

Disney's First Day

Disney had her first day at her new preschool last week, and she had a great time! She really likes going to preschool every day! Here are some pictures of her on her first day. One picture features her little brother who wanted to go to preschool too, but he's such a cool dude that he got right over it and is happy going to pick her up every day (despite his parents making him wear the Chicago Cubs shirt):



Disney's First Day Of School!

My almost 4-year-old daughter Disney joined her sisters in the profession of "student" the other day- it was her first day of

prechool, and she LOVES it!!

Here is the cutie on her first day:



Could This Be... Boredom?

The word “bored” has not been in my vocabulary for years – I always have too much to do with not enough time to do it. Such is still the case, but with the kids (half of them anyway) back in school, I’m finding myself with 45 minutes to an hour of time on the weekdays when I am alone, by myself and without kids. Problem is, I don’t FEEL like doing any of the

things I once thought I would do if I had spare time. I could put aside the lack of motivation, except that the household projects I want to tackle can't be completed in an hour, so I'm reluctant to begin big projects just to have to pack up after 45 minutes so I can pick up kids at school or have one awaken from a nap. Other things I might feel like doing seem pointless or not productive enough for me to waste my time doing them.

I always thought boredom meant lack of things to do, which I don't think will ever happen to me. But if boredom can also mean having a ton of things to do and not feeling like doing any of it, then I am actually bored!

Summer Blahs

My kids are driving me nuts!! It's the middle of summer, and although I've scarcely heard the words, "I'm bored", my kids are driving me and each other up the walls and back down again. My 3 girls (ages 10, 6, and 3) are bickering constantly! By the time I get their brother (age 2) down for a nap in the afternoon, I'm so exhausted that I really cherish my "me" time, which is always laced with sounds of the girls' fighting and bickering. My husband suggested we do more activities together (we read books and color in the mornings, and I take them to the library every day to play), but it's a vicious cycle. The more they fight, the less I want to do with them, and the less I do with them, the more they fight, as if their fighting could increase. I am so thankful that Friday is the day when I get to meet their Grandma in South Bend and arrange a trade – 3 girls to Grandma's for the week!! I could not be looking forward to it more! Sure, I'll miss them, but given the way they've been acting lately, it

will be a challenge for me to not dread the monotony of the summer continuing when they get back. I can think of plenty of things to do, but like I said, I'm so exhausted by the constant refereeing (aren't refs supposed to be paid?) that it's hard to find the energy to facilitate an activity and clean it up. Wait, Grandma reads my blog, I better not dwell on the fighting too much. Wouldn't want to change her mind about next week!!

Only 39 days until school starts! One week at Grandma's and 10 weekend days, so really only 22 days left – not that I'm counting or anything... Now where is that countdown timer widget? ☐

FOOTBALL! Time To Blog, Except...

... I've gotten engrossed in another video game. And because I'm a mom of 4 and don't have a lot of extra time, my blogging frequency is going to suffer while I divide my spare time with mindless gaming, oh well. With the start of the NFL season and back-to-school-time, I will have more time at home for my favorite quiet activities like reading the newspaper, blogging, and playing video games while my husband watches football (Go Bears!). I thought I'd be rolling out blog posts, but then my husband put an N64 emulator on my computer, distracting me with what is quite possibly the best video game ever made – in my opinion, anyway: The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time. It's an adventure game, which is my favorite genre of video game, but I'm very picky – there has to be large 3D worlds to explore, as well as a variety of puzzles peppered with the perfect combination of inventory, fighting,

and weaponry. This version of Zelda has everything, and this is actually my second time playing it through. Currently I'm in the second dungeon (Dodongo's Cavern) which is probably my least favorite in the entire game. Once I get past it though, I have lots of fun ahead – there are plenty of areas left to explore; including an underwater colony and the inside of a volcano. This game also skips ahead 7 years, and you get to see what Hyrule (the country you are defending) looks like in the future when your character has grown into a young man from a little boy. Here is a screen shot:



...which makes me want to get back to it so I can kick some Dodongo a**!

GO BEARS!!!

A Note To Add To That Last Post...

