

Spooky, Great Fun In The City

Not one, not two, but **THREE** hauntings were on tap in the Windy City Friday night. It was soooooo cool... (so maybe not the hour long wait in the line that never moved that went on and on my friends) but even that did not damper my excitement.

First stop was the Ditka Dome for the [Haunted Mansion and Asylum](#). Our group of six was divided in half and Mare, Derek, and I went in second. This was more focused on the jump out and scare you approach... been there done that, but it was still fun. A 12' man on roller blades was interesting. As we made our way through, I was once again amazed that the inhabitants kept saying my name.

We then made our way to [Eleventh Hour](#) where we had VIP tickets. There were four attractions in one: a corn maze (nothing special), and a three segment haunted house. Even outside the haunted house, we were entertained by actors being pused in wheelchairs and a crazy British woman giving orders who was unwilling or unable to take a photo of another couple who braved the terror. The haunted house was really amazing, full of actual scenes in which the actors stayed in character the entire time. I enjoyed the "Sweeney Todd"esque character who greeted us with a history of the house. The stairs then lifted a la the Munster case without Spot the fire breathing dragon. Also inside was the much mentioned little screaming girl, a walk in freezer, a live rock band, a very disorienting maze, and an elevator of doom.

Our final stop was [Evil Intentions](#). The story line for this one had to do with an old coffin factory (if memory serves that was the actual location... was it not?) This was the spot for the dreaded wait of doom. When we finally got in, we were all placed in separate coffins before being led through the terror. A locker room separation, a crawl through vents (I was half expecting a creep to come at us), and by the middle

of the haunt, 4 of us had been led away leaving Chris and I by ourselves and eventually being required to sing a song to leave the haunt.

If I had to choose, I would say that Eleventh Hour was the scariest house of horrors because the whole thing was so elaborate that we all could tell that so much time had been put into the extravaganza. Evil Intentions minus the wait was very cool, too. And while not as memorable, I'm glad we went through the Haunted Mansion and Asylum. A frightfully good time with ghoulishly cool friends.

Overall, A Series-ly Wonderful Day

Ok... the big item. The Yankees are off to THE WORLD SERIES! After a bit of speculation about the pitching decision (I thought all along that Andy Pettite was the way to go since he as pitched in numerous big games and now has the most post-season wins of any pitcher). Once again, a great game and I was flabbergasted when the combo of Buck and McCarver began to be silenced when the Angels remarkably made two errors in a row. The quartet of players who were flying high in the late '90s (Captain Jeter, Pettite, Jorge Posada, and closer extraordinaire, MARIANO RIVERA) will be joined by second year skipper, Joe Girardi (who was also the catcher in the late 90s and now is the fourth person to play on a World Series Yankee team and later coach another to the series).

NOW, for even better news on a personal level (close but yes even better), I will be playing the role of the eeeeeevil Mr. Potter in the Village Players' production of *It's A Wonderful*

Life. Travis called me earlier and informed me that I need to put on my mean face. I love playing the villain. Can't wait to get started! And it is now projected to run 2 weekends (December 11-13 & 18-20).

GO YANKEES!!!! AND NOW I CAN TRY OUT THOSE ERASABLE HIGHLIGHTERS (I was hoping that it would not be a long wait).
BOOYAH!

More crockpot cooking

The original recipe I had called for 4 boneless chicken breasts, 1 bag frozen mixed vegetables, and 3/4 cup chicken broth, salt and pepper to taste. This could be served with potatoes or noodles. Always quick, easy and tasty, but way too much for one person. So I cut this down to try to serve 1.

I have a small crock pot to use for dip and other small recipes, so I set out to use this. I had 1 boneless chicken breast, enough vegetables for 1, chicken broth to just cover the chicken breast (just like in the big crock pot) and some red pepper flakes instead of salt and pepper. Cooked this for 3 hours on high, and served with mashed potatoes... I thought it was good. Not bad for a cool fall evening.

