Late night/early morning

Deep in thought....

My mind goes back to a day in December some 21+ years ago. A few short days before Christmas when a chubby little blond entered my life. Yes at one time she was a bit chubby. Rolls of skin defined her short legs. And the blue eyes smiled from the first. All this and more in a tiny little package.

Her hair today is not as blond. She really can't be called chubby anymore. But the eyes can still smile.

I remember the day she found her first frog. We live in the woods, so it isn't very hard. When she learned to read, she found out as much as she could about the little animals. To this day she is drawn to them.

There were days playing in the mud, while wearing her sister's clothes. Days playing softball while dad coached from the sidelines.

Days being a child, days being a young lady. Days of very little care and days of hardship.

There was Star Wars both movies and books. There was friends, sisters, pets and family. We had shared a time or two on stage. She sang, I listened. There were the clothes from the boys section, there were beautiful dresses.

All of this and more. 21 years don't fit in a few short paragraphs. My beautiful blue eyed girl has spent years growing up. And I am proud of her….

What about them oats.

I was allowed to attend a dress rehearsal of <u>"Wild Oats" at the WCCT's Little Theater off the Square.</u> (Is that a mouthful?) If you don't have a wedding to attend, a daughter to pick up, or some other things that will take up all of your time for the next two weekends, make some time to see this wonderful little show.

Yes, this is a melodrama. Be prepared to laugh, boo and maybe even hiss. There were twists, turns and setups galore. Love, laughter and greed. And religion, we had religion too. And of course there was the sowing of wild oats.

I won't give anything away, but I really recommend this show. I would give a run down of the cast and crew, but I didn't see any programs yet, and I wouldn't want to miss anyone.

I really wish I could see this show with a full audience. It is one of those shows that will feed off the audience energy. So go, be prepared to have a good time and join in the fun.

One more word — Take in some canned food for the Food bank. 1 can of food will get you money off the admission. Great way to give to the community. One non-profit helping another. Great idea.

Parental Pickle

Have you heard about the controversy of Lenore Skenazy? She is the New York mom who is under fire for letting her 10-year-old son ride the subway alone. I would not put my kids on a subway alone, but us here (taking on a sudden hickish

accent...) are country folk, after all, and even I didn't ride the subway when I was in New York three months ago. But I trust that Ms. Skenazy made the right decision for her child... why? Because I think that parents these days NEED to be trusted to make the right decisions for their children! I believe that we are in the midst of an age where we are much too over-protective of our young-uns. And those parents who aren't utterly over-protective are left to a cruel and unusual punishment of media scrutiny... If you follow and/or agree with what I'm saying, you will enjoy the writing of Lenore Skenazy:

The last word: Advice from 'America's worst mom'

A year ago, journalist Lenore Skenazy caused a media sensation when she let her 9-year-old ride New York City's subway by himself. In a new book, she explains why she has no regrets.

About a year ago, I let my 9-year-old ride the New York subway alone for the first time. I didn't do it because I was brave or reckless or seeking a book contract. I did it because I know my son the way you know your kids. I knew he was ready, so I let him go. Then I wrote a column about it for The New York Sun. Big deal, right?

Well, the night the column ran, someone from the Today show called me at home to ask, Did I really let my son take the subway by himself?

Yes.

Just abandoned him in the middle of the city and told him to find his way home?

Well, abandoned is kind of a strong word, but ... yes, I did leave him at Bloomingdale's.

In this day and age?

No, in Ladies' Handbags.

Oh, she loved that. Would I be willing to come on the air and talk about it?

Sure, why not?

I had no idea what was about to hit me.

A day later, there across from me was Ann Curry looking outrageously pretty and slightly alarmed, because her next guest (the one right before George Clooney) just might be criminally insane. By way of introduction, she turned to the camera and asked, "Is she an enlightened mom or a really bad one?"

The shot widened to reveal ... me. And my son Izzy. And some "parenting expert" perched on that famous couch right next to us, who, I soon learned, was there to Teach Us a Lesson.

I quickly told the story about how Izzy, the 9-year-old, had been begging me to let him try to find his way home on his own from someplace, anyplace, by subway.

I know that may sound a little scary, but it's not. Here in New York, families are on the subway all the time. It's extremely, even statistically, safe. Whatever subterranean terror you see Will Smith battling in the movies goes home when the filming stops—probably to New Jersey. Our city's murder rate is back to where it was in 1963. And, by the way, it's probably down wherever you live, too.

