

# Furry Babies Sucks!!!

We began our trip to Chicago last Saturday, and the 3-state, 4-kid, mini-van trip went pretty smoothly. At some point, we achieved the quadruple-kid-pass-out which is never anything short of a great thing!

We arrived at our hotel in Naperville, Illinois on Saturday afternoon, and we decided to take the girls swimming in the outdoor pool which was really refreshing on an 80°+ day. It's been a long time since I've been swimming outdoors, and it was nice of my mom to meet us there for a swim instead of us driving the girls to her house for their week of fun with Grandma. After the girls left with her, we wanted to meet with a friend, but we were staying in the west 'burbs rather than the north 'burbs this time. Both parties had just endured long car rides, so we settled on a halfway point – a mall in the west 'burbs. Not really knowing what to plan on doing, we ended up finding such a great parking space at the mall that we just ended up going in to bumble. And it was fun! Partly because I haven't been in a real mall for years, so it was really interesting to see the different techniques that have evolved to try and entice shoppers to buy and visit... But I also enjoyed my mall visit because of the company we were keeping; it was nice to chat and catch up. And as you might have read in [derek's blog](#), we happened upon a glow-in-the-dark indoor mini-golf course that was less than a week old! It had 56 holes, but I don't think I could ever play that much mini-golf at once, so we stuck with the traditional 18 holes. I guess I should add in that I won the round and also had a lucky day with two holes-in-1 ☐ And I must comment on how good the baby was – he just sat in the shopping cart and watched the glow-in-the-dark golf balls throughout ALL 18 holes! There were these small contraptions sprinkled throughout the golfing space – you put your ball in, and it rolls around and comes out glowing brighter – those

were fun! And it was fun to see the mall again. It wasn't the same mall I hung out in all the time as a teenager, but I had still been to this one a lot growing up, and it was neat to see how much (or how little, compared to most things in the area) it had changed over the past decade and a half. That reminds me, speaking of change... when we arrived in Chicago, err Naperville on Saturday, we took the Naperville Road exit off of I-88 which is an area with which I am used to be very familiar. Back in the day (did I really just say that?), I would commute through that same intersection to work and back every single day, yuck... but apparently they've completely re-done the entire area in the past few years because the intersection was unrecognizable. I mean, they added new roads and everything – it was the most bizarre feeling, it felt like I had gotten dropped into the middle of the twilight zone. We exited I-88, and all of a sudden, we were on Freedom Drive. Where now? Freedom Drive? I had literally never heard of Freedom Drive, they created the street from scratch and plopped it down into this area where I worked and played so many years ago. As much as I thought I knew where we were going, Jill the GPS was actually quite helpful during this twilight zone adventure, and she got us to our hotel, even though I knew where it was – WAS being the key word here. But back to the mall... we bumbled around some more after getting some pretzel dogs (yummiier in Chicagoland, of course, what isn't?) at the food court. I heard some lady talking on a cell phone about the “puppy store”, and sure enough, we happened across it. I'm an animal lover, so I love to see and visit with animals, but I think a side effect of my tenderness toward animals is my loathing of pet stores. And the pet store in the Stratford Mall in Bloomingdale Illinois is just about the worst I've ever seen. It's no secret that many of the major chains of pet stores get their “wares” from puppy mills; ie dog breeding facilities with cramped quarters, little food, and animal abuse. The huge chain famous for bad press, Petland, just closed a bunch of stores, which I believe is a good thing for dogs and dog lovers everywhere. I

strongly believe that people should adopt animals, namely dogs and cats, from humane societies and other animal shelters. There are so many homeless pets, so how can it be justified to buy a puppy who is bred for selling when there are so many others bred accidentally who are also looking for love? I strongly support spay/neuter programs as well, fyi...

