

Down And Out In Shipshewanni

Well, life is back to normal, I guess you could say, whatever “normal” is. My 3 girls were with their Grandma in Illinois for over a week, and they had an awesome time. Our house was quite quiet and empty without them, so we made it our business to not be in the house much at all. We were constantly on the go, getting to do lots of fun things with just the baby and even some things just hubby and me – great times! More on that later since I need to finish writing about our trip to King’s Island, and hopefully entice some people to come along when we go back close to Halloween. But for now, here is a re-cap of our trip to Shipshewanni – I’m respectfully poking fun at my mom, who has a tendency to sometimes mispronounce things – love you Mom!

So Monday, instead of driving to Illinois to pick up the kids, we met them and my parents, uncle, sister, nephews, and brother-in-law in Shipshewana Indiana for two days of fun in an indoor water park. Anticipating this trip for months, I was sure I was going to have a fun blog to write – a family trip with 7 adults, 4 kids and 2 babies sounded like fodder for a National Lampoon movie. But strangely, especially considering **this** group of people – you know who you are ☹ – nothing bizarre happened; no one in the group got crazy (except for our baby, but that will be addressed later on...), and we all had a blast!

I have to be honest and say that when we got to the water park, I was a bit disappointed to see that there wasn’t a swimming pool. But as time went on, I became happy with the small size of the place since it was easy to keep tabs on the kids and find other members of the family to catch up and chat. There were two large water slides where you go down on rafts, and we had an awesome time taking turns going down with everyone racing each other. You could go down one or two-at-a-time, and after a while, our oldest got brave enough to try

and found she LOVED the water slides! Same with her cousin, and the two of them went down together – it was adorable to see the two of them work together to carry their huge raft up all those stairs. I wish I had a picture, but it was impossible to have a camera in the water park – and please, with my camera luck, do you think I could have taken pictures in the water park and still have had a camera when we left? Doubtful. But anyway, we (exhaustively!) made our way up all those stairs time and time again to race our daughter and my nephew and even my mom and dad down the water slide.

They also had a kids' pool with lots of things to play with and a soft floor for the babies to crawl on. There was also a playground with 4 water slides – the kind you go down without a raft – and I liked those too until I mistakenly went down one before it was cleared... My husband was standing at the bottom of it holding our two-year-old, and I slid right into the back of his legs, bowling them over. Thank goodness no one was hurt, and I'm sure it was an hilarious, stooge-like display of idiocy.

They also had a lazy river – my favorite. You just grab a raft and float on down the river, and my 1-year-old son fell asleep because it was so peaceful to float down the river in my arms. When we are rich, we are going to build a lazy river at my goat farm where I will play with goats, make cheese, and relax in my lazy river ☐

We split up for dinner, and my parents and uncle were nice enough to watch the kids so we could go out to dinner with my sister and brother-in-law. We took the babies with us (our youngest sons are 2½ months apart), and they allowed us sisters and husbands some much-needed catch-up time; I think it's been over 5 years since we went out together which is too long! We went to an Amish-style restaurant, and at first I thought it was going to be a gimmick. You know, yucky Sysco food disguised as Amish style food... but thankfully, I was wrong. The food was SO good! The roast beef was incredible,

the mashed potatoes homemade and not out of a package as so many are, and the chicken and noodles tasted like the noodles were also made from scratch. Everything was all we could eat, served family style – YUM! I highly recommend the Blue Gate restaurant!

So then we went back to the water park for a little bit until it closed, and then it was time to try to get the kids settled down for the night. My parents were gracious enough to splurge (the entire trip was a Christmas gift from them) and get us a room with some extra space for our large family, and the two oldest girls had their own little bunk bed area with a tv and nightlights in their beds. They were out in a jiffy. Not the case with the younger two – our two-year-old Disney had to bunk with us for lack of beds while her one-year-old brother had a crib. Disney and I caught up on life and her week with Grandma while whispering under the covers while Daddy tried to get the baby to bed. Soon, Disney was asleep which just left one standing... and standing... Christopher refused to go to sleep. In a hotel, especially in a room adjoining my sister's where they also had a fussy trying-to-go-to-sleep baby, we could not let him cry it out, so we took him down the hall to the mini-arcade – at least I could read my magazine and my husband could play some Madden while the baby crawled around. Ha. All he wanted to do was crawl up and (fall) down the stairs, so no fun for us. I thought about taking him downstairs so we could at least sit with my dad and uncle and enjoy the evening air, but one of us had to stay with the sleeping girls. Since our goal was to be able to spend some time together, this was not an option. We ended up sitting outside of our room for awhile, letting the baby crawl, but soon he got crabby and we realized we were just assaulting my sister's family from the other side of the room with our noise. Finally we put him back in his crib and hid out in the bathroom so we were out of sight, and this did the trick – 4 down! Except that now it was too late to do anything together, so we just watched a few of those weird