That's why letting Izzy find his way home alone seemed like a fine idea. Not dangerous. Not crazy. Not even very hard. My husband and I talked about it and agreed that our boy was ready. So on that sunny Sunday when I took him to that big, bright store, I said those words we don't say much anymore.

"Bye-bye! Have fun!"

I didn't leave him defenseless, of course. I gave him a subway map, a transit card, \$20 in case of emergencies, and some

quarters to make a call. But, no, I did not give him a cell phone. Because although I very much trusted him to get himself home, I was a lot less sure he'd get the phone there.

And remember: He had quarters.

Anyway, it all turned out fine. One subway ride, one bus ride, and one hour or so later, my son was back home, proud as a peacock (who happens to take public transportation). I only wrote about his little adventure because when I told the other fourth-grade moms at the schoolyard about it, they all said the same thing.

You let him WHAT?

The more polite said things like, "Well that's fine, and I'll let my son do that, too ... when he's in college."

So—back to the Today show. After Izzy tells Ann how easy the whole thing was, she turns to the Parenting Expert—a breed that seems to exist only to tell us parents what we're doing wrong and why this will warp our kids forever.

This one is appalled at what I've done. She looks like I just asked her to smell my socks. She says that I could have given my son the exact same experience of independence, but in a much "safer" way—if only I had followed him or insisted he ride with a group of friends.

"Well, how is that the 'exact same experience' if it's different?" I demanded. "Besides, he was safe! That's why I let him go, you fear-mongering hypocrite, preaching independence while warning against it!"

Well, I didn't get all of that out, exactly, but I did get out a very cogent, "Gee, um ..." Anyway, it didn't even matter, because as soon as we left the set, my phone rang. It was MSNBC. Could I be there in an hour?

Then Fox News called. Could I be there with Izzy that

afternoon? MSNBC called back: If I did the show today, would I still promise to come back with Izzy to do it again over the weekend, same place, same story?

And suddenly, weirdly, I found myself in that place you always hear about: the center of a media storm. It was kind of fun, but also kind of terrifying—because everyone was weighing in on my parenting skills. Reporters queried from China, Israel, Australia, Malta. The English wanted to know, "Are we wrapping our children in cotton wool?" To which I boldly replied, "What the heck is cotton wool?" (Turns out to be the kind of cotton in cotton balls.)

The media dubbed me "America's Worst Mom." (Go ahead—Google it.) But that's not what I am.

I really think I'm a parent who is afraid of some things (bears, cars) and less afraid of others (subways, strangers). But mostly I'm afraid that I, too, have been swept up in the impossible obsession of our era: total safety for our children every second of every day. The idea that we should provide it and actually could provide it. It's as if we don't believe in fate anymore, or good luck or bad luck. No, it's all up to us.

Childhood really has changed since today's parents were kids, and not just in the United States. Australian children get stared at when they ride the bus alone. Canadian kids stay inside playing videogames. After I started a blog called Free Range Kids, I heard from a dad in Ireland who lets his 11-year-old play in the local park, unsupervised, and now a mom down the street won't let her son go to their house. She thinks the dad is reckless.

What has changed in the English-speaking world that has made childhood independence taboo? The ground has not gradually gotten harder under the jungle gym. The bus stops have not crept farther from home. Crime is actually lower than it was when most of us were growing up. So there is no reality-based

reason that children today should be treated as more helpless and vulnerable than we were when we were young.

If parents all around us are clutching their children close, it's easy to understand why: It's what pop culture is telling us to do. Stories of kidnappings swamp the news. Go online, and you can find a map of local sex offenders as easily as the local Victoria's Secret (possibly in the same place). Meantime, if you do summon the courage to put your kids on a bus or a bench or a bike, other parents keep butting in: An unwatched child is a tragedy waiting to happen.

Here's a typical letter addressed to me at Free Range Kids:

"I understand that you probably don't want your children to grow up afraid and not able to survive as independent adults," she wrote. "On the other hand, I think you're also teaching them that there is nothing to fear, and that isn't correct. It's survival of the fittest, and if they don't know who/what the enemy is, how will they avoid it? There are many, many dangers to protect them from, and it does take work—that's what parenting is. If you want them to run wild and stay out of your hair, you shouldn't have had them."

