

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!

Before 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:

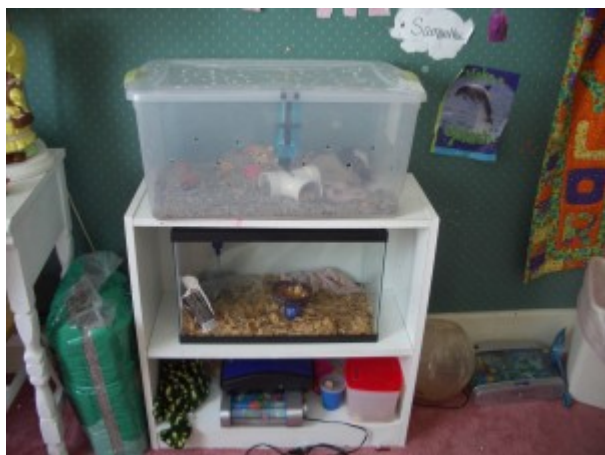
Backyard, before and after the new fence:



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 [“Who wants to be a superhero?”](#) 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 [role playing 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 thought 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 0' Heap 0' 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 spaciouly 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 superheroes. Or at least dress up as them. After a 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 [Guinness World Records](#) 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 record. For the full story (with pics!), click the link below:

['Superhero' students gather in Berwick to set new Guinness World Record](#)

Look For Him Tonight

My middle brother and his son are going to be at the [Great American Ball Park](#) for the Chicago Cubs-Cincinnati Reds game tonight. When I found out that Chad and Alex were going to the big city by themselves, I said "I hope they don't get lost." Chad got lost driving home from a town 8 miles away. Myself, I just can't find the destination I am going to but

have never been lost. However, I believe they went on a charter bus. I remember back in the day when my elder sibling would go to his friend's house and open up his COMPLETE sets of baseball cards and trade them away... not some of his brighter moments. Our parents or his godfather would spend good money on these sets. He would even "autograph" cards himself which pretty well made them worthless collectible wise. During several summers, Chad, his friend, along with "E-town's Number One Fan" rode the bus to Wrigley to watch their beloved team play. Last year, Chad and our Aunt LuAnn rode the rails to Chi-town and watched the Cubbies lose. Lu wanted to keep her tally of MLB ballpark visits up but Uncle Bob had no desire to go with them. Some year (especially if the Bronx Bombers are in town), I must make an effort to go.

6 HOUR SALE

Tonight was our big six hour sale. I'm not even sure exactly what was on sale except for one thing: Ground Chuck was \$1.69/lb. At 2, I was trying to get milk stocked (OH, that was 2.29/gallon... reg. 3.19), the hamburger filled, then the signs hung for promotion. At three, there were already customers gathered around the meat case as I filled the space. It did not take long before the dulcet tones of "Second checker please" came over the intercom. Around 4, two other associates came in and one left. Thank goodness manager Diane stayed until 7. I don't think I have ever spent so much time in the meat room grinding as I did tonight while making sure the chuck was kept full which was not easy. It seemed that every half-hour I was back grinding some more... even when I had some done ahead. Before I left at nine, I noticed that the strawberries (which were not even part of the sale) were really low. I think they are 1.69 for a 1 pound package.

Wonder whatever happened to the days when they were so much a quart.

Before leaving, I mentioned to my young protege that he left two things in the store the other night. Something which I put in my car to give him the next time I saw him but others saw them first and made comment of . As if I would EVER take up that hobby. He mentioned that he has given up the smokes but would take them "just in case." I told him it was a good thing for several reasons least of which being the outrageous price. Think he was worn out in the 5 hours he was there. Just gave him a pat on the back and welcomed him to the wonderful world of grocery. For his first week, he has done a commendable job.

From kids to kars.. er, cars

It looks like this may truly be the end for the summer, but it is also a beginning. I was able to secure jobs for the last three days. I even had a job for this morning, but I canceled it when I was still awake at midnight and it required an earlier start. I stupidly took a nap yesterday afternoon so that affected my being able to get to sleep. Monday was an extension of Friday as it was a two-day assignment. It was a light-duty assignment since it was an assistant position. I was pleasantly surprised though to find the assistant I subbed for had a paid lunch-duty assignment, so the lower-paying assistant assignment was offset a little by this. Too bad my Wednesday assistant assignment didn't have such a thing. It's the end of the year though, so I take what I can get. The two assistant assignments differed somewhat in that the first was there for a group of five kids (four actually since one has been out of school for the last couple of months) while

Wednesday my attention was focused on just one boy with autism. For the first I was on hand for the rest of the class as needed, which wasn't much being the end of the year, and for the second I stayed around this one boy, but did help his neighbor too who needed it at times. Across from him was another boy with albinism- the second I met this year. As seems to be standard with this condition, he had vision problems which required extra-large textbooks and he had to wear sunglasses and a hat outside. There really wasn't a lot of academic work being done on these last few days as the grades had already been turned in. There was a lot of cleaning and turning in books and extended recess times. There was a lot of letter writing in one of the classes (imagine writing a letter- at least half a page each- to every student in the class. They were doing only five a day, but still very monotonous. They also did math speed drills, practicing the times tables. I also did a lot of copying. Well, at least I was paid. It was also a rest in a way which is perfect for this time of year. Tuesday was completely different. You already know about the fire, but aside from that it was a very normal teaching day with math, reading, and so on. I didn't do much teaching though- a lot of facilitating. Get them started on something, and off they go as I walk around keeping them on task. I saw one of my now-former weekend kids, but only for math. The teacher I subbed for did advanced math.