I will be one of those frantic parents in the Walmart checkout line on the first day of school. I've never been there to witness them myself, but I know they exist; I'll find out for sure tomorrow when I join them. Yes, I planned ahead well

enough to buy the necessary school supplies, but what I failed to do was to supervise the middle-schooler who was excitedly stuffing her new backpack, apparently ignoring the direction to “pack what’s on your list”. Not really her fault – like I said, I should have been supervising her more carefully. But as a result, our 4th grader now has a locker full of 4th grade school supplies AND Kindergarten school supplies (she brought them to school last Friday during orientation), while our Kindergartner has an empty backpack.

We could follow our oldest daughter into her new middle school tomorrow to repo her sister’s school supplies, but I’m pretty sure being the only student whose parents follow her into school (especially with little brother and sisters in tow) could cause her emotional damage beyond repair. I’ll take my chances at Walmart.

Back To School!

Well, summer is officially over – school starts **tomorrow!** I could be like everyone else and say “where did the summer go?”, but for me, it actually didn’t go as fast as I would have thought. We were so busy; though it was good-busy; not like so-much-work-to-do-busy. But much fun was had and I enjoyed every minute! Last week was spent at school open houses and orientations, as well as a training event at our church to allow us to volunteer with our church’s student ministries. That was an interesting evening – it began with us volunteers breaking off into groups of about 15 and making lines. We were given a spoon tied to a string which was wound around a “spool” ie, an empty tube of toilet paper. The first person in the line (me) was to put the spoon down their shirt and pants and give it to the next person who was supposed to

put it *up* their pants and shirt, then to the next person who was supposed to put it down the shirt and pants, effectively “threading” the line of people together. Kind of strange, I thought, but what’s going to happen once we’re all “wearing” the string??? It was a little scary, but luckily, the threading was the entire ice-breaking activity, and the rest of the evening was pleasantly spent listening to a guest speaker while munching on all kinds of orange snacks (orange was the theme for the evening – I never really thought about how many party snacks are orange before!).

Today we had so many activities and volunteering planned for church that we were on the go from 8:30 in the morning until about 3:30 in the afternoon. Busy, but it was time well-spent, especially since we finished up the day with Kidstuff (a cute show with a wonderful message for the kids) and then a carnival with LOTS of treats and fun for the kids; they had a blast. Good thing too – we need to get settled down early tonight in order to get our oldest to school by **7:30 in the morning!!!** She is starting middle school, and yes, to those of you who have asked – she will be switching classes, kind of like the “block” style they had when I was in middle school. My daughter has a homeroom, but then she switches for language arts and math and perhaps other subjects as well. And they do gym class strangely – there are 4 classes: gym, music, technology (typing, etc.), and art, and they take one of these 4 classes every day for 9 weeks and then switch to another. That sounds pretty cool to me! I would have LOVED it if I only had to worry about gym for 9 weeks of the year! But, being in middle school also means that she has to change for gym class, poor thing – I remember that aspect of middle school making a lot of kids really nervous. And at orientation last week, the principal gave us parents a talk about making sure we wash the gym clothes – the kids are getting to “that age”, she said, which prompted me to whisper to my friend nearby, “I’m not ready!” But my daughter IS ready for middle school, and she seems to be making her way

from tween to teen in no time – UGH! Poor thing got her first pimple just in time for the first day of middle school, but she doesn't seem to mind too much, so we're not making it a big deal. It's not like we're publishing it on the internet for the entire world to read or anything... But what are moms for? She can thank me when she's older and finds this through some sort of google search or something.

Our second oldest is starting Kindergarten. This is our "difficult" child; our strong-willed one. Samantha has a mind of her own, and some of the things she says leave us in stitches – others leave us shaking our heads, but we'll stick to the positives here. It seems that Samantha has the same Kindergarten teacher that her sister had a few years ago, and my husband and I are chuckling to ourselves about the unintentional "joke" we're about to play on our local school system. We are wondering how many years it will take for word to spread amongst the teachers in town about how much of a... well, *difference* there is between Samantha and her big sister... No need to go off about it here, like I said, we need to call it an early night, but it will suffice to say that any teacher of Taylor's who gets Samantha 4 years later will probably be surprised ☐

I was going to write about the younger two as well, but it's bedtime already and this post is long enough – that's what I get for not blogging regularly, I guess, an über-post!