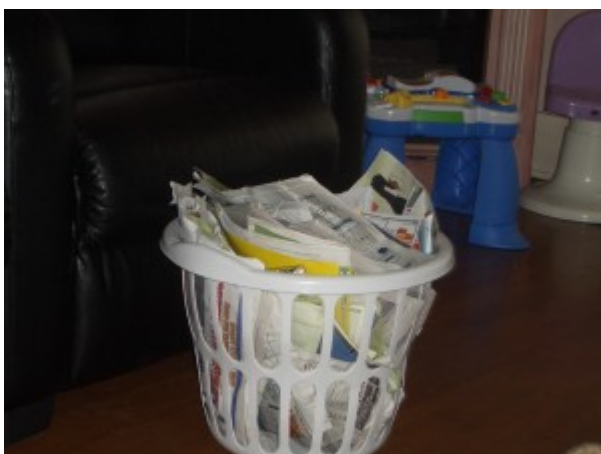
youtube-like videos and went to bed. Apparently the baby woke up again in the middle of the night and also early the next morning, and my awesome husband took care of him, even though he was dead tired by the time we got home the next day. I didn't sleep well either, especially with Disney in our bed who kept kicking me.

So the next morning, we were up for breakfast, and I couldn't eat anything because I was so tired. No problem; I'd get lunch later when I was hungry and at the very least, we had big plans to pick up some gourmet cheese from the awesome cheese shop before we left town. We split up for the day since my husband didn't mind taking the older kids to the water park again, and the rest of us had had enough water park, so we went to the flea market instead – what a madhouse! I don't know why it's only open 2 days a week because for those 2 days, the area is MOBBED with tons of traffic! But anyway, the flea market is huge and has a wide variety of things for everyone. Before I left, hubby said to make sure I bought myself something, so I did – isn't he awesome? He takes most of the kids for the day AND tells me to buy myself something, awww... (and this is why I obliged to let him try out for a play – he is a giver; he deserves to do something HE wants to do. Of course, being in a show takes months of rehearsal and prep time – oh, man, what did I agree to???) But anyway, I got a black and white vintage photo of Wrigley Field in 1946 – how cool is that? I bought a Bears Superbowl frame and some hot sauce for hubby, and we left the flea market before seeing all of it – is that possible to do in just one day? Then it was time to go home, and our oldest was really upset to see Grandma go – she has a Grandma addiction, so the more time she spends with Grandma, the more sad she gets when it's time to leave. But she got over it, and we achieved the coveted quadruple-kid-pass-out on the way home. Overall, an awesome time, and I think we should definitely do something again next year. As fun as the water park was, I might suggest a different location next time –

maybe a campground or another place where we would have more sit-down time to really get together, catch up, and maybe even play some games. My sole complaint is that I arrived home cheese-less ☐ There was an awesome cheese shop, and we were going to stop on the way home, but the kids were just too crazy and the traffic too thick in Shipshewana for us to stop – dangit. I had been looking forward to that cheese for two days! Bermuda onion cheese, yummmm...
(drooling...)

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.



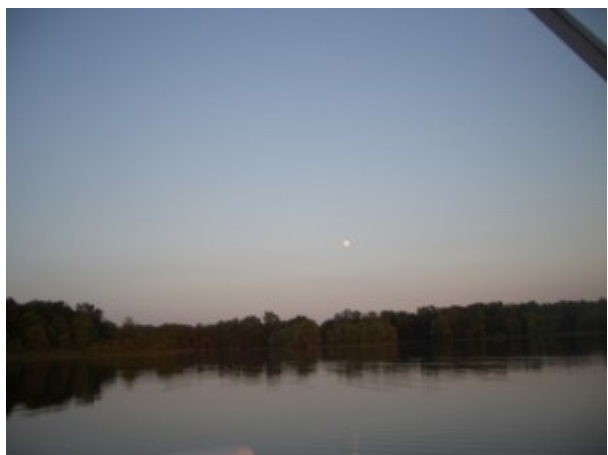
Next is a pic of our baby boy – he was so excited to finally get at that basketball that we had to take a picture. Never mind that he's going to play baseball for the Chicago Cubs some day – or the Chicago Bears if my husband gets *his* way...



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!

Bloggging In The Great Outdoors

Now that school is out, we decided to take a last minute camping trip with the kids and dogs, and it’s been wonderful. More on that later – I am in a cabin, “roughing it” in the great outdoors (so to speak – we do have beds, running water, a bathroom, a/c, even a little fridge and microwave), but it doesn’t even seem appropriate to be using a computer – just

kind of takes away from the outdoorsy ambiance a little bit. But it rained yesterday, with more storms forecast for today and tomorrow, so I figured I would use some of my free time to let my faithful readers know that I haven't skipped town. Well, I kind of have skipped town, but in a good way, and someday soon, I'll be back to blogging like a maniac whenever I have the chance...

Until then...