

Battle Of The Bulge

If you think this is a weight-loss blog post, click again!

Recently, I've noticed a huge bulge appearing in the floor of our downstairs bathroom:



Ok, so it's difficult to see in the picture – it's a few inches above that rectangular green carpet, but believe me when I say it's getting bigger, seemingly by the day – it's now big enough to trip over! My husband thinks we'll be able to see what's happening by going into our basement and looking at it from below the bathroom floor. The only problem is that our bathroom is over the crawl space, not the basement. In the 2½ years that we've lived in this house, we've never set foot (nor knee) in the crawl space – it's always scary to think what one may find in a crawl space that hasn't been disturbed in years, at least for me. I guess I've seen too many horror movies... or maybe it's the fact that I grew up only miles away from the most macabrely (not a real word, but fits perfectly here if you ask me – maybe I will coin the term) famous crawl space – that of John Wayne Gacy, where 29 bodies were unearthed in the late '70's.

So anyway, someone needs to go into that crawl space to find out what this bulge is and what it expands and takes over the entire house!

And we recently were told that our electric wiring in the house is out of date; here we've been spending money to fix up certain things on the house, and other things just keep breaking. Sometimes I'm not so sure about the joys of home ownership, sigh!

Cuteness To Get You Through The Weekend



Above is a picture of our second oldest, 5-year-old Sammie and her almost 1-year-old brother Christopher. He is the only boy in our family, and also the only sibling with which Sammie doesn't fight. It seems like the natives (kids) have been restless lately. Our oldest, Taylor, it back to her snotty tween "I'm-better-than-everyone-else-so-why-do-they-get-more-than-me" attitude, so she is constantly yelling at and fighting with her sisters. Disney is 2 and has been really sensitive, demanding, and impatient lately. Needless to say, our house has been very loud as of late. But in between the arguments, the kids still find time to be cute. Here is a picture of Disney actually sharing the activity table with her baby brother (whose looks seemingly aged months after he got

his new haircut):



They Know Me So Well

Tonight, I HAD to attend the opening night performance of the WCCT's latest melodrama to show my support of one of my dearest friends who had a couple of roles in the show. When I arrived, I knew I was in for a treat. There was a duo of western lawmen who began to harrass me (?) with the rifles. They even went so far as to frisk me. They made sure that I made my donation of a canned item for the area food banks. The officers repeatedly told audience members to look out for me and threatened harm upon my person if I got out of line.

In the preshow address, the three stooges pointed out that the audience show boo, hiss, and cheer but in no way were we to throw anything. I thought that was totally unfair. Two summers ago, I was in *Love Rides the Rails* and was unmercifully pelted by popcorn, Skittles (you know who you are), and other things I am sure. I thought I was the hero of the piece but judging from the audiences' reaction, I was anything but.

[Wild Oats](#) has all the traditional elements of the best of

cornball melodramas: heroes, villains, damsels in distress, mistaken identity, and plot twists galore. The strong-willed heroine (the aptly named Kate) and the hero Jack were both wonderful. The villainous Ike Gammon had a slimy appearance and a voice that just made you want to hiss and catcall. The duo of Croftus Thunder and his trusty Indian sidekick (astride his mount) Corporal Crow were a hoot. I must say that my favorite roles were a duo of hilarious stock characters named Mr. Kliegle and Mr. Leko who drew applause each time they made an appearance. And don't forget the all-important cameo of the Marshall who saves the day. There is also Ephraim Smooth a smooth preacher who steals several moments.

All in all a wonderful performance. I think the theatre should consider doing a summer melodrama every year. They are very light-hearted and fun not only to watch but to be in. Totally un-P.C. as a lot of issues get a fair amount of ribbing. But why do they always pick on me? Seriously, am I really that bad ☐

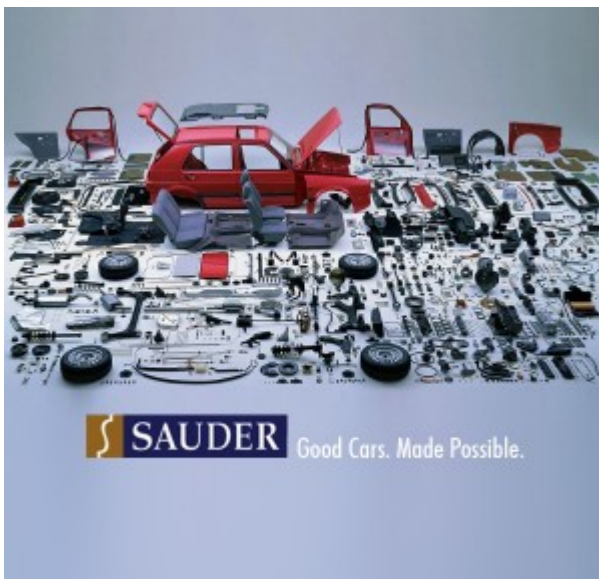
Road Work Ahead

Warm weather, baseball, county fairs, amusement parks, and **Torn Up Streets**. Yesterday morning, I was informed that I needed to move my car. I usually park across the street in front of the old school house to save on parking. However, yesterday began the inevitable tearing up of the pavement and resurfacing... right on North Michigan Avenue (aka ST.RTE 49). This morning, I debated whether to drive in the pouring rain or endure the flag lady even after I went around the block to avoid the machinery going up and down the street. I decided to stay dry. Fortunately, the wait was not too long. I was not needed at work right away this morning anyway since the

truck was at least 2 hours late (good thing it was a small truck or I might still be there... then again a little overtime couldn't hurt... me, anyway). So... if you are passing through NW0 on OH RTE 49 be prepared for the red flags and revolving stop sign.

A Regional Forward

With amusement and much scrutiny, I peruse most of the many email forwards I receive... Occasionally, one will catch my eye. Such is the case for the forward containing the following picture entitled: "Sauder Woodworking Company Takes Over GM"



I found it extremely amusing, but I began to think of the entertainment value of the aforementioned email forward. Is this also amusing to people who aren't affected by the close proximity of the Sauder factories? Do people who live far outside of Archbold, Ohio get the joke?

Well, anyway, if you live where you get it, then HaHa – we

share a joke. It IS funny – Sauder is a huge employer in the area and many locals have jobs assembling Sauder's 'assemble yourself' kits of furniture. The fact that someone crafted an email to tie it into the horrible economy and the downsizing of GM is priceless... but there I go again, overexplaining the joke. If you get it, then you get it... (and are probably located within 60 miles of Lake Erie), but if you have no idea what I'm talking about – power to you to recognize regionally sensitive email forwards... What are some of the regional forwards that have been haunting YOU?

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 [“Wild Oats” at the WCCT’s Little Theater off the Square.](#) (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 cool-looking 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 on most. 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 audience. 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. He had 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. Such talent! Singing in Spanish, Italian, as well as 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 on 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???