

Should Have Gone And Fed The Ducks

Well... another year plus 3 days older. This year has definitely been one of the most personally dramatic I have ever faced but with God's protective presence through my wonderful family and once again the very best friends He has put out there for me, I feel that I am nearing as close to a full recovery as possible.

I always enjoy doing special things on my birthday. This year, I was lucky enough to have a 4 day holiday (I will be paying for it since I now work until Tuesday without a break... I can handle that). Saturday, my parents and my oldest brother celebrated with me at The Factory restaurant. This is one of at least three family named (Don Hall) restaurants in the Fort: Triangle Park and the Gas House are two of the others... if memory serves there are a few others. It had been years since we had eaten at the Factory and that being the case I decided on that. Being only 5PM on a Saturday, there was not much of a crowd so we were seated right away. The selection was NOT at all what it used to be. In fact, I almost wished that I had decided to go to Triangle Park which has a small pond in which ducks and a few swans are known to gather looking for bread crumbs. However, my surf and turf was wonderful.

Sunday (the actual big day), I was invited to spend the day with my second family. This year, there was no other place I would rather be. C&L saw me and continue to stand beside me as I improve more and more each week. To say that they and their family are really special is an absolute understatement.

We met a few other friends at church service and then went to brunch. On the way, I had two little ones trying to play with the windows in the car. Their mischievous plans were thwarted as they discovered that the driver's door has a window lock.

MWAHAHAHAHAHA! Then back to the house and some play time with the littles. Around 6, I had to make my exit as I had forgotten to bring my meds.

Monday, more fun. I volunteered to take the three little ones to church while L took T to her camp. Later, I had a meeting and was invited to help celebrate another guy's birthday (he CAN'T be three already... I distinctly remember the day I was called informing me of his arrival).

Tuesday... a day to relax and think about nothing. Started reading the original Gaston Leroux *Phantom of the Opera*. Not as dry as I thought it might be in fact it is pretty good so far. Perhaps I will compare and contrast the longest running Broadway musical and the novel somewhere down the line. I did get our team signed up to play Family Feud at our annual village fest on the 29th at 7.

All in all a Happy Birthday. NOW I have to find a day to see the final chapter of Harry Potter opening this weekend. Definitely on Tuesday since I close every night through Monday. Anyone care to join me?

A Hit With The 6 & 7 Year Olds

Today for lunch, I went across the street to my old stomping grounds to help my newly turned first grade 7 year-old niece celebrate her birthday. 10-10-10... three months after I celebrate my own day She could have had me over Friday but she did not like the menu. Today's offering of chicken

strips, muffin, and peaches was fine (I was never fond of the school's cole slaw, so I let that go).

As you can imagine I was the most popular big kid in the joint. All eyes were upon me. Do you think I minded a bit?

I did have a hard time getting into the building. All but one door is locked all day, and I did not know which one (it hasn't been THAT long since I've graced the halls). And a lot has changed. The elementary section is now where the halls of my high school were. Alyssa's classroom is where the library/study hall used to be.

I did see a few faces from the past. The same elementary secretary who was there humn years ago still occupies the desk (as she did the first day I entered the school back in 19-).

I also came across my fifth-grade teacher. She has since retired but was subbing for a Kindergarten class. All this while sitting at a table outside the classroom (usually meant that you were in trouble... ME!?)

It must be my size that made me think that the lunch room appeared to be smaller than it was. But I thought for sure there were more tables set up in my day. One change almost broke my heart: the milkshake machine was gone □ DANG! I also do not remember being so rushed to eat (maybe there are fewer tables). Nope, just learned that the kids are rushed.

At least one parent has complained... possible while they were sharing lunch with their little one.

After lunch, Alyssa and I went to the Puppy Pound for a bit.

She got on one of the swings. Shortly after, the swing set was occupied with little ones begging me to push them. One kindergartener became a daredevil after he was pushed high enough and leaped from his seat. I remember doing that back in the day! Unfortunately for my new friend, the result was the same: A whistle blown and an escort to the wall. I tried not to grin as he hung his head.

If I had known that I was going to be the center of attention the whole time, I would have taken my camera.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, ALYSSA!

