

Work And Fun On The 4th

As with last year, I had to work on Independence Day. I usually flip-flop Fridays and Saturdays with a co-worker. This was SUPPOSED to be my Saturday off so I did not feel the need to ask for it off. Sure enough, I was informed that I was going to be closing. Funny thing is, I was told that the worker I alternate days with told the boss that it was indeed her Saturday off...hmmm. When I got to work, I was delighted to discover that we were closing at 7 instead of the 8PM I was scheduled until. However by the time 6PM rolled around, my co-worker and I agreed that we should have closed then. At 6:45, one of our regular customers came in and grabbed a cart. At 7, I locked the door and we waited in the office until the couple was finished.

After finally getting out of the store, I ventured to pick up some friends to check out some AMAZING fireworks. Getting to the site was a great adventure. I was armed with my mapquest directions and Megan had "Vera" with her, so we were sure to arrive with little problems. Before getting out of town, the adventure began. I misjudged the city limits and began to accelerate maybe a mile before acceptable. We did see the state patrolman as we made our way along. He pulled out of his parking location, began to follow us, and I don't know why it took soooo long but he turned on his lights and pulled us over. Megan had brought along some beverages but we were all of legal age and none were open, so we were safe there. The officer asked why I was going so fast and I "innocently" explained that I was not sure where the limits were. We were mere feet from it. However, the generous officer asked when my last violation was (about three years ago) and he sent us on our way.

As we approached our destination, my companions informed me that they had to visit the facilities and to stop at the next available location. We passed a rest area and then came up to

a nice, clean port-a-potty (thankfully, there were no planes in the area in danger of crashing into it). OOPS... did I say that I would not mention this?

After we finally found our friends (which was not too far from the location at which we found the restroom. We watched some GREAT fireworks. I saw something I don't believe I have before. Some began as if a machine gun was being fired, rapidly spurting out in a back-and-forth motion. Really cool.

Around 2AM, it was time to drive back. Coming home was an adventure as well as some fog had developed (pretty thick in spots) but I don't think it added a great deal to our return trip. So about 3.30, I got to bed in preparation for work at 9. But definitely worth a few hours lost.

Hope everyone had a fun and safe holiday weekend.

I'm Still Alive!

Don't count me out! I know I haven't been blogging as much as I used to; it's because I've been all over the place this summer! I am just swamped, but in a great way! The girls were with their Grandma for the past week, so I used the opportunity to finish up some old blog drafts and post them. I haven't really had the chance to sit down and write up my many recent adventures, so hopefully time will allow for that in the next few weeks – it's been totally awesome, and I can't wait to share everything with you! But until I have time for more blogging, please bear with me and check back often for updates! I hope everyone had an awesome 4th of July weekend – happy birthday America! THANKS FOR READING!

Secrets Of Traveling With Kids

I'm smack dab in the middle (of the beginning) of raising 4 kids of all different (under 10) ages, and also their friends are around a lot, so we are constantly surrounded by young-uns! Of my many observations and trials and errors in trying to keep them all simultaneously calm and content, I have discovered a few secrets, *golden* secrets – so considered because of their miraculous success rates, at least in the under 10 set. Give me a few years (especially when the kids reach their teens), and I may have enough golden kid-contenting secrets to write a book, let's hope I learn some more anyway...

1. If you trace the roots of every kid tantrum and meltdown, you will find that most are derived from feelings of hunger, followed closely by fatigue and thirst; the latter two can be interchanged, it depends upon the kid. But the #1 reason is usually hunger. Keeping small, energy-boosting (and likable!) snacks on hand at all times can do wonders for the mood of the group.

2. Never underestimate the power of blankie. I keep those really thin blankies in my car – the ones they give you at the hospital when you're having a baby. They fold up so small, it's really not a big deal for me to keep a bag with 4 of them (1 per kid is important!) folded up and stashed under the front passenger seat. When we are returning home on a long drive or even when we're in the middle of a long day out, a sleepy (and full-stomached, see hint #1) kid can often be comforted and most often put to sleep by a blankie. Even the thin ones work like a miracle; I've seen it work for multiple

ages, genders, and personalities. It's difficult for me to get used to, but I keep offering my son little stuffed animals to play with. I had 3 girl babies before him, and they all loved stuffed animals. My son could care less, unless the stuffed animal still has its tag for him to rip off. But the blankie secret is effective even with him – he'll pull it up against his cheek and instantly get sleepy! If you don't have enough of the hospital blankies for each kid (and it's important they each have their own), I highly suggest you purchase other thin blankies for the car since they're inexpensive, especially when you consider how helpful they are. They come in packs of 4 or 5 for under \$10, I think... A key to helping this secret be effective is to make sure **you** retain control of the blankies – don't let the kids keep them in the back of the van or like anything else, the novelty will wear off, rendering the blankie ineffective. My kids know that the car blankies are just for “blankie emergencies”, and that policy helps to make sure I can keep them somewhat clean and stashed and ready for use.