And this was a little healthier than my breakfast food cravings of just a little while ago. How often should one eat sausage gravy? ☐

What part did I have?

Our rehearsals have started for the WCCT's production of "Miracle on 34th Street". I started with a few male roles, since they were small roles and would be easily played by 1 actor. I started out with 4 such roles. Then 3 others were added, with lines from one or two being combined with one of the new parts. Today I was moved to a different role and lost another. Such is the way of community theater.

I'm just happy I get to keep the role I wanted. And I am again on stage with one of my daughters...

We do have a great Santa Clause with a real beard. In my opinion, our Santa is one of the best actors on our little stage. It is a pleasure to work with him again. A few other actors that I've been on stage with are also in the cast. And we also have many new people on stage. I always like seeing new people on stage. They are the way our theater grows.

I'll have to add a countdown the the opening. It should be a fun show...

In The Eleventh Hour, Evil Intentions In The Basement Of The Dead

As you may have read in my previous post, we took a trip to Illinois to visit with family and also tour the area's haunted houses. Well, I'm done whining about my painful mouth, so here's a run-down of the fun parts:

Got to visit with lots of family in the short time we were there. We had nice visits with one of my husband's father's only living blood relatives, his niece Lilly. Lilly is a really sweet person who has been going through a few tough life experiences lately. We don't get to see her often, so it was great to see her on Saturday. We hope to be able to get her out to Ohio for a visit soon! We stopped by my mother-in-law's house where we also got to see my husband's sister and her family. Our kids had a ball playing with each other; there are 7 of them altogether! After that, we also got to see where my Grandpa moved; it's a very nice place with a cute little main street area for visiting, complete with ice cream shop. We discussed the Chicago Bears (no comment as of the game's unfortunate status right now in the 2nd quarter – poor hubby!) with my grandpa and told my grandparents of things like the kids' awesome grades at school. Afterward, we had a really great 40th wedding anniversary for my parents at my sister's house. The kids had such a great time that they refused to leave – literally. My sister's family had to literally lock out my kids, which was slightly embarrassing, but mostly just a humorous result of their incredible come down from their awesomely fun weekend – also known as a fun-down.

The family stuff was Saturday, so Friday night we were lucky enough to be joined by 4 friends (3 all the way from Ohio!) for some haunted house fun! We went all over the 'burbs, with a goal to complete a huge square if you plotted our stops on a map. Because of an hour-long line in a cramped basement tunnel in Elgin, we did not make it to the Aurora stop, but we cajoled my mom (even though it was her anniversary party) into watching all 6 kids on Saturday so we (along with fellow tangenteer derek who made the drive south for the second consecutive night) could go to the haunted house with my sister and her husband, who hadn't been to a haunted house in probably about a decade – FUN! Here is a run-down / rating of the Illinois haunted houses – haven't made it to any Ohio

ones this year, don't know that there will be time for that!

[Haunted Mansion and Asylum 13](#) – Bolingbrook IL – Saving the best for last would mean the worst is first, right? This haunted house was definitely the worst of the lot. It had lots of actors, not much else. Average costumes, not much scenery, blasting music not relevant to the theme of the haunted house... the only noteworthy and the most enjoyable part of the entire thing were the live chickens in the 'crazy hicks' scene. Seeing [Drew Peterson's](#) house in Bolingbrook might have been creepier. **Grade: C-**

[Eleventh Hour](#) – Elk Grove Village IL – This haunted house is located at Berthold's, a family-owned plant nursery and is actually 4 attractions in one. The corn maze is small but succeeded in losing us, even if for a short time. The haunted house was actually a string of 3, but it wasn't really clear when one ended and another began. Eleventh Hour had some really cool haunted house concepts, along with the obligatory chainsaw guy and spinning tunnel to walk through. The scenery was REALLY cool, complete with (SPOILER ALERT!!!) moving staircase and refrigerator door that both actually became passages to walk through! And, they had a live zombie band performing in a separate room while we viewed them through little windows – now that is something I haven't seen in a haunted house before. A very cool haunted house, and without all the same old tiresome gore. Prize moment when an extremely creepy little girl made my husband scream like a... well, that seems like a mean thing to say about a guy who's been doing nothing but wonderful things to help out during my illness. It was hilarious, that's all I'm going to say.