Part 2 Of The Whew That Was The First Part Of July

So we pull into our driveway after our 4 hour drive back from Nashville Indiana (not going to waste time with a recap, these posts are long enough! See my previous post if you want to know what I'm talking about), and my husband's aunt's truck is parked in front of our house. We had agreed (or so I thought) to meet them at their hotel (which was a safe distance of 10-15 miles away) for some dinner and swimming – after just getting back from being out of town for a few days, which was preceded by constant activities for my family for the 4th of July, I wanted some time to make the house presentable. Much to my dismay, that did not happen. We pulled up to our house and see that their truck is there – I could not believe it. Luckily, they were no where in sight, turns out they had gone shopping downtown. So hubby and I bribed the kids to all go play together upstairs, we unpack the car as fast as we can, and we quickly run around the house doing some very fast spot-cleaning. It worked out, but I get really stressed about stuff like that – it would have been better if they had just adhered to the original plan.

So they come over (they called first, so they get bonus points for that), and my mother-in-law mentions giving my aunt-in-law a tour of my house multiple times. Under normal circumstances, I would be more than happy to do so – personally, I love to

see the different layouts of people's houses, and I'm always excited to take a tour if one is offered. But when I haven't had the time to clean my house in a few weeks, I'm a bit apprehensive about giving my aunt-in-law (who has never seen the house) a tour... but I think it's about time I get over some of my hang-ups, so I oblige and give the tour through the dirty house – and we all survived and came out alive.

After that, we went out to dinner and swimming at their hotel, and that was a lot of fun until we made the mistake of letting our little 2-year-old boy out of his floatie. He began to run around and do other brave things, like get onto the pool ladder and act like he was going to jump in, all of which terrified me and compounded my exhaustion from the week before – so I had had enough; it was time to go. The next day, we left it up to our guests where to eat lunch, and they chose our local circa 1950's diner, which has a cute atmosphere but I warned them that the food is not so great. I hadn't eaten there in probably about a year though, and my Philly cheese steak sandwich wasn't too bad, although it left me hungry. After the diner, we decided to play tourist in our hometown some more and went on the "Lolly Trolley" at the Dum Dum factory – you know Dum Dums, and don't try to tell me you didn't save up your wrappers when you were little to send them in for various bits of Dum Dum treasure.



The Lolly Trolley was fun, much more fun than I had expected given the factory's disclaimers of how we weren't going to be able to see the kitchen where the candy is actually made. We also spotted our good friends' son on the job as he is an employee of the factory, so that was fun. After our tour, we went swimming again in the hotel pool, and someone had a

marvelous last minute idea for dinner – let's go to Walmart, pick up some ingredients, and have my husband's mother cook us dinner! She is a brilliant cook, I might add. So she made us come kind of delicious baked chicken breasts on a bed of croutons with swiss cheese on top, and the house smelled almost as good as dinner tasted... until my son was left unattended for literally only 2 minutes, when he used that opportunity to produce one of the dirtiest diapers he's ever had. I will spare details, but let's just say that the mess did not stay in his diaper (not an accident, either), and the upstairs carpet was one of the victims of this disaster. Luckily, Hubby is great at fast clean-ups, so he helped me quickly clean up the mess and our son before any additional guests arrived for our game night.

Game night with my mother-in-law was extra fun, even if she did sabotage herself in a game of Mafia by talking out loud and accidentally revealing her position – it just added to the fun for the rest of us. We also played other game night favorites, and people stayed too late as usual – not that I ever mind because it was fun, as tired as I was on Saturday.

Saturday we took the family to the produce tent and the local pizza buffet for lunch, and then we just sat around the living room and chatted for the afternoon while my son napped, learning more about my husband's cousins' hobbies (his 16-year-old cousin is really into air-softing, something I hadn't heard of, but I was glad to hear him provide a little more info – getting pictures in my email of this boy I've basically watched grow up wearing camouflage and brandishing a gun was a bit alarming, so I appreciated hearing the details about his sport). They left for home a little after 4, leaving us just enough time to get to a dear friend's retirement party. We were a tad late, but we overcompensated by staying way past the time the party was supposed to end and had a lot of fun meeting her family and celebrating her accomplishment.