So just remember, snacks and blankies can usually get you out of most kid-pinches, sometimes even calming kids who pinch, ha. At the very least, if you find yourself in charge of some crazy kids, plan ahead and do some light packing – these hints will buy you some time to think of a better plan!

Talking maps

After the wonderful drive back from Florida, I went out and purchased a GPS system. My good friends take theirs with them everywhere they go (just about) and use it to find hotels, restaurants, and other fun places. Further adventures with “Jill” can be found [here](#). I haven't used mine long enough yet

for the voice to be accepted, but right now she is called Samantha. That's the name the voice came with, but I do find it slightly annoying (the voice, not the name).

My daughter and son-in-law (one of three pairs, take your guess), took me to a place called [The Blarney](#). It was a great little place. I'm not sure how authentic it keeps to real pubs in Ireland, but it was a fun time. I had hoped my talking map would get me there, but we didn't have the address, and it wasn't in the restaurant list, we made our best guess. Lucky for us there was no ball game, the Blarney is just a short walk away from the Mudhens stadium. This is going to be on my list of places to go. I'm not a bar scene person but this was a lot of fun. The Bangers and Mash was fantastic. I have to add this place to my talking map.

I'm hoping I can find some downloads for places like this on the GPS site. I'm wondering now if there are other Irish or English pubs in the area. Or maybe a coffee shop or two? Other places I may want to see. Who knows.

The funny thing is, I picked the GPS up because I wanted to make a side trip on my way back from Florida. I didn't have a map, and I didn't use Google Maps or Mapquest to plan my trip back. By the time I got an Atlas, I was passed any good way of getting to where I wanted to be. That may have been a blessing, since my truck battery decided to give out, but that was the cause of me getting more tech stuff. Really, it wasn't because I wanted another toy. I'm a very good map reader, and I like plotting my own course. I've tested the GPS already and it mapped the same travel routes that I did. So do I think like a computer? You don't have to answer that one.

So be on the lookout for more adventures with my talking map. I hope I don't get sent directions to turn into a lake... ☐

Jubilant Jubilee Time

Once a year, like many around the nation, our small town has a festival complete with carnival rides, games, and fried foods galore. Upon seeing how quickly our money disappears year after year, we vow to never return to our town's festival, called the Jubilee. But somehow, we find ourselves back there year after year, and the kids always do have a great time, despite the fact that a family could go broke because of this thing.

This year's Jubilee was great. My girls were looking forward to it for an entire week. Once they began to pull up the trailers and set up the rides come Sunday, the kids' excitement was unstoppable. And because we formulated a careful budget plan regarding the Jubilee this year, Mom and Dad were happy to see the little ones so excited. But there was one problem we did not foresee nor did we warn the kids about – the possibility of rain. And you know what I'm talking about – these traveling amusement companies are not going to refund your money just because it rained a little and they had to shut down some rides. It was quite a gamble – dash the hopes of the little ones or take our chances with the rain (and judging by the radar, we could tell it was probably going to rain all night). We decided to take our chances with the rain, especially since we were assured that they would keep the rides open unless there was lightening. Luckily for us, the gamble paid off, and we were all able to enjoy many (wet) hours riding the rides, sampling the food (including my favorite Jubilee treat, Root Beer Float flavored Dippin' Dots), and mingling with friends we bumped into along the way.

The kids had a great time, and so did my husband and I, even though we rode ourselves sick. A ride called the Hurricane

(boats that fly in a circle) was the one that did in my hubby, while the Orbiter made me feel like I suddenly aged a decade or two. Immediately following the Orbiter, with my head spinning, I made the unwise decision to get on a ride called Rock O Plane which is essentially a Ferris Wheel with circular cages instead of benches – and as the large wheel turns, the small cages with the passengers in them spin around independently, going upside down and sometimes trapping the riders facing head-first for what seems like forever... fun, but the combination of all those rides made my head spin for the rest of the night!

We returned to the Jubilee with my parents when they came to visit on Saturday when there were live bands to listen to, and it was just a nice atmosphere. The kids each got to ride a few more rides, and they were satisfied until next year...

They're making what now?