Grade: B+

[Evil Intentions](#) – Elgin IL – This one also had a few very unique fright concepts, but they really need to work on the wait time – we waiting in a dingy narrow basement hallway for over an hour! After that, they separated our group of 3 guys and 3 girls into individuals and put us each into a casket!

Mary and I lucked out and got to share one since there were 6 in our group and only 5 caskets, but it was still terrifying knowing that they were probably going to do something sudden and scary to us in the casket. SPOILER ALERT! They pretended to show us a movie on a screen in the casket, but the screen went to colored bars and made the high-pitched beeping noise, which was creepy, but that's all that happened. They really should have lengthened the movie or banged on the casket or something, anything. This, like a few of the other concepts in this haunted house, really needs to be better developed in order to heighten the fear factor. You take a bunch of people and put them in a haunted house with only 5 caskets for them to queue thru, and of course you're going to have a huge long wait to get in. The makeup in here was average, there seemed to be a relatively low number of actors (all of whom seemed to have the same mannerism of getting right up in your face – how many times can that be scary?), and I would consider the scenery downright bare – they definitely could have highlighted the building's casket company history in the scenery as well as they did in their marketing. The guide ghouls are particularly fond of separating the groups of patrons, especially isolating the women from their men, a concept I sort of hated and also really enjoyed at the same time – it was weird. If I factor in the wait time for this one, you don't want to know the rating, so we'll just pretend I'm rating this as if I walked right in like I did in the previous two rated houses. **Grade (not including wait time): C+/B-** (hard to forget that awful wait time!)

[Basement of the Dead](#) – Aurora IL – Because we had to wait an hour for Elgin on Friday night, this one had closed and we didn't make it. But as I said earlier, my mom, dad, and uncle graciously agreed to watch the little ones so that us sisters, hubbies, and a friend could venture to downtown Aurora – a frightening experience in itself, haha. Seeing the line outside was daunting, and one character said the wait would be at least an hour. We were about to leave since my

brother-in-law had just come off a double work shift and hadn't slept in 36 hours, when intrigued by the totally awesome looking makeup on the characters wandering outside, my husband inquired about the wait time at the ticket window. We took the gamble, and it paid off when we were admitted after only about 15 minutes. During our stay in line, we were entertained by a few of the haunted house escapees; including a super-tall, slow moving dude who had a habit of very creepily and slowly inhaling the scents of patrons of his choosing. The guy's build kind of reminded me of an Ohio friend, but I won't mention who, even though I know he's not a reader of my blog. There was a KISS rocker meets clown guy who succeeded at making his makeup and mannerisms really creepy also, and a blank face guy (a nylon stocking on his face, I would guess?), and a guy who moved quickly through the bushes on all fours, kind of like an ape. When it was our turn to go in, the scary clown slob manning the door burped and blew it in my face which was not scary, just stupid and rude, and if I get his H1N1, I will consider a lawsuit. Kidding, but it was still gross. He made me go first into the haunted house. Whatever, I would just let my husband ahead of me when we got in the door anyway, except that when I got in the haunted house, they shut the door on me and someone came running up and told me to go through it alone. I flat out refused – I'm not going to PAY to do something I don't want to do, and they reluctantly let in the rest of our group. Sorry I foiled their plan, but I would not enjoy the experience alone; that's not really my thing. It was fun to see my sister and her husband in the haunted house since they hadn't been in one in years, but we quickly lost them in the dark mazes and didn't bother trying to find them. We figured they wanted to hang back and enjoy the startles they would get if they weren't so close to us. When we got back outside, we waited and waited, but two groups emerged before the rest of our group, and when they came out, my sister was white as a ghost. Hilarious, and I think they had fun – most people can benefit from venturing into a haunted house once in awhile,

especially parents who can go without their kids – it's nice to just have only yourself to worry about for a little bit ☐ The makeup in this one was stellar, best I've ever seen. Scenery was good, if a little dark for my taste since it was difficult to see some of the blood and guts. Also a few good animatronics and lots of blood and gore, which was actually a change of pace from the others we've seen this year. **Grade: A**

