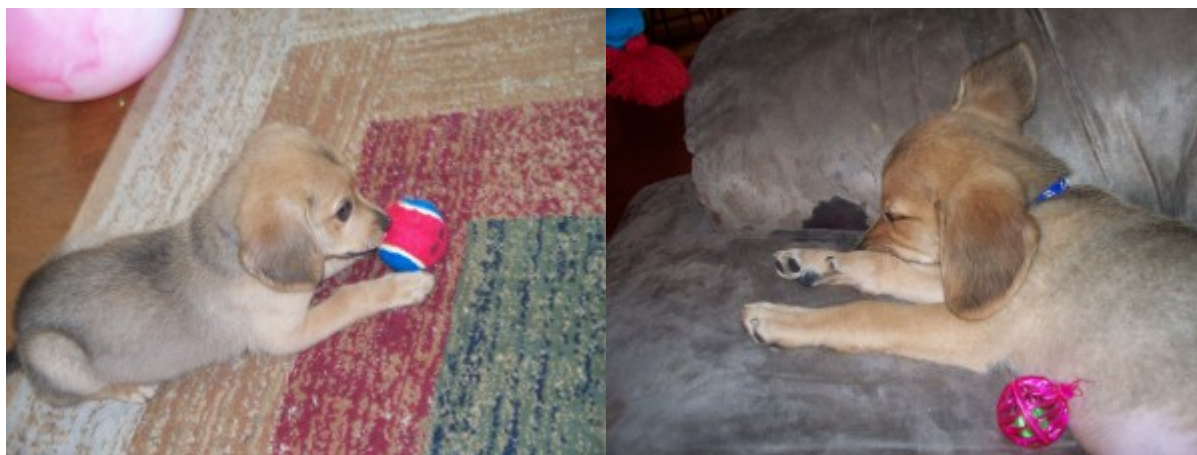
Introducing: ?

We don't know yet! We have a new addition to our family, but he doesn't have a name yet! It's hard for a family of 6 to all agree on the same name for a new puppy...

As you probably know, our beloved almost 12-year-old dog passed away a week before Christmas. If you know our family and how much we love animals, then it should come as no surprise to you that we are again a 2-dog household. It all started a few Saturdays ago when we decided to take the kids

to the Humane Society, "just for fun". Yeah, right – I should have known better! How could I possibly think we'd be able to resist giving a cute homeless pet a loving home? We couldn't. We found a lab mix we all loved, and we went to lunch, talked it over, and decided to turn in an application. But another family turned in an application five minutes before us for the same dog! They said they would look over the apps and call us either Monday or Tuesday either way. Well, the entire week went by, and my husband called them every day because we had 3 anxious kids! Disney (who's 3) kept asking if we were going to take the 'vanilla dog' home; it was so cute! Finally they called on Friday to tell us that the dog had been adopted. We were disappointed but also kind of expecting it since we knew that another family wanted him. But that did it – now we officially wanted another dog. So Saturday on the way to the zoo, we stopped by another humane society and found another dog we really liked – she was a very unique looking dog, a black Lab / Basset Hound mix. She had the long, stocky body of a basset, complete with long ears, but she was all black like a lab – adorable. We didn't have our checkbook with us, so we had to come back Sunday to put down a deposit. When we came back Sunday, the dog got so excited that she nipped my husband on the mouth – twice. Uh, oh. Can't do nipping on the face with 4 small kids, whether it was intentional or not, so we were back to square one. When we were there on Saturday, we had seen people come in with 2 teeny tiny puppies, so we decided to have a look. I was going to have to housebreak the Lab/Basset, so I figured if I was going to have to housebreak a dog, it might as well be a teeny tiny adorable puppy, right? Never mind that I'm potty training a 3-year-old, have a toddler to chase around, and two other kids to get to school. My days are so hectic, why not add to the chaos?

So here he is, how cute is this puppy?!?



