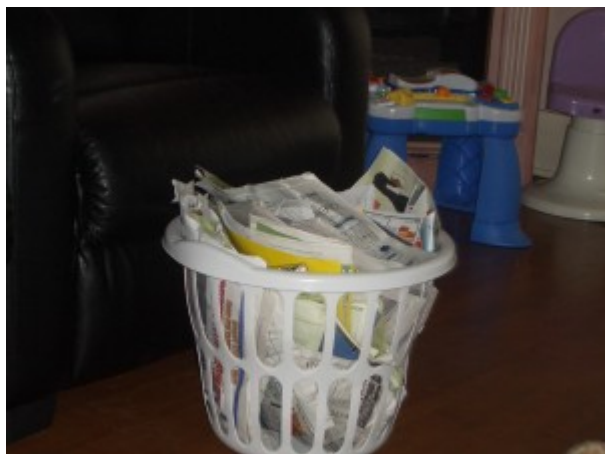


Camping Pictorial

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!

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...”

The Scariest Night Of Our Lives...

... happened just the other night. It’s really frightening and a huge reality check to know that you could be sitting somewhere (camping and enjoying the beautiful outdoors in my case), totally relaxed, and the very next minute, there is a life or death emergency – literally.

Before you fret, let me disclaim that everyone is fine but this was almost not the case. As you may have read in my previous blog post, we decided to take our 4 kids camping and have been in the great wilderness of northeast Indiana during the past week. A few nights ago, my husband and I had gotten the kids to bed, and we were enjoying a horror movie on the porch of our cabin when we heard a strange noise – kind of like a kid laughing or coughing. Then, through the window, we see our oldest daughter Taylor practically jumping down the ladder that leads to the loft area in our cabin where our two oldest kids have been spending the nights. From her body language, it was obvious that someone was very hurt. My husband and I ran inside the cabin, just as Taylor said something about her sister choking on a gumball, and that’s when we see our 5-year-old daughter Sammie in the loft,

CHOKING. My husband grew wings, flew up to the loft and gave her the Heimlich until the gumball shot out of her throat and across the room. Sammie was catching her breath, but she was still drooling and not talking – the scariest moment of our lives! I was already on the cell phone with 911, and the dispatcher was asking me if I could bring her up to the front of the campground, so they didn't have to waste precious time by trying to find our cabin. Miraculously, Sammie started to talk and act like nothing even happened – that's kids for you! Poor Taylor was scared and shaking, so we told her what an AWESOME job she did *saving her sister's life*. We are going to write to our local newspaper about what a hero she is – without her quick thinking and correct response to the situation (she was actually dozing when it happened), I shudder to think that we could have lost Sammie... I just can't bear to think of it. Thank God everyone is ok! The very cool (thank you Steuben County emergency dispatch!), calm and collected dispatcher asked if I wanted to cancel the ambulance that was already in route, and I agreed and thanked her before I hung up – so that makes FOUR times I've had to dial 911 on my cell for this or that, not fun!

But we have outlawed gumballs in our family – just not worth that kind of agony! Maybe on their wedding days or on the days they move out of our house and gain their independence, maybe then we will be the family that celebrates with gumballs after outlawing them for decades!

Blogging 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...

Camping humor

A new post on subbing coming eventually, but until then enjoy this find from the vast reaches of the interweb:

Camper Comments

These are actual comments left on U. S. Forest Service registration sheets and comment cards by backpackers completing wilderness camping trips:

- “A small deer came into my camp and stole my bag of pickles. Is there a way I can get reimbursed? Please call.”
- “Escalators would help on steep uphill sections.”

- “Instead of a permit system or regulations, the Forest Service needs to reduce worldwide population growth to limit the number of visitors to wilderness.”
- “Trails need to be wider so people can walk while holding hands.”
- “Ban walking sticks in wilderness. Hikers that use walking sticks are more likely to chase animals.”
- “All the mile markers are missing this year.”
- “Found a smoldering cigarette left by a horse.”
- “Trails need to be reconstructed. Please avoid building trails that go uphill.”
- “Too many bugs and leeches and spiders and spider webs. Please spray the wilderness to rid the area of these pests.”
- “Please pave the trails so they can be plowed of snow in the winter.”
- “Chair lifts need to be in some places so that we can get to wonderful views without having to hike to them.”
- “The coyotes made too much noise last night and kept me awake. Please eradicate these annoying animals.”
- “Reflectors need to be placed on trees every 50 feet so people can hike at night with flashlights.”
- “Need more signs to keep area pristine.”
- “A McDonald’s would be nice at the trail head.”
- “The places where trails do not exist are not well marked.”
- “Too many rocks in the mountains.”