Outbreak

The flu season is upon us, and it's obvious. In our family, we are teetering between two outbreaks of illness. Last week, it was hand, foot, and mouth disease (not to be confused with its fear-provoking counterpart, foot and mouth disease, which is only found in animals). The kids had little bumps on their hands, and a general feeling of being unwell, known as malaise as I learned on the internet. This is an extremely common (in children anyway) viral illness that usually runs its course in most kids. When my mouth erupted in sores last week (it's like having 10-20 large canker sores at the same time), I was shocked because it's supposed to be very rare in adults. We contacted 3 different health professionals to make sure that our trip to Illinois could go on as scheduled, and they all assured us that if there was no fever, we were not contagious. We ventured across the state of Indiana, and I don't know if I was more fearful of what we were bringing with us or what we were going to take home, what with the many recent flus reported in Illinois and elsewhere, H1N1 and otherwise.

More on the really great parts of the trip in the next blog post – I need to get this out of my system so to speak, haha –

a sick post and a fun post. So for the sick part...

My husband woke up today feeling awful – the flu. My morning started pretty much like the past 2 or 3 mornings now – tremendous pain in my mouth, worse than the day before. One of my favorite things about visiting the Chicago area is the food – despite the city's drawbacks: the aggravating traffic, the inflated prices, CROWDS; Chicagoans do have a talent for their intolerance of crappy Sysco food – ie, Chicago food is fantastic! Last week, anticipating our upcoming trip, I remember thinking that it was only Wednesday, surely my mouth would heal by Friday so I could indulge in some of my favorite Chicago treats. But alas, Thursday's pain was worse than Wednesday's, and Friday's was worse than Thursday's. Actually, as I said before, it's gotten worse every day since it started. Somehow, I was miraculously able to enjoy my [Italian beef sandwich](#) Friday night, but pain-wise things just went downhill from there. We had a wonderful breakfast at the [Uptown Cafe in Arlington Heights](#), quite possibly the best breakfast restaurant *in the country*. They have the best eggs benedict I've ever had, but unfortunately I came very close to sinfully wasting my eggs benedict when I could not eat them (let alone carry on a conversation with relatives) without my eyes watering from the pain in my mouth. My little boy saved me from wasting half my order (I knew I should have gotten soup or at least a half order of eggs benedict, but I literally could not resist – we get to this place less than once a year!) – but my toddler ate *half* my eggs benedict – he is his father's son!

The weekend ended with my sister making us wonderful homemade lasagna, of which I had about 5 small very painful bites. I did not try any of the appetizers, the steamed vegetables, the salad, the garlic bread, or any of the desserts ☐

I also did not get my usual crave case of White Castle cheeseburgers to bring back to Ohio, although generous relatives supplied us with some Chicago beef for sandwiches,

homemade soup and Grammy's out-of-this-world homemade spaghetti sauce, all frozen and ready to be thawed as soon as I'm better! Talk about something to look forward to!!!

We ventured home at 2 am this morning, and arrived safely, however painful (and tiresome for my husband) the ride home. And a special thank you to Officer Friendly of the Ohio State Patrol, who did not issue even a warning for my husband's "hovering around 60 in a 55." I'm glad he seemed to take the 4 sleeping kids and the grumpy wife in the passenger seat into consideration – this police stop was completed very quickly and only blocks from our house.