He's a beagle / shepherd mix about 8 weeks old, and yes, he is as sweet as he looks! He just adores our dog Beesly, but she's not sure what to think yet – eventually they'll be friends I'm sure. Squawky the parrot was intrigued with him too, mostly because he has a little bell on his collar so we know where he is. The kids like the names Johnny and Buddy, but we're not taken with either of those. We liked the name Gizmo, especially because the kids have been into watching Gremlins lately, but the kids don't like the name. My husband and I also think the name "Hank Markdukas" is really cute – it's a reference to the movie I Love You Man. It's a funny movie, not one of our favorites or anything, but there is a funny running joke in the movie about a Hank Markdukas. We also like the name Michael Scott after the main character on our favorite show, The Office, but of course the kids aren't thrilled about any of those names. This sounds like a good poll...

[poll id="15"]

The bottom line is, our cute little guy needs a name before he starts answering to "puppy". Yesterday I was feeling overwhelmed by the prospect of adding a puppy to my already hectic lifestyle, but it went well today, and he is incredibly adorable! I love to snuggle him; he is so soft and sweet. And the responsibility involved with him is different than the kids; there is much more instant gratification. Kids whine, cry, yell and fight, while puppies wiggle and snuggle. I love

our new puppy! That reminds me of an Alan Jackson song – “I’m in love with you baby, and I don’t even know your name”!

Patience

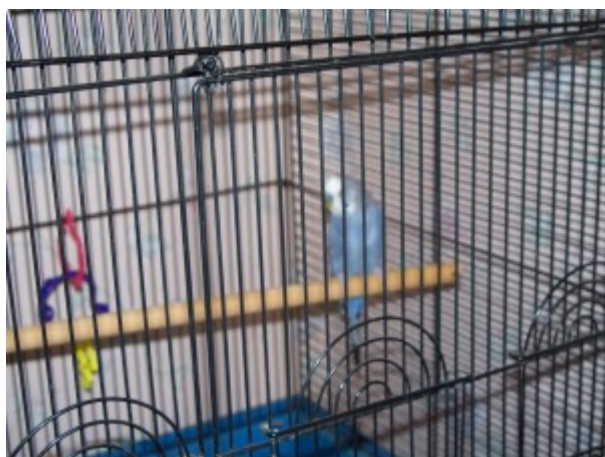
Our new bird is so cute! Not having parakeets for years has made me forget how pleasant they are to have around. JJ chirps and sings, and even when he’s quiet, he’s adorable to look at. My husband (who is not known for his patience anyway) mentioned the other day that he’s having trouble with his temptations to reach into the cage and grab the bird to play with him. It’s partly his impatience, and it’s partly because he’s used to just reaching out and grabbing his obnoxious parrot. But my husband knows that if he is disruptive to the training process I’ve chosen for JJ, there will be big trouble!

I’m having trouble being patient too, but I understand how innately nervous parakeets are. Once you build their trust, they can make wonderful interactive pets – but the key is taking it slow and being consistent. As much as I want to cuddle my baby bird, I can respect his need for space right now too. But try telling that to my excited kids. The older ones (ages 10, 5 and 3) are ok about it; for the most part, they’re content to just stand there watching JJ and talking to him. But my 18 month old toddler is another story. He is fond of banging on metal cages because that’s what makes the most noise, and the rats don’t really mind. My poor little baby bird, on the other hand... We usually shut the door to our bedroom since that’s where JJ lives, but the other day, we forgot. I figured shutting the gate at the bottom of the stairs would keep the dog away from our bedroom, but kids opened the gate. While the dog was fine (I don’t think she

even realizes there is another bird in the house), I found little Beeber (that was our then-2-year-old's nickname for her baby brother) next to JJ's cage, and he hasn't been the same since. He still chirps and acts happy, but he now tries to fly around the cage whenever I come near – he used to let me put my finger right up next to him... He was doing so well with the training, we were bound to take a step backward. I still have confidence that I can train JJ to be a nice family bird, or at the very least, a little buddy bird for me. We just need to have a little patience.

Introducing... JJ!

As you might have read in an earlier blog post, I received a pet store gift certificate for Christmas from my husband. Today I spent it – I picked out the newest member of our family – JJ the parakeet!