Sunday was my little guy's actual 2nd birthday, so we took him

to the Mexican restaurant where the staff sang to the birthday boy, who was frightened by all the attention being paid to him and jumped out of his highchair, burying his face into Dad's shoulder. We returned home for a day of some much needed r and r, and here it is Tuesday, and I'm STILL recovering! But in this family, busyness is the norm and while summer provides us a break from school, youth group, and other obligations, we always find plenty more to do – besides, would we be able to survive boredom? I think not!!

Independence Day And That Other Nashville

Well, it's been a long week and a half – which is probably how long it will take you to read this super-long blog post I'm about to write. Hey, it's been awhile since I've been able to blog, and I have lots to say! Tons of fun since the 4th of July weekend, but go-go-go constantly, and I am so tired, it's unbelievable! A quick (well, kinda, sorta) rundown...

July 3 – my birthday, so we dragged the kids down to a larger town down south to see their fireworks, one of my favorite birthday activities. The only problem is that the fireworks didn't start until 10pm, and we wanted to get there by 2pm because we had tickets for a raffle at a party thrown by a store. Even with our 5 tickets, we did not win any one of the 50 prizes (no surprise there; our luck is terrible when it comes to things like that). But the party was lots of fun with airbrush tattoos for the kids, sand creations they could make, free coloring kits, and also free hot dogs, pizza, and baby water bottles. We had no trouble killing time for the next 8 hours, although it did exhaust all 6 of us. We had a

nice birthday dinner at Bob Evans (have you tried their pot roast stroganoff? It's yummy!!), even though they forgot to sing to me or my little boy, whose birthday is 8 days after mine (so we were celebrating both). No matter, I usually hate stuff like that anyway (like it for my kids – for me, not so much), but I was willing to give it a try just for the free dessert. Oh well. This larger town's fireworks were much better than our hometown's, though the kids would not let me forget that they are starting to find fireworks boring. Might have to find something new for next year's bday celebration, or maybe a babysitter so Hubby and I can enjoy fireworks alone for a change...

July 4 – After church, we packed all day long for our upcoming camping trip. This involved doing lots of last minute laundry and preparing the house as best I could so that it wouldn't be too much of a mess when we got back. Although we were exhausted, this turned out to be a good decision because when we got back from the 3 day camping trip, my mother-in-law and her sister and kids were here waiting for us – that was SO not the plan. They were supposed to be at their hotel, and we were going to change into our bathing suits and go meet them at the hotel for swimming, giving me a chance to pick up my very messy house. But more on that next post...

July 5-8 – July 5 was the day the kids had been waiting for – we left for Nashville. Not the well known country music capital of the country in TN, but the lesser known, population 800 Nashville in Brown County, southern Indiana. What a beautiful place! I can understand why it's a very popular destination in the fall, the scenery must be nothing short of gorgeous when the leaves change colors. As for visiting in July, that was nice too. Never mind that the weather was above 90° all 3 days of our vacation – we barely noticed, thanks to the accommodations my husband was able to find for us: an over 3,000 sq ft fully furnished house that fit all 13 of us comfortably on its secluded 10 acres. I made a video

tour of the house, but I haven't figured out how to put in links to youtube.com playlists yet, so you lucked out – a video tour of a house you've never been to would probably bore the pants off of you, and now you don't have to sit through it. You'll have to settle for the ultra-exciting text version I'm going to describe below (some of which you can skip if it gets dry – remember, I use my blogs as sort of a family diary as well. Years into the future when I'm long gone, I'm hoping my loved ones will enjoy reading my ramblings. If not, hey, my feelings certainly won't be hurt!).

The long, tree-encircled, steep hill of a driveway ended at a garage with a basketball hoop, grill and table and chairs for grilling out, which we did a lot! Hubby and I played a few games of H-O-R-S-E with my dad, which quickly became a championship when all 3 of us were tied at one win apiece. Unfortunately, Hubby and I were not able to win a title for our family name, but we still had lots of fun. Just off of the driveway, there was a swing that overlooked the pond area, which was a short way from the house, down a steep hill and past the firepit area. We had lots of fun cooking our lunches over the campfire and making smores at night. My 10-year-old daughter also revealed her hidden talent as a master fisherman, er fisher-person! She found a bit of line on the ground with a hook, and proceeded to use it – **without any bait** – to catch no less than 5 fish, and they were larger fish than we had caught with my nephew's fishing pole and using bait!!