This morning I awoke in a lot of pain, and it's gotten worse throughout the day. I think if it continues its trend and gets even worse tomorrow, I'm going to have my husband call the doctor to make an appointment. I am so thankful that my kids seem to be over it, and as horrible as it's been for me, I'm still happy I got the most of it in the family. I pray for my husband, and I'm really nervous about swine flu, but he seems to be feeling better, unless he's just putting on a braver face than I. This illness for me has been characterized by bouts of severe pain sandwiched between constant regular pain. In the past hour, twice that I've talked brought on the most severe bouts of pain and was enough to make me start typing on the computer and making my husband read it in order to communicate. Whatever works, it's amazing how easily the threat of tremendous pain can train a person to keep her mouth closed (like [Pavlov's dog](#)). My husband joked that it's the "shut-up disease". That brought a smile; it doesn't hurt to smile – just the talking, eating, drinking, and sleeping. And that reminds me, being in constant pain has made me an insomniac. I couldn't sleep in Illinois at our hotel and ended up listening to an hour-long Larry King interview with Suzanne Somers – even that did not put me to sleep. Did you know that Suzanne Somers never actually had cancer even though 4 different doctors told her

to get her affairs in order because they had mis-diagnosed her? That's a tangent that doesn't need to be taken...

Well, anyway, that's enough from me for now. Sorry about the rambling, but this really sucks, and typing is my voice right now. Hubby is watching the Bears game, so it'd just be rude of me to constantly interrupt by making him read my ramblings. I wish I could take care of my husband while he's sick, but for now we're helping each other. Let's really hope this gets better – if I have to go to the doctor, I can't tell them what's wrong with me because I can't talk, and I don't really want to bring my family with me to the doctor's – who knows what else we could get?!? I guess I'd have to write a note, but I feel kind of silly...

A real Halloween horror treat tonight would be for us to watch the movie [Outbreak](#) – now that's just TOO scary!!!

At least we have a good part of a week to whip these things and get ready for fun Halloween activities abound next weekend! Super-fun blog post about the awesome parts of the Illinois trip – including haunted house ratings! – to follow this depressing post, I promise!

Highway Tuneage

Our two day Chicagoland adventure began yesterday around 1PM when Mare and I hopped onto the 'pike and headed west. It was amazing to me how fast we flew there. We arrived at our hotel around 3PM (according to my chauffeur's cell phone time... she did not realize that her device automatically accounted for the change in time zones).

Our journey was seemingly made even more quickly with our

listening variety. I brought along my *Carousel* Score. Mary I believe said that she played the part of Cousin Nettie Flower in a production of one of my favorite musicals back in the early part of the decade. REALLY! WHERE WAS I when they staged it?! Then, we popped in some Josh Groban and by that time we were very close. So.... we let "Vera" guide us the rest of the way. Little to no traffic. Surprisingly, very little construction on our side of the highway. A very fun, easy trip.

Coming back, Megan joined us on the return trip. We made a slight detour to South Bend and took a drive-by tour of the perimeter of Notre Dame. Since it was rather rainy and a home football game, a more close up tour was out of the question. We did get a glimpse of the golden dome and Touchdown Jesus. Very fun!

One of the most interesting music selections in Mare's catalog was a CD of [Beatles](#) hits recorded by some interesting actors. Imagine Robin Williams and Jim Carey giving voice to "Come Together" and "I am the Walrus". There were lots of very interesting Beatles classics including a strangely bluesy rendition of "Hard Day's Night" by an even more interesting actress choice who none of us could figure out was Goldie Hawn. But no recording of the classic William Shatner take on "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds." A very fun if at times a bit strange tribute.

All in all, a very fun trip on the road. Stay tuned for my take on the big fun in the city.

The final selection on the Beatles tribute was by the best Bond that seemed a bit odd because he stated his dislike of the Fab Four in *Goldfinger*.

Westward, H0!

OK... Mare and I will soon be on our way to the state of ILL in America Country. I have Vera loaded up with directions along with mapquest printed directions, hotel check in sheet, and printed tickets (Justin Case), and cell phone. Mare had to work last night and just called and told me she would be here soon! WHHO HHH0000!