When you adopt a pet parakeet from a pet store, the workers have to barge into the cage full of parakeets with a towel on their hand to grab your bird, and then they put it in a cardboard box for the ride home. This might sound like a mean thing to do, but in my experience (this is my fifth pet

parakeet), the bird recovers very quickly; I wouldn't even use the word recover really; they always seem just fine. And JJ handled his transition like a pro! He actually seemed immediately happy in his cage! I put my finger in there, and he let me almost touch him, just a few hours after he got home! He didn't back away or anything! I am so excited to become friends with this little guy; he is so cute! It's been about 15 years since I've had a pet parakeet, and I've forgotten about how they just exude happiness! Already JJ moves his beak like he's trying to talk and responds to my voice. Hopefully I will make the time to train this little guy to be the little buddy I've always wanted in a bird – I get jealous of my husband's relationship with his parrot. Wait, that doesn't sound quite how I meant to say it...

There's a fine line between training a bird, earning trust, and scaring him off for good. JJ seems very patient and ready to learn, and so am I – but getting to spend time with him while there is a trouble-prone toddler toddling around will be my greatest challenge, I think.

Many people have fun parakeet stories; they really are pleasant little birds. My dad and my uncle had a parakeet when they were kids named Tippy who would walk on their kitchen table. They would hold a hand of playing cards, and Tippy would walk up, choose a card, and then carry it in his beak to the edge of the table, let it go and watch it float down to the floor. I've heard that many (male) parakeets can talk, and of course they will sit on your shoulder and be your best friend. So yeah, I'm excited about this bird, and it's a nice feeling – can't say there's been a lot of that lately. Even if he isn't easily trained (defying all early indications), I've already tremendously enjoyed just looking at him and absorbing his pleasantness, something I look forward to doing in days to come... feeling a contentment that I haven't felt for awhile...

Just for the heck of it, here is a timeline of my other pet

parakeets. I was a kid when I had them, so I don't remember dates or ages – each one lived for around 5-8 years, the usual parakeet lifespan. But it bugs the heck out of me that I can't remember which of my birds liked to ring his toy bell – Tippy, I think? I named him for my dad and uncle's childhood pet... The memories of the bell ringing bird have been replaced in my brain by the obscenely loud parrot we currently own who jangles his bell-shaped toy whenever he starts to get rowdy. Parakeets are actually in the same biological family as parrots and are in fact classified as parrots. So technically, we've gotten ourselves another parrot for our house, just what we needed, right? But Squawky, the scarlet macaw (loud a**hole) parrot belongs to my husband (or my husband belongs to Squawky, depends upon who you ask), and JJ is mine – this is important since birds “mate” for life – I'm so happy to have MY bird!

So here's that rundown of parakeets past:

Spunky – he was blue and fiesty, but we were really surprised when he she began to lay eggs!

Tweety – the only parakeet I had who was of the green / gold variety.

Tippy – named after my dad's childhood bird; he was light blue.

Goat – my sister found him flying loose outside around her work. They took him in, and when no one claimed him, I named him “Goat” in honor of my dream pet at that time. He was pretty tame for a “wild bird”!

J.J. – dark blue, almost a gray to violet hue. And why is he named J.J.? It's short for **J**ungle **J**ack Hanna, of course ☐

Our Poor Baby

One of my babies is sick. It's not one of the four children, thank goodness, but it's still someone who is a part of our family and means the world to us – our beloved almost 12-year-old dog Charity.



Charity has an aural hematoma, which is basically when a cavity within the ear fills with blood. It's very painful for the dog, and poor Charity has been slowly sauntering around the house in a daze; I can't stand it. The good news is that we have a vet appointment tomorrow, and the really bad news is that it will cost a minimum of \$150, more likely upwards of \$300-500 to fix. But how much money is too much to help our baby? We adopted Charity as a puppy 11 years ago before we had any kids, and she's been with our family through countless moves and other episodes in life, both good and bad. I guess we're all going to have to be a little patient while my husband picks up some extra work hours so we can pay the vet to fix all of her old dog ailments.

Please pray for Charity to get well. She is an older dog, and I can't stand the thought of putting her through surgery. I really hope she feels better soon! She's been sleeping all

the time, and there is no one to clean up all the food that the kids drop – the house is getting so messy! And believe it or not, I actually miss her constant barking... ☐

Supressing My Whim For Another Parrot...