Upon entering the house, the living room (2 couches and large tv with over 100 movies from which to choose, as well as a bookcase full of board games, books, and magazines) was to the right, and the kitchen and breakfast nook was to the left. Off the back of the living room was a washer / dryer (who wants to do laundry on vacation? But in case of emergency, it was very nice to have, especially if you were going to stay longer than the 3 days we were staying) and a half bath. On the 2nd floor, directly at the top of the stairs was a bedroom

with a bathroom (where my sister, her husband, and their 2-year-old slept), another living room (this one with a couch, futon, and billiard table), and a wrap around 4-season room with CD player and CDs (no country music?!? Don't worry, this is the only suggestion I could think to make on my comment card – everything else was perfect) and a Foosball table. Off of the 4-season room was another bedroom with bathroom (this is where Hubby and I and our 2-year-old slept), and then outside of the 4-season room was a yard with a deck with swing, chairs, picnic table, hammock, hot tub, swingset, sandbox, and outdoor fireplace. And oh yeah, my sister's room and our room shared an outdoor patio as well.

We also had a cut-throat pool game championship with my dad, but we didn't do very well at that one either... and since we're on the subject of lost games, I might as well get it out there that Hubby and I came in last on the Cornhole tournament as well. How funny is that when the Illinois family had never heard the term 'cornhole' anyway? ☐ Must be an Ohio thing, but that didn't seem to help our Cornhole skills... So we lost H-O-R-S-E, we lost cut-throat, and we lost Cornhole, but in what must have seemed like an even exchange, we made our reluctant family play some party games against their will – Mafia and Partini. I can't say they were big fans of either game, but at least they gave them a try and gave us some hilarious memories in the process. Here's what happens when people reluctantly play a normally very fun game called Partini:

Back to the house... from the 2nd floor living room was a staircase that led up to the 3rd floor master suite, which boasted a master bathroom with whirlpool tub. My parents slept up here, and lucky for them (?) there was a huge walk-in closet right next to their bed, which the 4 older kids (my 3 girls and their cousin) immediately eyed as a "clubhouse" where they could sleep right next to Grandma, who of course agreed. Also on the 3rd floor was a little nook with another queen bed, huge closet, and a little couch and chair – this is the bed where Uncle Bud slept. And off of the master suite was a huge outdoor wrap-around deck, where Hubby, my dad and I spent the first night watching the hilarious comedy The Goods in the fresh woodsy air (on our laptop – didn't want you to think there was a tv outside or anything. There were an abundance of cool bugs – huge moths and a different sort of firefly than I'm used to, but no outdoor tv).

Overall, a wonderful trip; I don't think we could have asked for it to be any better... well, perhaps the weather could have been a bit cooler, but what else can be expected in early July in southern Indiana than three 90°+ days in a row? That made our trying out the hot tub interesting – here we are packed in like sardines; we did try putting some ice cubes in it, but that didn't work so well. It kind of felt like being meat in a stew for a giant's brew:



And with that kind of weather, it made us even more thankful that we had changed our original vacation plan which was Jellystone campground in Fremont Indiana. It still sounds like a fun place, but the cabins there were very tiny and didn't have bathrooms, plus it was going to be mobbed on the dates we had to go – July 5-8. I will take our secluded, 3000+ sq ft, air conditioned house with plenty of bathrooms

any day! It was a bit further than Jellystone – 4 hrs vs. 45 minutes, but it worked well because our Chicago family had basically the same travel (distance-wise, anyway – they made a lot more stops than we did and so the trip took them longer to complete).

Whether you're looking for a fun place to have a family get-together, a vacation with friends or with co-workers, I highly recommend checking out the houses and cabins for rent in Brown County Indiana. If you would like to know which cabin is the one we stayed at, just leave me a comment, and I can send you more info!

7-10-2007

Another year and eleven minutes older...o maybe not exactly, I'll have to find out what time I actually entered the world.