I agree that it makes sense to teach your kids about danger and how best to avoid it. Just like you want to teach them to stop, drop, and roll if they're ever in a fire. But then? Then you have to let them out again, because the writer is wrong when she says, "There are many, many dangers to protect them from."

There are not. Mostly, the world is safe. Mostly, people are good. To emphasize the opposite is to live in the world of tabloid TV. A world filled with worst-case scenarios, not the world we actually live in, which is factually, statistically, and, luckily for us, one of the safest periods for children in the history of the world.

Like the housewives of the 1950s, today's children need to be

liberated. Unlike the housewives of the '50s, the children can't do it themselves. Though I'd love to see hordes of kids gathering for meetings, staging protests, and burning their baby kneepads—and maybe they will—it is really up to us parents to start re-normalizing childhood. That begins with us realizing how scared we've gotten, even of ridiculously remote dangers.

We have to be less afraid of nature and more willing to embrace the idea that some rashes and bites are a fair price to pay in exchange for appreciating the wonder of a coollooking rock or an unforgettable fern.

When we watch TV, we have to remind ourselves that its job is to terrify and disgust us so that we'll keep watching in horror. It is doing an excellent job on both fronts.

We have to learn to remind the other parents who think we're being careless when we loosen our grip that we are actually trying to teach our children how to get along in the world, and that we believe this is our job. A child who can fend for himself is a lot safer than one forever coddled, because the coddled child will not have Mom or Dad around all the time. Adults once knew what we have forgotten today. Kids are competent. Kids are capable. Kids deserve freedom, responsibility, and a chance to be part of the world.

I have to be honest, though: I write all this in a kind of shaky mood because I just got a call from the police. This morning, I put Izzy, now 10, on a half-hour train ride out to his friend's house. It sounds like I'm a recidivist, but really: His friend's family was waiting at the other end to pick him up, and he's done this a dozen times already. It is a straight shot on a commuter railroad. This particular time, however, the conductor found it outrageous that a 10-year-old should be traveling alone, and summoned the police, who arrived as my son disembarked.

When the officer phoned me at home, I told him the truth (while my heart stood still): We had actually inquired of the railroad what age a child can travel alone and were told there was no specific regulation about this.

Later I looked up the official rules: A child only has to be 8 to ride alone on the railroad or subway. Good rule.

(From the book Free Range Kids by Lenore Skenazy. © 2009 by Lenore Skenazy. Reprinted with permission of the publisher, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.)

All The World's A Stage

and all its men and women merely players.

As You Like It (II, vii, 139-40)

I have often been asked what type of stage I enjoy performing In response, I usually state that it depends upon what is being performed. Sometimes, a show is grand in scale and is meant to be presented on a HUGE stage with a HUMONGOUS Other times, a play is more intimate and is meant for a more intimate setting. I have been watching a Josh Groban concert on PBS tonight (after the Yankees were defeated by the Red Stockings). Being pledge drive time, there are frequent breaks and during one Josh was interviewed. recently performed at Madison Square Garden: one of the world's grandest venues. This evening's taped performance was much more intimate: smaller stage, closer audience (in which he could see the "whites of their eyes"), almost a jam session in front of maybe 100 fans. Once again, I was in total awe. Singing in Spanish, Italian, as well as Such talent! English. Taking lyrics that I have no idea what the

translation is yet conveying their message brilliantly. Looking forward to the concert version of *Chess* coming next week. Although it is a concert version, it will be my first time seeing any version of the cult musical.

WAIT! I think I have gone off an another tangent. Coming up in a few short months is the WCCT's production of *Little Shop of Horrors*. This is going to be done at the smaller of the two venues. I think it will be quite interesting to discover how we are going to have the huge flesh-eating Audrey II on a small stage as well as the scenery for Skid Row. Seems like a lot, but if it comes off it will be awesome and I think the intimacy of the smaller, in your face venue will have an even more dramatic effect.

So, although I have kind of given a roundabout answer to my own question, it really does have more to do with the type of production being staged. I like being part of big, theatrical extravaganzas that call for a huge setting. I also am comfortable in a small, intimate space in which you can see the audience and know that there are actually butts in the seats.

Thoughts on Daughters and Weddings

In some ways I can't believe my third daughter will be getting married this weekend. I'm still in a bit of shock when I think of my older daughters being married. Is this the way of it for fathers?

My only job is to walk my daughter down the aisle. Maybe a dance or more. One never knows with daughters.