Why I Loathe School Fundraisers

It's that time of year again – back to school already! For

the most part, this means good news for me as it clears out half of the foot traffic around here during the day. And since my oldest 2 are school-age and also the ones who are constantly misbehaving lately – Whoo Hoo for back to school time!

But back to school season also means it's time for school fundraisers, and my oldest daughter brought one home on the *second* day of school! They really couldn't wait until the second week of school at least? Because of how busy we've been around here between the new baby, my husband being in a play and his health scare, I set the fundraiser order form aside until the night before it was due when I reluctantly sent out an email seeking fundraiser participants. We actually did pretty well; better than I thought, actually, so I have to thank those of you who ordered stuff. But I have to come clean and say I did not order anything from my own daughter's school fundraiser. I just could not find anything I needed or even wanted for quadruple what it *should* cost.

My nephew sent me an email about a week later seeking participants for his first school fundraiser, so for him I was a little more motivated to order something. Since the kids get credit for the number of items they get people to order versus how much is spent, I started looking for something inexpensive I could order. I began by trying to think of any gifts we might need for people sometime soon. No luck – we have a basement full of stuff my husband got from overstocked wholesalers that is just waiting to be gifted away. Next I tried looking for a small kitchen gadget I could use, even if it was only once in a blue moon. I found a can strainer – a plastic disk with holes in it you put over cans to drain the water out. It was \$5 – outrageously expensive, of course, but I could justify it for my nephew's first attempts at fundraising for his school. This wasn't so hard, I thought as I clicked on the shopping cart to check out. Except that all of a sudden, I was spending \$11 instead of \$5. And there was

a text box on the webpage that told me that \$2.20 of my order goes directly to his school. They were trying to make it sound like a good thing, but \$2.20 out of \$11? And I'm spending \$11 on a 4 inch piece of plastic with holes in it? It really is easy enough to just use the can lid to strain whatever is in the can – and now I couldn't even justify buying an over-priced item “for a good cause” since the school was only getting \$2 of my money! Ugh, back to shopping on the fundraiser's site...

Have you ever had to shop for something you didn't want? It's actually quite difficult. We had a similar experience after our new baby was born. Someone got him some clothes that were the wrong size, so we ended up with a bunch of Kohl's store credit. My husband and I spent almost 2 hours in the Kohl's trying to figure out what we wanted; it was really difficult for us. Kohl's is not our type of store – we love bargain shopping, and even though it was “free” store credit we were spending, it was hard to justify their expensive prices on things we barely needed. We ended up with 2 candle warmers and an electric razor for my husband. He can grow a beard in a matter of days, and this razor cut his shaving time drastically. The candle warmers are pretty cool too – you put candles on them and still get the scent, but without the ‘something's burning’ smell or the danger of the open flame – a must-have if you like candles and have 4 little kids running around. So anyway, where was I before the Kohl's tangent?

Oh, yes, trying to shop for things you don't need... Like I said, I could justify the \$5 for the can strainer, but when it climbed to \$11 (especially because only \$2 went to my nephew's school), I had to explore other options. I considered a ‘dip kit’ for \$6, figuring I could use it at one of the many game nights we host – then it would double as a conversation piece as well – but shipping on every item was \$6. Since the dip instructions read, ‘just add mayonnaise and sour cream’, I couldn't justify \$12 on a packet of powder, again with the

school only getting a measly \$2. So anyway, over an hour later, I finally found a good solution – a magazine subscription. Sure, I was now spending \$15 instead of \$12, but there were no shipping fees which meant the school got \$8 of my money. With 4 kids I barely ever have enough time to read the daily newspaper, so I don't really know what I'm going to do with all the *US News and World Report* magazines that will soon be piling up around here. But hey, my kids already have a subscription to *Highlights* and my husband's not really into magazines, so what else was I supposed to do? The subscription to *Parents* magazine was actually cheaper, but as I've said many times before to people who try to borrow me books about parenting – at the end of a long day full of changing diapers, cleaning spills, refereeing fights, and serving meals for people to reject, the last thing I want to do to unwind is read about kids! So I figured I could maybe save time – instead of surfing the 'net at night reading news stories, I could bring my *US News and World Report* up to bed and start my reading time a little earlier so I don't stay up too late.