They have lost all creativity. We keep saying that, but every time we think they can't go any lower Hollywood surprises us. Did you know they are making movies based on board games like Candyland and Battleship? I'm sure I must have heard about it before and forgot- it was part of the article on the latest movie based on a game. A video game. Yes, we know how those go- from Super Mario Brothers to Street Fighter they tend to be flops, but at least the games they are based on have some sort of plot even if the movies twist it beyond recognition. How is this for a movie though- Asteroids. That's right- they are now making a movie based on the 30-year-old arcade hit (video below if you aren't familiar with the game, such as you've lived under a rock or are under 15 or so years of age ☹). But that's not all. We can easily imagine a studio just

picking this up and figuring it's worth a try, but how about four studios? That's right- not one, not two, but **four** studios had a bidding war over this movie. I have to say, I hope that's a good sign but I have my doubts. Click to read the story at the [Hollywood Reporter](#), or just read below- it's certainly short enough to post here:

'Asteroids' lands at Universal

Lorenzo di Bonaventura producing game adaptation

By Borys Kit

July 2, 2009, 02:12 AM ET

Universal has won a four-studio bidding war to pick up the film rights to the classic Atari video game "Asteroids." Matthew Lopez will write the script for the feature adaptation, which will be produced by Lorenzo di Bonaventura. In "Asteroids," initially released as an arcade game in 1979, a player controlled a triangular space ship in an asteroid field. The object was to shoot and destroy the hulking masses of rock and the occasional flying saucer while avoiding smashing into both.

As opposed to today's games, there is no story line or fancy world-building mythology, so the studio would be creating a plot from scratch. Universal, however, is used to that development process, as it's in the middle of doing just that for several of the Hasbro board game properties it is translating to the big screen, such as "Battleship" and "Candyland."

Senior vp of production Jeff Kirschenbaum will oversee the project for Universal.

Di Bonaventura's next outing is "G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra," which Paramount is set to open Aug. 7.

Lopez came out of Disney's writing program and worked on that studio's recent movies "Bedtime Stories" and "Race to Witch Mountain." He also wrote the most recent draft of "The Sorcerer's Apprentice," currently in production with Nicolas Cage and Jay Baruchel starring.

Lopez and Atari are repped by ICM.

Youtube video of the game in action:

“Only One Thing I Want Ya Fellas Ta Do...

Talk me out of it!”

This is my favorite line from one of the most classic movies of all time. If there is one person within posting range who has never seen the 1939 version of *The Wizard of Oz*, I would seriously have a hard time believing it. The scene involves Scarecrow and Tin Man attempting to bolster the Lion’s courage as they are about to enter the Witch’s castle to rescue Dorothy. Just as he is on the verge of charging into the Lion’s den, the feline returns to his old ways.

Back in the days when cable television was in its infancy, I remember well a Friday night around Halloween when the movie was played annually. Friday night because *The Dukes of Hazard* and *Dallas* (ho hum) were preempted. Tonight, it was shown on Turner Classic Movies so this was my yearly trip down the Yellow Brick Road. It’s funny, I can almost remember where all the commercial breaks were inserted. Yet another classic I wish I could see again for the first time. A five year old screamed with delight and a four year old hid her eyes whenever “the green witch” was on screen.

A few years ago, I had the pleasure of assisting in the production of the musical for EHS. Although very faithful to the cinematic version, there were a few additions. There was a covered bridge that the quartet and Toto attempted to cross; however, the Wicked Witch of the West enchanted the bridge making it revolve so Dorothy and her companions got nowhere fast.

Another addition was the Jitterbug sequence which was actually

cut from the movie. On screen, the Witch makes mention of the insects as she sends her army of winged monkeys to the Haunted Forest. The dance sequence was filmed and put on the cutting room floor.

I know there is at least one person who would possibly (if not probably) agree that Oz would make a good addition for a community theatre season. If we are looking for famous, well-known name shows, is there any more famous, well-known, sure to get butts in the seats and people to audition (ahhem). Just a thought.

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 (yummier 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 peruse 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 5000 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...

Swimming in the Ocean

That is a good metaphor for a lot of things, but it is actually something I did not too long ago.

Now I generally prefer a nice swimming pool. A non-public pool is better than any public pool too. I never liked swimming in ponds or lakes. Mud, pond weeds, sharp stones and the non-clarity of the water were the things I didn't like. My wife's family had a lake cottage when I first met her, so we did spend some time there. While I did swim, I can't say I every really enjoyed it. I enjoyed being with family but not the lake swimming part. Of course, there were a few other things I really didn't enjoy about that cottage, but they had nothing to do with swimming.

I did find out more than a few years ago, that I do enjoy swimming in the ocean. The big waves, the sandy beaches, the smell of the salt water. I wish I could do it more often, just not feasible in the NW Ohio. The first time I remember swimming in an ocean was some 20 years ago in Southern California. The big wide Pacific was a blast. Sitting on the beach with my wife as the tide came in (and almost getting caught with no way out, but that is also another story).

Recently I was with my family in Florida, and I got to swim in the Atlantic. We didn't stay long enough to get caught by any tides, but we enjoyed the waves, sand and salt water.

Other than people, I didn't see any wildlife in the ocean. Some no longer used shells, but nothing living. A bit sad really. When we were in California, we saw sea lions and otters. They weren't where we were swimming, they knew better. □ But they were close by.