I wasn't ready to handle my daughters getting married. I was even less ready being a widower. 3 weddings in just over 3 years, the emotions don't get easier.

Hopefully the youngest won't get married in the next year. I'm not sure I can handle 4 weddings in 4 years. I know she doesn't have a boyfriend yet, but stranger things have happened. I think it runs in the family.

This wedding is a little different than the last two. It starts inside for the wedding and moves outside for the reception. The last two weddings were outside and moved inside for the reception. Having any part of a wedding outside was new to me. When I got married it was below zero all day. You get that in January. I guess that's why my daughters have spring/summer weddings.

We had birds, chipmunks, squirrels, alligators at the other two weddings, I wonder what kind of wildlife will show up for this one.

Weather looks good for Saturday. Will my daughters be 3 for 3 on good weather? I certainly hope so.

It will be the first time that all 4 daughters have been together since the last wedding. Great times. I really enjoy my family.

More later???

Please Help My Family

Something interesting happened weeks ago, and I haven't had the time to blog about it until now...

My husband and I were driving down a main drag in our small town, kid-less because it was date night, when we came across a guy standing on the corner across from Walgreens with a sign saying "Please help my family". Our movie didn't start for awhile, so we pulled over to talk to the guy who looked to be about our age. We asked him about his circumstances, and what brought him to our town. We learned that he was the father of two who had just been laid off from a factory job and couldn't provide for his two children or for his wife who had also lost her job. He had come to our town in hopes of finding work or resources to help his family. We learned that he had a daughter, just a little bit older than our oldest daughter, and a younger son, so we went home to gather things he said his family needed — clothes and food. We told him we would be just a few minutes, and we went home and gathered up what we thought would be a treasure trove for someone in need who has kids: coats (brand-new, donated from my husband's wholesale business), food, clothes for his daughter, even some clothes we could scrounge up for his son. We returned in less than 10 minutes with the items, but the man was gone!

I still can't figure out what went wrong! Perhaps he was lying about the needs of his family, and he really wanted cash instead for something else, possibly drugs (this is why I always try to avoid giving cash to those in need but rather try to find necessary resources for them instead). I hate to be skeptical, but I have read a bunch of stories in the news about panhandlers who try to swindle and deceive, mostly for the purpose of supporting drug or alcohol habits and not seeking for their own well-being or that of their families.

This happened probably over a month ago now, and we haven't seen the guy since... If I did, I would probably pull over again, but this time it would be to ask him what it is he REALLY wants!

Befores and Afters

As you might have read in my blog before the impromptu camping trip, we've been putting a lot of effort into a bunch of home improvement projects lately. Here are a few of the latest pictures:

Backyard, before and after the new fence:



Not from the same angle, but hopefully you get the idea. We now have a fenced-in play area for the kids, and the dogs have their own little area for their gross natural business.

Even the rats have moved on up into posh digs. Here is their new cage, where all 4 of them live together — harmoniously, I might add!

BEFORE:



AFTER:



Of course I want to be a superhero

Derek (another Tangents' Blogger), posed the question <u>"Whowants to be a superhero?"</u> in his blog. My first thought was about the Saturday evenings I spend with my oldest daughter, her husband, and a few friends. For the past few months, we spend Saturday being superheroes. A fun little <u>role playing</u> game based on Marvel Comic book characters and settings. Yes, there are mutants, armored, magical, or insect-bitten superheroes running (flying) all over the place.

Our game master has a wonderful gift in the design of the stories/settings the players face. We designed our superheroes and try to bring them to life during our Saturday games. Now as with most groups like this, sometimes the game gets set aside for a while and we have idle talk about this or that. I'm not sure if she knows it or not, but my eldest invited her dear old dad into part of her life she wasn't expecting. On Saturdays, I am not only her father, but I am a friend of her friends. By extension, that does make me my daughter's friend.

Hmm. I think that is a place any father would want to be. She still calls me and talks to me about her troubles. In her eyes, I can still make things better with a hug or the right words. By any other name, I am still her Daddy. And she is still my darling girl. During the past few months our relationship grew. I am more than her Father and maybe a better Father. Maybe I am a superhero in my own life? And by all counts, I will be an important factor in the life of my soon to be grandchild.

Who would have though of that 25+ years ago....