But the point of this long rambling blog is this: I hate school fundraisers. I hate asking people to spend their hard-earned money on them, I hate ordering from them, and I hate the way they're set up. Don't get me wrong – I was more than happy to order from my nephew, especially because it's his first one; I find that kind of cute. Nevermind that little voice in my head that says, "but he's only in *Kindergarten* and they're already making him sell things!" But lucky for me, my sister only has 2 kids. Can't say the same for us -our family's fundraiser victims will get hit up a whopping 4 times a year! Not only that, but when the kids are in different clubs and activities, those are also prime targets for fundraising opportunities. My daughter brought home a newsletter just today that said her Girl Scouts fundraiser will be starting in a few weeks... ugh, here we go again. So even if we don't have any more kids and say each of our kids

is in only 1 club or activity that does a fundraiser (girl scouts does 2 if you include selling cookies) – that's now a minimum of 8 times per year I have to hit up my family and friends. And that 8 times a year will probably all be overlapping in the autumn months! It is my hope to someday be able to put aside enough time to attend the PTO meetings and urge the implementation of a new fundraising system – one where not so much money is wasted on the company that is hired to actually do the fundraiser. Until then, maybe I will just buy stock in one of these fundraising companies that are preying on our children's schools... in a struggling economy, something tells me that is one type of business that isn't hurting!

Back To School And Redirection

Today is the first day back to school (already?!?), and it's really quiet around here. I guess my oldest two are my loudest two, and we have reduced the traffic in the house by 50% since half the kids are now at school during the day. Thank goodness for school; I'm enjoying myself already. So far, I've gotten two loads of laundry done – folded, put away and everything, and I have somehow also found the time today to put away most of the clutter that's been haunting our dining room table for the last week and a half. I even got to work on my e-book a little bit, and it's not even 1 o'clock! And, the kids at school are learning stuff, getting exercise, and socializing with their friends; they're not vegged out in front of the tv or outside fighting in the wading pool. Everyone wins!

While the oldest 2 kids are in school, I also have time to focus on my toddler, Disney, while her baby brother is napping. Today, I got to sit on the floor and play puzzles with her; something we haven't done together in months, almost a year because of my pregnancy and c-section. And she was down for her nap by 12:30, which not only means some quality time together for me and baby Christopher, but also that my toddler should be to bed at a decent hour tonight. Win-win!

While I was on the floor playing with my daughter, I was getting up to tend to the laundry and whatnot. My daughter was following me around the house, and this is where my day becomes challenging – trying to keep our clingy almost 2-year-old out of my husband's home office so he can work. The home office isn't a room where he could close the door and utilize the out-of-sight-out-of-mind tactic. The office is on the landing on our second floor, so if my toddler begins to head up the stairs or even *looks* up the stairs, she sees her best friend, Daddy, and it's over. She tantrums until he holds her, and he can't get any work done. Today she got upstairs and in the clutches of Daddy, so when I chased her down, of course she was upset. But I used one of my favorite child-rearing techniques: redirection. I taught her how to clean the toothpaste off the kids' bathroom counter, which she happily did. We went downstairs for a popsicle, puzzles, and Barney, and all was forgotten. Wow. I had totally forgotten about the magic of the redirection technique because the last 2-year-old I had in the house was our "spirited" child, Samantha. Sammie was **never** re-directable. She has always been so strong-willed that it's literally impossible to re-direct the kid, let alone being able to trick her into helping around the house. To this day, she will fight for her cause, whatever it may be, until she gets what she wants or she passes out. And now that she's older (she's 4), the crying doesn't last as long, but she will remember what it is she wanted and bring it up throughout the day (or week or month) until she gets it. So I am actually *enjoying* Disney's terrible twos a little bit – it's so refreshing to have a kid

who listens. I know, she's not yet 2 and things could get worse – so much worse. But I've been there, done that, and after what Sammie put us through, no wonder Disney seems like a breeze. And even if she does get completely crazy, soon she'll be old enough to go to school, and we'll start the terrible twos all over again with Christopher. After 3 tantruming girls in their terrible twos, I'm curious to see what a boy will be like. Probably no big deal, at least compared to Sammie ☐

Nocturnal Purple-Legged Baby

So how is life with 4 kids? One word – chaotic. I suppose some of that can be attributed to us not taking any time off from volunteering with the various community groups we are involved in... Most logical people would have done the smart thing and laid low for awhile. But us, we did just the opposite and jumped into a few new projects head first – oops. But, I do enjoy getting out and spending time with fellow adults, and besides, we've already committed ourselves, so it's too late now.