Well... yesterday, I had to run to the big city and get my picture snapped. I abhor having my mug shot for my little piece of plastic for three years. Look at the little smiley sticker, drop your jaw, now move slightly to the right. UGH!

A fashioned model has it easier and they get paid for it!

Then, I endured a long nine hour work day. Better yesterday than today especially when I get three days off in a row! I don't have to be back until TUESDAY! Today, I have to go to an audition for *Hound of the Baskervilles*. I believe that I have stated that I will not be auditioning for either Holmes or Watson. I think my talents are better served in a return to a more character driven role this time. And I do not believe that the detective or the good doctor had facial hair... Watson, perhaps.

Tonight, mass at 6 is being given in memory of Aunt Carol.

After that, the sky's the limit. Spontaneity on your birthday is always fun!

Well... 22 minutes into another year. Tired, maybe I'll get some sleep.

That Candle Smells Like WHAT?!?

Something to put on my birthday list?



The White Castle slider-scented candle. That's right... if you are familiar with [White Castle restaurants](#) and their famous products, be warned – they have made a White Castle-scented candle. Yes, the steamed onion scent of the famous little burgers can now be brought into your home!

According to an article that ran on [nydailynews.com](#):

“The candle has a top note of diced sweet onions and crisp pickle, the middle notes are beef patty, cheese and ketchup, and bottom note is a warm burger bun. It all comes together to create this amazing aroma of a White Castle Slider.”

Ok, so I don't really want the White Castle scented candle for anything other than a conversation piece. I am curious about how it smells, but for my birthday I would much rather have a terrifically fun weekend, which is always probable thanks to

my wonderful family and the awesome local 4th of July events that are usually planned. On my birthday, the 3rd of July (please don't remind me that I share my birthday with one of my least favorite actors), we will probably catch some fireworks somewhere, as that is one of my favorite thing to do every year. Since the 4th of July is on a Sunday this year, we will be going to church, so we have to find a way to get out to the airport as well for the annual fly-in breakfast which is always a lot of fun. After church, probably during the little dude's nap, we have a lot of packing to do for a super-fun week in the woods of southern Indiana with the extended family – more about that when we return in a week or more.

HAVE A VERY HAPPY AND SAFE 4TH OF JULY WEEKEND!!!

HAPPY BIRTHDAY AMERICA!!!



Happy Birthday, Aunt Carol

Today would have been Carol's 54th birthday. So many wonderful memories. I know the last show she saw me in was *Idol Night at the Karaoke Place* and the character I played which is the same as my blog title. In the show, my best friend sang my favorite inspirational song made famous by my favorite artist. The music and lyrics are just perfection. So for Carol:

You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains.

You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas.

I am strong when I am on your shoulders.

You raise me up to more than I can be.

And yes, Mr. Groban is very high on my ipod shuffle. I would consider it a Christian tune as I would many of my favorite songs by Josh.

Happy birthday to One More Angel in Heaven.

A Beary Super Birthday!

Yesterday started off slowly and ended in the best way possible. I had to work on my birthday but I really wanted to have Saturday off just in case plans arose for an all day celebration (ya never know). I decided to call my pal when I got ready before work to check up on him because we were still bumed about the auditions. After talking to him, I sensed that he was still not fully recovered. Hopefully, the game night would help.

Before I went to work, I stepped out into the beauty shop and was greeted with birthday wishes from my mom's co-owner and an old friend who remembers this day 36 years ago. The mother of the first woman to ever break my heart. Ok, so i was like 6 when I asked "Seeah" (could not say Teresa) to marry me then she went off and got married to another man. To this day, she reminds me of this.

After a looong, uneventful day at work, I called over to the

game night festivities that had already begun to inform them that I had five minutes left! Games, brownie cake with a "54" candle on top. $54=18$ (another game night participant celebrating her birthday)+36. I think it was 54... sometimes that short-term memory ain't what it used to be.

Then the surprise package. I received a thong with a lottery ticket (\$2.00 winner) from Megan and a gift bag with a homemade card from Taylor, an invitation to Beeber's 1st birthday party, a hardcover copy of *The Death and Life of Superman*, and a fantastic stuffed #1 Yankee fan bear. I think I like the bear even more than the book it is soooooo cute. Thanks taylhis for going to the trouble.

