

Playing Tourist In Toledo

It began with terrible news – my husband's uncle had a massive heart attack and was in a coma. His uncle was in Youngstown Ohio, on his way from Illinois to Washington DC where he was going to take his two sons for a vacation. A week ago Sunday, we packed up our family and were ready to head to Youngstown to be with the boys since they didn't have any other family in the area, but at the last minute, we found out that their mom was on her way.

We were all packed and ready to go, plus the summer almost got by without us taking a family vacation. Sure, we had some fun excursions with extended family and friends, but nothing with all 6 of us, just the 6 of us. So we changed our destination from Youngstown to Toledo, cut out a bunch of that driving, and were able to utilize a hotel gift certificate that had been burning a hole in our pockets. Although Toledo is not our home town, we live only an hour away so we visit often, which is why I used the term 'playing tourist'.

We went to the zoo (for the umpteenth time, but I could never get sick of the zoo, NEVER!), ate some delicious food, and swam in the hotel pool a bunch. We visited a mall; something I haven't done in probably over a decade (I don't count our local mall – it's more than half vacant, and its food court has only one restaurant left!), and I was disappointed to learn that the mall's Dippin' Dots store (which is the only one anywhere nearby) DOES NOT carry my favorite flavor – Root Beer Float! But the Dippin' Dots were still delicious, and besides, that's just one more thing that makes Orlando that much more special – plenty of Root Beer Float Dippin' Dots in the store near Disney World, how I miss that place. We couldn't believe how crowded the Toledo mall was on a Wednesday afternoon, and because I hadn't been in one in years, there were all these new gadgets, gizmos, and what-nots that our family had to check out and play around with,

probably making us look like total hicks. But that's ok, we had fun! And not only do I love living in a rural area because we have no crime, crowds, or traffic, but it makes things like visiting malls or big movie theaters rare treats and fun vacations!



4 party animals in the hotel

Probably the most fun I had on this vacation was when we rented a pontoon boat and took it into Lake Erie. Now, don't be fooled by stats – You wouldn't know that Lake Erie is the second smallest of the Great Lakes in surface area when you're out there on a boat – you go out far enough, and you can't see shore, like all of the Great Lakes. When we looked at a map when we got home, we found that we had barely even gotten into the lake, yet it took us about 30 minutes to get there and there was water as far as the eye can see. Setting Lake Erie apart from the others is its relatively shallow depths, at least on the west side of the lake where we were visiting – the water averaged 1-3 feet in depth! It looked really strange to see people *standing* in the lake, really far from shore, with water only up to their knees!

There were some interesting and fun islands to explore; we anchored our boat near the Woodtick Peninsula and waded onto the beach for some sea shell hunting and sand playing.



My kids were well behaved on the boat, and they enjoyed themselves, with the little guy even finding time for his afternoon nap.



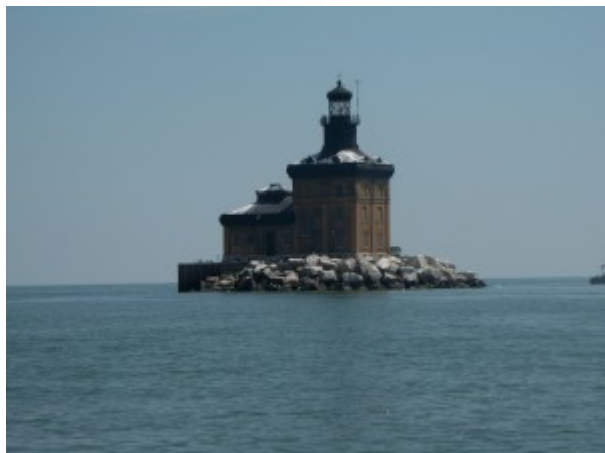
(Note the can of precious Coke Zero clutched in his hand. He stole it from his dad, but apparently it didn't help keep him awake!)

We wanted to dock at a cool looking place called Turtle Island, but it didn't seem very kid-friendly – maybe next time if Hubby and I can get back for date night. [Turtle Island](#) (click the link for more history) was once destined to be a great resort island, but plans fell through, and it remains abandoned. There are some abandoned structures that remain on the island, including an old lighthouse and an old-fashioned crane (on the right of the island in this picture).