Some day I should go to Hawaii and see some really big waves. Someday is always just around the corner isn't it?

Camp 2009: Day 1

Days -2, -1, and 0 were getting ready days of course. Day one however is where it begins. Past years have had a check-in time of 10:00AM. Not so this year. With a brand new 8:00AM check-in time I dragged myself out of bed early and got a ride over to the bank lot across from the church. While I didn't really care much for the early call time, it did give us a couple extra hours once we got to camp. The chaos of checking in seemed less this year for whatever reason. I know numbers were down due to the you-know-what, but even considering it seemed pretty tame. Parents checked in the kids, picked up tags, saw the nurse, carried the bags to the appropriate bus, waited for departure. During this time I had the chance to say hi to three of the kids in my cabin and their parents. Another one I found out would meet us at camp while the fifth I didn't know at all, leaving it a total surprise when I finally did. Around the final prayer and departure time, I finally met him as he was pointing to some bags that hadn't yet been loaded on. I looked at the tag and saw the bags were for someone in my cabin. I turned to him and saw he was the fifth boy- Diego. I later found out that the bags were for his stepfather who was coming with him. This was no ordinary boy either- he was in two leg casts (to straighten his legs-

they weren't broken) and was... small. Ever watch [Little People, Big World](#)? Yes, he has that condition. After a prayer with the parents and campers we hopped onto the buses and we were off. We gave them about a half-hour of chat time and then the first movie went in. All the movies were Disney of course- rated G animated features. Ratatouille was first and it engaged at least 95% of the kids. Wall-E followed. Too bad the bus DVD player had no remote as Wall-E had a couple of nice shorts in the extras. Halfway through the bus ride we stopped at a rest-stop so the drivers could take a quick pit-stop. Yeah, leaders too. ☐ () Kids were stuck on the bus, but the movie was kept playing so most didn't mind I'm sure. Having forgotten my lunch (it's always something, right?) I scrambled here to get overprice vending machine offerings while still trying to pick up something extra for the kids in the same boat as me. Other leaders chipped in too.

So 3½ hours later, or 4½ when you take the time change from CDT to EDT into consideration, we arrived- about ten minutes after Wall-E ended. We got to the usual drop off point- and kept going. Yes! No walking a half-mile to the camp, partly down a 40° incline (or back up that same incline at the end of the week for that matter!). We were greeted with large welcome signs from the staff, waiting for us on the game field. While the bus was unloaded and the luggage carried to the cabins we were given an introduction speech. The week at camp was officially underway! We split for the cabins so the kids could get ready for their swim tests, then headed for the swim front. For one of only two times during the week the gate was swung open so we could enter without checking in. At all other times the kids were required to check in to the swim front to keep track of who was there in case something happened. I had told Diego's stepdad that we would start out with a sandcastle/fort competition when others were doing their swim tests, two cabins at a time. Wrong! Just because we had the previous four years didn't mean this would be year

five- oops. Instead, we played a friendly game of nuke 'em, a volleyball variation where instead of hitting the ball it is thrown up in the air. If it isn't caught by the other team, the person on that team who last touched the ball trying to catch it, or the one who it fell closest to otherwise is out. The game is over when one team is out. At the end of our swim test during this time, three of my kids had red bracelets for non-swimmers. Diego was one of course as he did not even take the test because of his casts. This was definitely different for me with more than half my cabin wearing red bands; in the past I have always had only one or two.

So with that done, we changed out of the swimming gear, went to the court on top of the hill by the girls' cabins for more instructions for the week, then hit the lodge for dinner. It looked like this year they turned the tables 90 degrees from previous years, but other than that it was the same as previous years. Following dinner was the first lesson. This week's theme was Code Blue: Having a Heart for God, so all the lessons were based on this theme. The main passage of scripture was the parable of the seeds and the soils they landed on or in. We broke out for small group, and what was another first we never broke into smaller groups. In the past I have had 7-10 kids in my cabin so the kids could be split into two groups since every cabin had at least two leaders, but with only five kids we just stayed together with all three of us leaders taking turns leading discussion. My five kids this year all had been raised in strong Christian homes, and they all had stories to tell of accepting Jesus. I have had others in the past that had not and have even been able to lead such kids to Christ, but this year it was all about living the Christian life with all these kids which I will be the first to say is a struggle.

As the last part of the night the kids had some "free time" which for this age group is staying in one area free to play whatever games they wished in that area. This was their first

opportunity to hid the canteen, a short bus painted like a bee where they could buy candy and pop (Gatorade and water as well). This first night was also where I received my first scars which still populate my arms to an extent of mosquito bites as I was eaten alive. After this I would remember to put on bug spray...

The students were given a choice on whether or not to take a shower- the only night I gave that option since they didn't do much activity that day- and then we prayed, turned out the lights, and this post finally ended. □