As usual, I was the last guest to leave. We got into a discussion of our status as guests in a roundabout way. Something like you no longer are considered a guest if you stay long enough to help clean up. I don't know how much I cleaned but I definitely stayed long enough.

Thank you all once again for a Super birthday!!! I hope it helped C as much as it did me ☐

You Delivered My Pizza, But Please Don't Watch Me Eat It

We had a great weekend, even though the weather on Sunday was horrid – so cold my Christmas teddy bear got frozen to the window! Friday night was an all-night work session to finish up the planning and organization of our community theater's awards show, which is where we went Saturday night. But first on Saturday afternoon, it was a birthday celebration for our oldest who turned 9 on Sunday with a MUCH anticipated visit

from family who live out of state. We had a great time catching up and watching the kids open their birthday and Christmas presents, and the kids got to have a sleepover in the hotel with Grandma, Papa, and Uncle Bud while we went to the awards show. The awards show was lots of fun, as always, and I got to watch 2 very good friends win much-deserved achievement awards. Congratulations, guys!

It was lots of fun putting the show together, even if we didn't have much time to do so due to last minute notice from the theater. It was fun and also rewarding to watch the individual skits, shorts, songs, and awards presentations start as ideas on paper and then watch when they came together as a whole. It's also a fun excuse to get everyone together, and it's always nice to see long-lost busy friends who are unable to get together but for this one night. It might be fun to produce the awards show again next year, but then again, I'd love to have my best friend sitting beside me to watch them because I missed him this year – even though he did make an excellent host. If there are a few individuals in the theater community who have a hard time because they don't win awards, then let them have their hard time. There is talk of cancelling this awards show, and I would be very sad if that happened. It's definitely a whole ton of fun for most of us, and I really don't think we should let a few individuals ruin it for everyone. That's all I'm going to say on the subject for now, but expect to hear more from me once this very topic is discussed at the next production board meeting.

Sunday we had major Grandma-let-down, and because we didn't want our oldest daughter to be depressed on her actual birthday, we let her have a friend sleep over. During football season, we usually set aside Sundays for low-key stuff, like watching football, reading newspapers, and blogging, but we always end up with crazy kids so it's never exactly low-key. But I don't usually cook dinner on Sundays, and today we ordered pizza. Five minutes after the pizza was

delivered, we noticed the delivery guy was still parked out front and that he was standing outside of his car. Turns out, he had locked himself out of the car, and so we offered him a warm place to wait for his ride. Since the temperature outside has been hovering around 0° all day, with wind chills near -20°, he gratefully accepted. And he stood in our front hall for almost 30 minutes! If he were outside, he would have frozen to death. But it did feel a little awkward eating the pizza he delivered while he stood there. We offered him a seat in the living room, but he opted to stand in the entryway, and I'm kind of glad because at least we were then eating out of his view. Our 2-year-old kept asking about "the pizza guy", and then he became scary to her – "I scared pizza guy" – probably cuz he was just standing there, doing nothing, and she's never seen anyone do that in our front hall before. But finally his ride came, thank goodness, and he left. I wonder if he gets paid for the time he was standing in our house? I wonder who pays for the gas that was used in his running car while he was waiting for his ride? Should we have offered him some pizza? It was kind of a weird situation, but it does make for interesting blog fodder. Of course it had to happen on the coldest day of the year – that guy has a new story to tell!

A single cup of coffee..

Yep, more on coffee. Well sort of. This is really a birthday post. Yesterday, it ended around two hours ago, would have been my wife's 45th birthday, if she had lived that long. It was the 5th I've celebrated without her. The first, I put a personal ad in the paper, I invited friends and family to show up at 'our' little coffee shop. Very few did. The second year, I don't remember what I did, our little shop closed its doors

before I could celebrate that day. The 3rd year, I went to a coffee shop and sat with some friends who were there, they knew nothing of the day. The fourth year, I went to a winery with some friends. This year, I went to another coffee shop. I ordered one cup of coffee and a blueberry scone. I even had something different as my refill. They had Chocolate-Raspberry for the Decaf flavor. I'm not a big decaf fan, but I had that anyway. It was her favorite coffee flavor. It was a good morning.