So anyway, the new pet store at the mall is called "Furry Babies". Their website calls it an "upscale puppy boutique, not just a pet store", but I call it disgusting. The puppies were in cribs, for goodness sakes, and along the walls they had a large variety of dog clothes for sale, no doubt at prices that I wouldn't pay to clothe my human kids. We inquired about one particular puppy, who was cute but looked to be slightly cross-eyed. We found out that she was a "designer dog" – they pretend like they meant to mix two breeds together (in this case a golden retriever and a poodle, thus giving us a "Goldendoodle"), but where I come from (the reality land of logic), we would call it a "mutt". And mutts tend to be better with kids, live longer, and are cheaper than purebreds – at least they were until a few years ago. Now mutts are these "designer dogs" and they cost **a lot** of money – in the case of the furry baby Goldendoodle – a cool \$1600. I cannot denounce this place loud enough! I also don't want to spend a ton of time going off about animal welfare nor lose readers by getting political. This just happens to be an issue I feel strongly about, and I plead that if you are in the market for a family pet, you consider adopting your animal companion from a shelter and also realize that you are entering into a life-long commitment! That being said, Furry Babies sucks, but the good news is that I can't see them lasting that long. Oh yeah, I forgot to mention that the employees wear mock scrubs, in order to imitate delivery room nurses, I guess, which to me is even more sickening. But there I go again... get me going and I will never stop... so if you want to read more, [here is a link](#) to the forums about Furry Babies on the bestfriends.org website, which is an awesome organization – the country's largest animal sanctuary

for homeless pets of all kinds! I hope to visit them someday in Utah, but until I get over my fear of flying I will just persue their website and I suggest you do the same...

Now that I'm actually leaving the homeless pet tangent behind... we left the mall at a decent hour since we wanted a good night's sleep to rest up for the Cubs / Sox game the following day – the entire reason we were in town to begin with. Poor us – that did not happen! We got back to the hotel (which was pretty crappy for a Naperville Hampton Inn – see my [Small Separate Side Post](#)), and the baby decided he was going to go nuts and stay up until midnight. Then the little booger awoke at 6 the next morning, and he crawled around and caused mischief like dipping my drying bathing suit into the toilet, thanks for THAT. My husband was nice enough to take him in the bath for awhile and do other various quiet activities with him in the small room so that I could get a little more sleep, and then we all went down to breakfast – my poor husband was a zombie. I decided for us (he could not make decisions at that point) that he would go back up to the room while I drove our son over to my mom's for the day while we went to the Cubs game. We did that, and it took me about an hour to get all the way out to Aurora (not much traffic on a Sunday morning, but S000 many stoplights!) and back. I thought we had plenty of time, but if you read my "A Patch of Blue In A Sea Of Black And White" post, you'll see why I should have stepped on the gas a little...

---

## Utter Chaos – The Good Kind

The school year is winding down... my third-grader's last day of third grade is today! When I was a kid, we always went to school into the month of June – never ended in May. Well,

except senior year when we graduated on May 31 – but the seniors always finished early. I don't understand Ohio and their strange school schedules (what with fog days and stuff, which are unheard of in Chicagoland where I went to school), but I do like them. My third-grader is a HUGE help around the house, and I'm excited to have another pair of hands and someone to talk to during the day.

So anyway, yesterday was my 4 5-year-old's end of the year picnic for her school, rain or shine. And rain it did. Even though we arrived right on time, all of the sheltered picnic tables were taken. So, we had to slosh the double-stroller through the puddles and the mud to sit in the rain with 3 little kids and eat our lunch. Luckily it was only drizzling, but the picnic table and bench were all wet – note to self to start keeping a towel in the car. After lunch, they started to set up the large bouncy castles and my husband wisely took our 5 and 2-year-olds (Sammie and Disney) over to get in line. Judging by the huge turnout for this event, we didn't want to wait in line all day, especially if the drizzle turned into a downpour. My kids were first in line, but Disney chickened out, so Sammie bounced without her sister on the regular bouncy castle. Then it was time to check out the MEGA-bouncy! It began with a crawl-thru maze, followed by a ladder up a vertical wall and finished with a steep slide, and it was total chaos! There were kids everywhere! The adults were scrambling to regulate how many kids went inside, but somehow kids were getting stuck... next thing you know, there were kids crying and yelling and adults couldn't get to them because they were in the crazy maze of this gigantic bouncy! My daughter Sammie emerged from the maze, and she climbed the steep ladder like a pro. Matter of fact, Sammie was thru the entire boucy obstacle course 3 times before most kids got through once – she is a very good climber and couldn't care less about the pile of kids at the beginning which is where most of them freaked out for their parents. Disney kept saying she wanted to try it, and noramlly we like our kids to

try new things, but the huge bouncy was littered with kids of all types and sizes: crying kids, climbing kids, big kids, screaming kids – I was sure my sweet little 2-year-old would get eaten alive in there. So she watched for awhile and decided she still wanted to go in it, and we found a side entrance that bypassed the crazy maze of kid-doom. To our surprise, Disney climbed the ladder (with help from big sis Sammie) and went down the slide – and she had fun! And Sammie loved seeing all her friends and her teachers and having fun with them. Chaotic as it was, it was all worth it because it was for Sammie – and she loved it! This is Sammie helping Disney up that huge ladder:



---

## CUBS Vs Sox



I haven't had a chance to blog much, but a few posts ago in my "To Hellinois... .. And Back Again" blog series, I mentioned

that I might be partaking in a “very exciting, awesomely fun event” to which I promised, “more on that later”.

Now that the event is definite, I am bursting with excitement, so I will share – hubby got us tickets to see the Chicago Cubs play the White Sox LIVE! I’ve been wanting to go to a Cubs game for awhile (since our last visit to Wrigley in 2004), but last summer was out because I had a baby and unscheduled surgery from which I had to recover. So, June 28 at ~~Comisky Park~~ US Cellular Field, we will venture into Chicagoland once again to cheer on the Chicago Cubs while on the turf of the Chicago White Sox – AWESOME! My mom was nice enough to agree to watch all 4 kids for the day (and the eldest 3 for the rest of the week, BOOLYAH!), and the tickets for the BIG GAME arrived in the mail the other day.

They accidentally got thrown away in the garbage with the junk mail, but LUCKILY hubby was heads up and asked about the whereabouts of the tickets. That’s when I realized that I probably had thrown them away – by accident of course! Good thing he asked when he did – the tickets were found not too near the bottom of the garbage and salvaged, thank goodness!

But anyway, I am looking forward to this event like you wouldn’t believe. Not only is it **LIVE** baseball, but it’s MLB, not AAA or AA. And it’s the Cubs I get to go watch, and they’re playing the SOX – their arch-rival (especially as far as I’m concerned – I HATE those White Sox!!!). So I would say yeah, even though it’s not even 2 months after our last Chicago visit, this visit will be well worth it! So watch for us – we’ll be decked out in Cubs gear to be sure to properly invade the South Side Sox turf. The game is at 12:05pm local time on June 28 – the last of a 3-game series between the two teams, so it promises to be that much more exciting! It’s scheduled to be shown on WGN, so if you get that channel, check it out, you just might see Taylhis and Co.!

GO CUBS!!!!



---

## ...And Back Again

*(continued from the previous post – To Hellinois...)*

So FINALLY, after yet another GPS debacle orchestrated by Jill (might be time to change the persona of the GPS again and fire Jill!) we arrived in Aurora, and it's the first time I've seen my parents' dogs in years. Loopy is looking a little bit gray in the muzzle, but also much slimmer since last time I saw her. And Happy... well, Happy is herself, I guess – hyper and happy to see my kids, I wouldn't expect any less! We visited with my mom for a little while, and then it was off to lunch, which my husband and I had carefully orchestrated. My mom was nice enough to watch our girls so that we could enjoy a little time out with just the baby, and after all that driving + the morning's (more than) two hour tantrum, boy, did we need some time to ourselves! So we went to Sweet Tomatoes – a restaurant that specializes in an ultra-fresh salad buffet, my husband's favorite, and I don't think he was disappointed! They also have 6 kinds of soup and 3 kinds fresh hand-tossed pasta – YUM! We drove around for a few minutes after lunch searching for a dollar store or two – next to zoos and cuisine, "exotic" dollar stores are my favorite things to see while in different areas, but we couldn't find one, so we went to a Petland instead. So I put aside my opinions that



Petland is a leading trader in puppy mill pups, and we went for a visit. And this Petland had LOTS of animals with very nice habitats. They did have a huge bunch of puppies though, and almost all of their “getting to know you” puppy rooms were taken (let me just vent real quick by saying – why can’t more people consider shelter dogs so we can reduce the amount of homeless pets in the country!!!) And I asked the staff members a few questions – some to learn things but most to test their knowledge on subjects – and they passed. They no longer sell seahorses because they require ultra-clean water and exceptionally large tanks. I was glad to see that Petland was no longer putting the lives of seahorses in jeopardy just to make a quick buck, but they lost me when they offered to order me some – oh well. There were the cutest little Robinsky hamsters – about the size of a silver dollar – and they were in constant motion. They are so fast that they kept flipping each other over in the hamster wheel and making each other go upside down! They were adorable, but how anyone could handle having such a busy pet is beyond me – you couldn’t even pick them up since they were so fast! Here is a picture of someone who actually got one of these things in their hand:



So then it was on to my nephew’s first birthday party – he is only  $2\frac{1}{2}$  months older than my son, and the two of them together were SO cute! My son is on the left, birthday boy on the right:



The party was lots of fun, and it was nice getting to spend time with my family and my sister's in-laws, who we don't see very often. We had to leave a little bit early to try to get on the road at a decent hour, but before we left, my kids did a good job of trashing my sister's house. One of them clogged the toilet, one of them crumbled their birthday cake all over the floor (requiring my brother-in-law to haul out his Shop-Vac!), and one of them had too much cake and ice cream and spit up all over Grandma and the floor. I bet they're glad we don't come over very often! Just kidding, I'm sure it was understood that with 8 kids at one party, something was bound to get messed up – but why did all the messes have to be traced back to *my* kids?

After the party, I dropped my husband off at a Walgreens for some clearance shopping – his favorite! – cuz I wanted to stop by [White Castle](#) and get a case of slyders to bring home. White Castle is an institution in Chicagoland, and one of the things I miss that we don't have here. For those of you who aren't familiar, slyders are what locals call the little hamburgers that White Castle sells – the secret to the awesome flavor is steamed onions. My hubby must love me a lot to put up with the smell of steamed onions for the 4 hour drive home! And no, the frozen ones they sell at Walmart are not the same as the ones you can buy at the restaurants – which is why I try to bring home a case every time I go! But on Sunday, I kept getting behind slow drivers (what happened to

the drivers in Illinois? I swear, during this trip **I** was the most aggressive driver I ran into, what's happened to all the a\*\*holes that used to be on the road over there? Could it be the red-light cameras?), and then they took forever at White Castle. And what do I do? I drive off with only my drinks, forgetting my cheeseburgers. So I get back in line, and of course I'm behind the slowest lady in the world – I was in line for 20 minutes, just to get food I had forgotten! By the time I got back to Walgreens, my husband was ready to put out an APB on our van. And of course the baby cried the whole time because he was tired and wanted his bottle, and I couldn't reach the spot in the car where he had thrown it. So I was flustered by the time we finally started for home. Luckily for me, we achieved a quadruple pass out though, so the drive home was peaceful. We got home around 1 am, and much to our surprise, our pet sitter and great friend Carol was still in our house! The kids started to wake up, so we rudely hushed Carol and brought the crying kids upstairs. Luckily we only had one straggler who stayed up for a little while, and I apologized to Carol for my rudeness (and my stench of coming off a 4-hour drive sitting next to steamed onions with baby spit-up on me). We were more than happy to share the White Castle bounty, and my husband drove poor Carol home since her car had died and she was trapped at our house – I felt badly getting in so late! I was so tired that I forgot to call my mom to tell her we made it safely – I don't think that's ever happened, oops!

Sunday we somehow got up for church, and we got to see some people get baptized which was a neat experience. The sermon was about Moses and the parting of the Red Sea, which interested me because I don't have much religious background and didn't know the story. But I learned some useful tools that I think might help me during this ultra-trying time that Samantha has been putting us through lately. After church, they had a program they call KidStuff – they have it twice a year – and Sunday's KidStuff was about obedience – perfect!

Just the message we need to drill into our kids' heads lately! It was a really cute skit about how it's important to be obedient, and I thought it was very well done. There was lots of physical comedy for the kids, goofy characters, an air horn (kids love noisy things!), and they stressed the importance of obedience repeatedly. And, they gave us an orange "O" to put on our fridge to remind the kids about being obedient! I was so excited to get home and apply these lessons to real life! But alas, after the pizza lunch at church for KidStuff, Sammie had to rub it in how much she DIDN'T learn from the skit – our friend is a professional photographer and met us at the park to get some Spring pics of the kids. But our family picture is minus one – Sammie refused to participate in the picture taking. Even seeing a robin's nest up close didn't soften her enough to be cooperative. So all my hopes about her learning something, even a little bit, from the obedience skit flew out the window. But the baby robin was adorable – there were two eggs and one that had hatched, couldn't have been more than a day old. I've never seen one so little, it barely had any feathers or baby bird peach fuzz! Awww!