But anyway, the kids are adjusting just fine to having a new little brother. Our almost 2-year-old has reached the terrible twos officially, and she spends most of her time being upset or making messes. Figures, doesn't it, that she would reach this stage right as there's a new baby in the house. But it can't be helped, and we just have to grin and bear it for awhile until it passes. The upside is that her terrible twos are no where near the magnitude of the turmoil that her older sister caused in the house when she was going through them, but it's still hard to see our once sweet little girl being so nasty. I don't know what it is about the

terrible twos, but every kid goes through them (maybe the terrible twos aren't so bad with boys? I'm hopeful...), and they can totally change a child's personality for months, even years. Little Disney was the sweetest baby and toddler, and now that she is almost 2, she has begun tantruming (almost constantly), hitting, spitting, and biting. Much, if not all of the behavior comes from being so frustrated – she gets frustrated when people don't understand what she wants or when she thinks her sisters are taking things from her. Even if they're just trying to help her, if anyone is doing anything she doesn't like, she'll throw a tantrum. But what keeps me going is knowing that it's just the age, and she'll magically return to normal one day; that's how it works. It usually happens suddenly, almost as suddenly as it began – it's like a spell is broken, and hopefully it's sooner rather than later; but I'm prepared for the long haul because her sister's terrible twos (and boy, were they *terrible*) lasted from about the ages of 16 months until she was 4 years old.

And speaking of our 4-year-old, Sammie loves her new little brother and always wants to hold him. I'm trying to get better about how nervous it makes me; especially because Disney sees her older sisters holding him and then of course she wants to do it. But as time goes by, he gets stronger and less floppy, so eventually I can let them help more and be relaxed about it.

Taylor, our 8-year-old, loves her new little brother also, although with 2 younger sisters, she's kinda been there and done that, as far as new babies go. She is still a big help, especially with Disney, but she and Sammie fight constantly, and now Disney is starting to join in... If we could get a handle on some of the fighting, things would be much better around here. I feel like my kids fight, argue, and bicker *constantly*. I probably feel this way because it's true. Part of it is Disney being so frustrated all the time, and then neither she nor Sammie like to share things with others; and

then also Taylor can be really nasty to Sammie, probably just cuz it's summer and they're sick of each other. Thank goodness school starts in less than 2 weeks. I say that now, but I'll also be losing my day-help when Taylor goes back to school, so we'll have to see how things work out.

As for the little guy himself, Christopher is almost 4 weeks old, and he's doing well. He is a constant joy to have around, but aren't they all at this age? The only problem with him is that he seems to be nocturnal – wakes all night and sleeps during the day. Luckily for me, my husband is a light sleeper and wakes with him before I even hear anything. He is getting no sleep, but I told him weeks ago, once you let me start sleeping through the night, my body will get used to it and I won't wake up... I don't think he listened. But my sleeping-lightly days are over – during my pregnancy I awoke very easily at every little noise, but now I'm back to my I-could-sleep-through-Armageddon phase. I also warned Hubby that this baby was going to be nocturnal because in the womb, he wouldn't move much during the day, but he's start going crazy about 9pm until after I went to bed.

And almost all new babies bring with them the fear of something being wrong – the other day, Christopher's legs turned purple out of no where... I had just gotten him out of his stroller, but his straps weren't too tight or anything like that; I checked on them later. It was horribly scary to see his little purple legs, and I've never experienced that with my girls. But the doctor didn't seem to be too concerned; just something to take a look at next appointment – might be a blood vessel spasm, which I found out is not terribly uncommon in infants after looking it up on the internet. There is a condition called Raynaud's Syndrome that is characterized by purple limbs, however they're accompanied by extreme pain, and little Christopher was sleeping calmly while this happened. We'll see what the doctor says on Monday.

That's about it for now; it's good to be sitting here blogging again – it's been so hectic for a few weeks that I was not in front of my computer enough to even blog. But then I started thinking of all my faithful readers I was disappointing, and I thought I'd better make the time to give them something to read ☐