Last night's audition went well. I listed all the male roles I could think of (the adult ones, anyway). I still think I could pass as one of the Bailey children. I did forget another role, that of Mr. Martini who is an Italian immigrant who has a traveled to America with his a wife. That a could a be fun!

Lots of people came out. LOTS of kids. Squirmy and his daughter came up and he read well. But Jade... OMG... if ever there was a heartwarming, scene stealer... I think it would be very hard to find a more adorable Zuzu. Results Sunday night. Read-through hopefully next Thursday.

If You Are A Happy Green Grape And You Know It

This morning, after she got out of preschool, my four-year old niece brought home a song to sing called "I Wish I Were A Juicy Green Grape." Sydney ran to me and asked me to sing it.

It is set to the tune of "If You're Happy And You Know It." Really, the exercise in song parody was not an easy one. My dad kept trying and sounded like he was singing The Oscar Meyer weiner song. See if you can make the melody fit the

words”

OH, I wish I were a juicy green grape.

OH, I wish I were a juicy green grape.

When squeeze me

I will squirty

Onto everyone’s shirty

Oh, I wish I were a juicy green grape.

Of course, this presupposes that you know the tune and words of “If You’re Happy and You Know It.” In elementary school, I remember having such an exercise in which I came up with a parody of “White Christmas” entitled “(I’m Dreaming of a) Cheese Pizza.” How adorable.

Partially immersed

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If the characters above got rendered properly in your browser you should see Japanese writing. The proper response for me would be, say what? Of course, if I knew what that said the real response should be:

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Sorry, I guess you probably don’t know Japanese either. The first question was, “Do you speak Japanese?” The response was, “No, I do not speak Japanese.” When encountering a Spanish-speaking classroom, I always start with, “No hablo español, solamente inglés.” (I don’t speak Spanish, only English). It’s fun to see the kids’ reaction, especially if I add a little bit more from my severely limited Spanish

vocabulary. With Japanese, I can't even begin. Three times in the space of two weeks I found myself in dual language classrooms- twice for Japanese, once for Spanish. What kind of class is this you may ask? I will answer. Once upon a time the way to teach kids a foreign language was to offer it as an elective in high school. Then, someone learned that the best time to learn new languages was as a young child, so they added the classes to the junior high curriculum (in some cases making kids take five different ones in sixth grade!). This trickled down to intermediate grades with one language twice a week like gym. Still not happy, the powers-that-be started dual-language classes allowing children as young as six to start learning a different language, and that is where we are today. In such a class, the younger grades slowly learn the language, and then they start instructing in that language as they get older for a sort of immersion experience. In the Japanese class, this means that for the entire afternoon teachers and students use only Japanese. The teaching assistant took over this duty of course since I would be unable to converse in or even understand Japanese. It was an experience not unlike working in a deaf classroom as I have done before, but knowing that I could converse with the students in English when necessary. This was sixth grade, so they were on their sixth year of this. They seemed pretty proficient to me- having read Japanese books for starters and giving a book report in Japanese. When it came time for me to instruct, however, we all went back to English.

The Spanish class was 4th grade, so they weren't as proficient in their second language as 6th grade was in theirs. There were no book reports or the like in Spanish, though of course it could have just been the day. When trying to read the Spanish social studies book, it became clear many did not understand very well. Unfortunately I did not have a Spanish-speaking assistant at this time as I did for Japanese. When math time rolled around, the Spanish-speaking assistant finally arrived and I expected she might take over for a bit, but she didn't so we did the subject in English as I could do little more than the numbers and operations in Spanish. As it turned out it was probably a good thing we did it in English as they had a difficult enough time with the topic in their primary language.

So what's next, dual language French? Italian? I guess I may find out. It's odd that this is the first year I have been in this sort of classroom in all my years of subbing. Bilingual and regular foreign language classes yes, but not dual-language. This may mean then that the chances of doing it again are somewhat remote, so we'll see.