Camping Pictorial

If you've been reading my blog lately, then you know that I was away last week camping with my family — my husband, 4 kids (ages 9, 5, 2, and almost 1), and 2 dogs. Camping for the entire week with 4 little kids has its ups and downs; mostly ups. But one of the major downs is the amount of house-mom work that awaits my return: 6 persons worth of laundry for a week and a half, which I refer to as "Mount Washmore", grows to be the size of a small county's dump. And my Week O' Heap O' Paperwork I must sort through is picture-

worthy:



But when all is said and done (a week or more from now), I will say it was well worth it. It was worth it to be (mostly) away from the internet and other electronic distractions for a week, especially tv. During that week, it wasn't my job to dwell on horrid and depressing headlines from around the world. And it was worth it to spend a distraction-less 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with my family, just the 6 of us in the wilderness (of Indiana) with only the bare necessities (a furnished cabin with refrigerator and a store within walking distance) with which to survive...

A great time was had by all, and camping is definitely something that we will do again in the future.

This is our cabin. It has two beds downstairs where Daddy, Mommy, Disney, and Charity and Beasley (the dogs) slept. Along with the two beds are a table and chairs, a bench, shelves, a half-bathroom, a mini-fridge, and a microwave. There is also a ladder which leads to the loft that spaciously houses two twin mattresses where our two oldest girls slept. As you can see, there is also a picnic table out front and a grill and fire pit. Our cabin's porch also came with a great view of the fishing creek and the sunset.



We did lots of fun activities while we were camping; including boating. We took out a rowboat (thanks for rowing, Dad!), and the little ones caught a nap before we set sail:



We also took out a large pontoon boat and made ourselves quite comfortable watching for wildlife for hours at a time:



I think I could get used to being a boat captain; I just loved driving the boat (and my husband says I'm good at it, whatever

that means). But I really did love being the captain, deciding when to pull close to shore, idling the boat or even keeping pace with the wildlife as we did when we followed a young hunting raccoon. We were able to see SO much wildlife; all in its natural glory; it was great! Among the highlights: butterflies, dragonflies, water snakes attacking fish, fish attacking fish, herons, swan families, frogs, crayfish, geese families, raccoons, does and their fawns, turtles, and even lots of campground dogs and puppies. Here is an example of the beautiful scenery with a doe getting a drink at sunset — I missed photographing her fawn, oops:



And the next picture combines two of the kids' favorite things about camping — frogs and marshmallows — I guess "Big Buddy" does not eat marshmallows... not raw ones anyway. For those of you who are wondering about my frog phobia, you should know that there was a mandatory 5-foot-diameter 'frog buffer zone' around the cabin for me. But I did come to terms with the phobia in some ways during the trip, maybe it will lessen with time, who knows.



Next is a pic of our baby boy — he was so excited to finally get at that basketball that we had to take a picture. Never mind that he's going to play baseball for the Chicago Cubs some day — or the Chicago Bears if my husband gets *his* way...



Here are all 4 of my kids on the beach — they all loved playing on the beach!



And, some more examples of the beautiful scenery — the rising



moon over the lake at sunset:

A hot air balloon over the lake:



And that reminds me — we also spotted some parachuters in the sky (and lots of cool airplanes — the airport was across the highway at the front of camp) who landed in a field nearby. Our daredevil 5-year-old Sammie said, "I want to do that!". It's really funny that she said that if you know Sammie. And ironically, when she was in the womb, I even said that she would be the one to parachute and do crazy things like that to scare her parents! I could just tell by the strength of her kicking and the fact that she was constantly moving... Well, anyway, another great trip, and let me close by recommending camping as an inexpensive family vacation that pays dividends in quality time and togetherness!

Who wants to be a superhero?

No, Sci-Fi channel (or should I say SyFy?) didn't renew Stan Lee's reality show for a third season. But apparently 106 5th and 6th grade students in Berwick, Maine wanted to be Or at least dress up as them. superheroes. university in the UK set a Guinness record of the most people in one room dressed as superheroes with 103 students and staff members a teacher at Knowlton School decided to try and break the record. Their new record, if their attempt is accepted (i.e. no one else tried for the same record with more people), might be short lived though as the university vowed to take back the record if anyone were to break it so whether or not they will be in the next <u>Guinness World Records</u> book depends on how quickly this university can respond. It may well be that the teachers at the Maine school were clever with their timing as summer time means break time so it may not be until fall or later when the university tries to take back the For the full story (with pics!), click the link below:

<u>'Superhero' students gather in Berwick to set new Guinness</u>
<u>World Record</u>