As I write this I am still trying to secure a job for tomorrow, but I won't be surprised if nothing turns up. One district is already out of the running. Monday however, I start on something new. I will be training to take pictures of cars for ads. Actually, I think I mentioned this in another blog post so I won't repeat it, but now I have signed the contract and have an official starting date. He is even allowing me to do my usual week at camp, which is coming up in less than three weeks. Training can last three weeks to three months depending on how quickly I learn the ropes. This

should become my priority over subbing, but I will probably still do maybe one day a week, more in winter if there are less cars to do. I will see.

My Favorite Camping Memory

If you've been reading my blog as of late, you know about my family's impromptu camping trip – my husband and I, in a fit of outlandish spontaneity (read: **his** idea), decided to take our 4 children – ages 9, 5, 2, and almost 1 year – on a surprise, last-minute, week-long camping trip. Despite our family being very inexperienced and mostly camping-inept, it's been going pretty well! My husband was shipped off to camp for entire summers when he was a kid, and it's fun to see this side of him – the skills that he learned in the campgrounds of his youth since we've never been camping together... well, not like this anyway, with 4 kids and 2 dogs to look after. As for me, the camping experiences of my youth consist of a few over-nighters for Girl Scouts, and one week-long venture at Girl Scout camp that I did not like one bit – it was cold, we had to get up early, I had to be away from my beloved family dog, which made me incredibly homesick. To top off my week of misery, the counselors at the camp wanted us to do a *mandatory* (believe me, I did ask about the mandatory part!) art project that involved catching frogs, dipping them in paint, and letting them hop across a piece of paper. Call it art, if you will, but there was no way I was going to be anywhere near that art project due to my intense fear of frogs and toads which I am still conquering as we speak (guess what my 5-year-old's favorite camping activity has been this week?). Luckily for the kid-version of me, it rained at Girl Scout camp, meaning I did not have to participate in the frog-filled art project. But it took 3 days for that project to get canceled,

and I was panicked about it the entire time. Plus, when we got up in the morning, it was very cold outside, and first things first – we had our swimming lessons first thing in the morning. Anyone who was too cold to participate in the morning lessons lost their privilege to partake in free swim after lunch when the sun was scorching. But as miserable as I thought I was at camp, I did have a favorite camping thing that we did – something that just isn't the same without a campfire: we made pie-iron pizzas.

A pie-iron is a camping cooking utensil that consists of two small, shallow metal square pans with long handles. You can build sandwiches and desserts and all kind of culinary creations between the squares, then you latch them together and hold them over the campfire to cook the filling. My long-term memory continues to serve me well – even as an adult, pie-iron pizzas are delicious! After a trying day yesterday with my girls being tired and throwing tantrums all day, making pie-iron pizzas was a great way to close the day – they honestly cheered everyone up, including me! Not only are they yummy, but to make them is actually a fun project that is easy for kids and can easily burn a good 30 minutes of off kid boredom time! The kids might need help cooking their pie-iron pizzas over the campfire for safety reasons, but any age kid can enjoy preparing her pizza for cooking. There is something about kids helping to prepare their own food that makes them eat better than ever, too – works every time for my kids.

So yeah – the \$10.99 pie-iron turned out to be a great investment. Not only was it a fun family experience (I built the sandwiches with the girls while Dad helped cook them over the fire) which also accomplished the task of feeding the family, but the activity accomplished the near-impossible task of cheering up a tired family! I am excited about the [many experiments](#) I plan on conducting with the pie-iron – you can make mini-casseroles, desserts, pita pockets, stir fry... so many possibilities!

As I cheesily began to sing the other night, "Pizza... Roasting on an open fire..."

And I missed it.

Many people know that I really enjoy my coffee. My dear wife and I used to frequent a local coffee establishment until her death. During the many years of enjoying the coffee and company, I found that I know a thing or two about a good cup of joe. I was sad on the day that little coffee shop closed its doors for the last time.

I will still visit our other local coffee shops, but I no longer make it a weekly habit. I tend to buy good coffee and share it with the people I work with.

We also used to visit many small coffee shops while on vacation. I really liked getting the feel of a location in the local place. I did stay away from the big chain coffee shops, since their goal is to move people in and out. Most local shops have a customers that will stick around and talk over their cups of coffee, not stare into computer screens or newspapers.

But I am sad to say I missed visiting one coffee shop with a bit of a twist. I haven't been to Maine yet, so I didn't get to visit the 'Topless' coffee shop. It [burned down this week](#). The owner had no insurance on the building, so it may be up in the air as to any reopening of the business. I am curious as to what my lovely wife would have thought of this establishment. I am sure that we would be glad our daughter worked at our local coffee shop and not the topless one... ☐