Believe me, I am definitely not expressing that parrots are pets to get on a whim, not that any pets should be obtained on a whim. But I wouldn't really even recommend parrots, the loud and moody (however beautiful and insanely smart) creatures as pets, except to the perfect parrot owner – which might just be as rare as the gorgeous birds themselves. Due to a set of circumstances that transcribed long ago, we've found ourselves adapting to a be a parrot family. Years ago we adopted Squawky, as a needy unwanted baby, a Scarlet Macaw, who is now somewhere just older than 8 years old. He is finally starting to calm down just a tad, but he still makes me think of putting him in a more unused room of the house on an almost daily basis. That being said, it's time to share with you the video of a bird who re-kindled my childhood desire (not that I ever really lost it, but 4 kids and little sleep will certainly give one pause about adding any new pet to the family) to raise an African Grey Parrot – the type of parrot known more for their uncanny impressions and ability to reason than for their beautiful feathers. As a kid, I read a book that made me want the parrot in the first place. It is called *Harry's Mad* by Dick King-Smith (this author also wrote the story that the movie [The Water Horse](#)'s screenplay (good movie!!) is based upon), and it's a great read for young adults (and maybe regular adults too? Might be basic, but fun – haven't tried it as an adult). And as for the video that

made me again want an African Grey, despite the daily blows to my eardrums from the Scarlet Macaw? See for yourself; her name is Sylvia, and I especially love her Rhett Butler and Desi Arnaz impressions!

Faith

Well, we found a church home in March, and it's been going very well; we love it there. The month of August is filled with church opportunities for us – a few classes we're taking, a carnival for the kids, I'm volunteering in the Welcome Center, and we just went to a retreat at a beautiful Christian campground in Michigan yesterday. But this post is not about THAT type of faith – it's about a dog named Faith who was born with only a stub instead of front legs. They had to remove his stub, and his mommy and first owner rejected him. His new owner named him Faith and taught him to walk and get along without his front legs just fine. How cute is this?



Thanks to Elizabeth for sending this to me!

Furry Babies Sucks!!!

We began our trip to Chicago last Saturday, and the 3-state, 4-kid, mini-van trip went pretty smoothly. At some point, we achieved the quadruple-kid-pass-out which is never anything short of a great thing!

We arrived at our hotel in Naperville, Illinois on Saturday afternoon, and we decided to take the girls swimming in the outdoor pool which was really refreshing on an 80°+ day. It's been a long time since I've been swimming outdoors, and it was nice of my mom to meet us there for a swim instead of us driving the girls to her house for their week of fun with Grandma. After the girls left with her, we wanted to meet with a friend, but we were staying in the west 'burbs rather than the north 'burbs this time. Both parties had just endured long car rides, so we settled on a halfway point – a mall in the west 'burbs. Not really knowing what to plan on doing, we ended up finding such a great parking space at the mall that we just ended up going in to bumble. And it was fun! Partly because I haven't been in a real mall for years, so it was really interesting to see the different techniques that have evolved to try and entice shoppers to buy and visit... But I also enjoyed my mall visit because of the company we were keeping; it was nice to chat and catch up. And as you might have read in [derek's blog](#), we happened upon a glow-in-the-dark indoor mini-golf course that was less than a week old! It had 56 holes, but I don't think I could ever play that much mini-golf at once, so we stuck with the traditional 18 holes. I guess I should add in that I won the round and also had a lucky day with two holes-in-1 ☐ And I must comment on how good the baby was – he just sat in the shopping cart and watched the glow-in-the-dark golf balls