Since Turtle Island is way out in the lake, you wouldn't expect there to be wildlife, but we saw this fox looking for fish on the beach – so cool to see!! Perhaps because of the shallow nature of this part of Lake Erie, animals can just walk out to the islands, or maybe the fox was a stowaway. Pardon the bumpiness of the video – taking pictures and video was something I struggled with the entire time on the bobbing boat!

There is also a “haunted lighthouse” (in reality it’s called the [Toledo Harbor Light](#)) that looks very cool and emits a ghostly warning horn every few minutes.



As we were floating nearby gaping at it, a Coast Guard boat came speeding up to us, lights flashing and all. What the...? There were four Coast Guard officers on the boat, all armed, and the one in charge informed us that they “had the authority of the US government” and were going to board our boat and search it.

As serious as it seemed, they must have liked what they saw because we were awarded a “good as gold” form, which means that we had been following all the maritime laws and regulations. But it was kind of a strange experience to be all alone floating in the middle of Lake Erie one minute, only to have a boat full of gun-wielding government agents on your case the next... They were nice enough, I suppose, but sheesh, why our boat? Later when we returned to shore, the owner of the boat rental place said that in all their years of renting out their boats, none of their clients had ever undergone a boarding inspection by the Coast Guard. Lucky us. Perhaps with all my kids on board, they were suspicious of some illegal Canadian smuggling, eh?

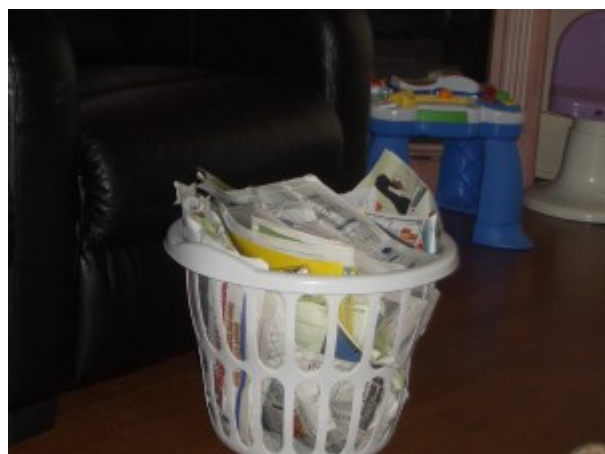
Despite all the high-seas adventure, the vacation was fun and so refreshing to be able to spend time together as a family without distraction, not having to worry about household

chores, responsibilities, or Dad's work for a few days. Just what I needed to get out of my kids-are-fighting-constantly-rut at home, and hey – I even lost track of that back-to-school countdown I had been swearing by before the vacation!

And the best news of all this? Hubby's uncle has been released from the hospital and is now recovering at home. Time will tell us what he will need to make his heart healthier, but for now, he is out of immediate danger and for that, we are so thankful!

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.



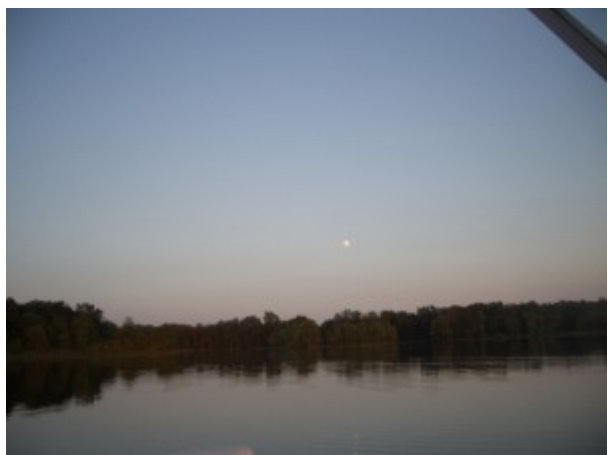
Next is a pic of our baby boy – he was so excited to finally get at that basketball that we had to take a picture. Never mind that he's going to play baseball for the Chicago Cubs some day – or the Chicago Bears if my husband gets *his* way...



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!