throughout ALL 18 holes! There were these small contraptions sprinkled throughout the golfing space – you put your ball in, and it rolls around and comes out glowing brighter – those were fun! And it was fun to see the mall again. It wasn't the same mall I hung out in all the time as a teenager, but I had still been to this one a lot growing up, and it was neat to see how much (or how little, compared to most things in the area) it had changed over the past decade and a half. That reminds me, speaking of change... when we arrived in Chicago, err Naperville on Saturday, we took the Naperville Road exit off of I-88 which is an area with which I am used to be very familiar. Back in the day (did I really just say that?), I would commute through that same intersection to work and back every single day, yuck... but apparently they've completely re-done the entire area in the past few years because the intersection was unrecognizable. I mean, they added new roads and everything – it was the most bizarre feeling, it felt like I had gotten dropped into the middle of the twilight zone. We exited I-88, and all of a sudden, we were on Freedom Drive. Where now? Freedom Drive? I had literally never heard of Freedom Drive, they created the street from scratch and plopped it down into this area where I worked and played so many years ago. As much as I thought I knew where we were going, Jill the GPS was actually quite helpful during this twilight zone adventure, and she got us to our hotel, even though I knew where it was – WAS being the key word here. But back to the mall... we bumbled around some more after getting some pretzel dogs (yummiier in Chicagoland, of course, what isn't?) at the food court. I heard some lady talking on a cell phone about the “puppy store”, and sure enough, we happened across it. I'm an animal lover, so I love to see and visit with animals, but I think a side effect of my tenderness toward animals is my loathing of pet stores. And the pet store in the Stratford Mall in Bloomingdale Illinois is just about the worst I've ever seen. It's no secret that many of the major chains of pet stores get their “wares” from puppy mills; ie dog breeding facilities with cramped quarters,

little food, and animal abuse. The huge chain famous for bad press, Petland, just closed a bunch of stores, which I believe is a good thing for dogs and dog lovers everywhere. I strongly believe that people should adopt animals, namely dogs and cats, from humane societies and other animal shelters. There are so many homeless pets, so how can it be justified to buy a puppy who is bred for selling when there are so many others bred accidentally who are also looking for love? I strongly support spay/neuter programs as well, fyi...

So anyway, the new pet store at the mall is called "Furry Babies". Their website calls it an "upscale puppy boutique, not just a pet store", but I call it disgusting. The puppies were in cribs, for goodness sakes, and along the walls they had a large variety of dog clothes for sale, no doubt at prices that I wouldn't pay to clothe my human kids. We inquired about one particular puppy, who was cute but looked to be slightly cross-eyed. We found out that she was a "designer dog" – they pretend like they meant to mix two breeds together (in this case a golden retriever and a poodle, thus giving us a "Goldendoodle"), but where I come from (the reality land of logic), we would call it a "mutt". And mutts tend to be better with kids, live longer, and are cheaper than purebreds – at least they were until a few years ago. Now mutts are these "designer dogs" and they cost **a lot** of money – in the case of the furry baby Goldendoodle – a cool \$1600. I cannot denounce this place loud enough! I also don't want to spend a ton of time going off about animal welfare nor lose readers by getting political. This just happens to be an issue I feel strongly about, and I plead that if you are in the market for a family pet, you consider adopting your animal companion from a shelter and also realize that you are entering into a life-long commitment! That being said, Furry Babies sucks, but the good news is that I can't see them lasting that long. Oh yeah, I forgot to mention that the employees wear mock scrubs, in order to imitate delivery room nurses, I guess, which to me is even more sickening. But there I go again... get me going and I will never stop... so if

you want to read more, [here is a link](#) to the forums about Furry Babies on the bestfriends.org website, which is an awesome organization – the country's largest animal sanctuary for homeless pets of all kinds! I hope to visit them someday in Utah, but until I get over my fear of flying I will just persue their website and I suggest you do the same...

Now that I'm actually leaving the homeless pet tangent behind... we left the mall at a decent hour since we wanted a good night's sleep to rest up for the Cubs / Sox game the following day – the entire reason we were in town to begin with. Poor us – that did not happen! We got back to the hotel (which was pretty crappy for a Naperville Hampton Inn – see my [Small Separate Side Post](#)), and the baby decided he was going to go nuts and stay up until midnight. Then the little booger awoke at 6 the next morning, and he crawled around and caused mischief like dipping my drying bathing suit into the toilet, thanks for THAT. My husband was nice enough to take him in the bath for awhile and do other various quiet activities with him in the small room so that I could get a little more sleep, and then we all went down to breakfast – my poor husband was a zombie. I decided for us (he could not make decisions at that point) that he would go back up to the room while I drove our son over to my mom's for the day while we went to the Cubs game. We did that, and it took me about an hour to get all the way out to Aurora (not much traffic on a Sunday morning, but S000 many stoplights!) and back. I thought we had plenty of time, but if you read my "A Patch of Blue In A Sea Of Black And White" post, you'll see why I should have stepped on the gas a little...