Overall, a great weekend. I call it Hellinois, but I'm (half) joking. You couldn't pay me to live there, but there are worse places we could have to visit! I think we might be going back sometime soon for a very exciting, awesomely fun event – more on that later!!!

---

## **To Hellinois...**

I'm not a big fan of the place and try to avoid it like the plague for the most part, but there are about two times a year I am willing to travel to the place of my birth which I

lovingly refer to as "Hellinois", a nickname for Chicagoland, with its insane traffic patterns and millions of unfriendly citizens: around April for my nephews' birthdays and also around Christmastime. Making the 4-hour trek across two states twice a year is doable and definitely worth it so that my kids can have fun and get to know their relatives. So Friday afternoon, we took off and headed over to the Land of Lincoln. I don't understand why it took me two hours to pack our family of 6 for a one day trip, especially because there were plenty of things that were forgotten, but more on that later. We arrived outside the Loop right about 6:30 on a Friday evening local time, but much to our surprise, we barely hit any backup. What the? Unheard of for a Friday night! But on our way past the Chicago skyline, we did have fun trying to find the new Trump Tower and comparing it to the John Hancock and also to the other new skyscrapers that have sprung up, seemingly over night. I have to admit that Chicago's skyline is more impressive than that of New York, at least in my opinion – just for the heck of it, I played tourist and actually took a picture of the Sears Tower. While I was there, I heard that they're going to build balconies on the observation deck of the Sears Tower with glass floors. They got the idea after watching all the tourists bump their foreheads on the windows while trying to look straight down. I have to admit, I've done that myself a few times. Wonder if I could keep my new-found vertigo in check enough to give the new balconies a try when they're complete?

We arrived at our hotel and got the kids ready to go down to the pool, and that's when we realized that we forgot my son's bathing suit, as well as ALL of my husband's clothes that had been put in the dryer before we left and forgotten. So we all had to sacrifice – I had to sleep in my clothes and give my pajamas (sweat pants and a t-shirt) to my husband to wear to the birthday party the following day. He had to wear pajamas to the party and also roast inside a sweatshirt all day since the t-shirt was ripped. My son went swimming in his pants –

luckily I had learned a little something from the New York trip and brought plenty of extra baby clothes with me.

We were only down at the pool for about 30 minutes, but the kids had fun – my son kept clapping. We had called fellow blogger Derek to join us, but we kicked him out soon after we got back from the pool since the room was very crowded and the kids needed to settle down for their big day ahead. We ordered pizza (MMMmmm, Chicago-style pizza!) and tried to get the kids to settle down, but it took a long time. We got so tired that we forgot to close the drapes, which led to everyone rising bright and early in the morning – big oops. Our almost 5-year-old Sammie, the handful (putting it mildly) of the bunch, decided to draw a bunch of block letter T's all over her cousins' birthday cards. No problem, until she ran out of room for any more T's and threw a 2-hour tantrum about it – I am not even exaggerating. By the time we checked out of the hotel, so many people had walked by glaring at our family; it was not a good way to start the day. We were so not in Kansas (err, Ohio) anymore. I have trouble getting used to that every time I visit other places. It feels weird to not say hi to everyone I pass, or worse yet, to say hi and get a weird stare in return.

We had decided that my husband was going to take Sammie somewhere else rather than for us to subject my elderly grandparents to her screaming, but luckily she calmed down on the way over to their house. We had a nice visit, and as usual, my grandma made too much food. What was supposed to be a light lunch (so we could fit in as many other samples of fine Chicago dining as possible during our short stay) turned out to be a buffet spread of strawberries, black raspberries, cheese, smokies in biscuits, deviled eggs, pickles, cheese spread and crackers, not to mention 3 kinds of dessert! So anyway, we had a really nice visit with my grandparents, although we were walking on eggshells with Sammie, who got an early birthday present from them, which was nice. But then

fights broke out over the birthday present, and rather than stress my grandparents, we beat a hasty retreat. My grandpa did manage to make a joke, despite all of his discomfort from the Parkinson's and who knows what else. He asked how our 10th Anniversary vow renewal ceremony went, and we said great! So then he said, "You made the same mistake twice, huh?" Obviously, I don't feel I made a mistake once (or twice) marrying my husband, but it was funny anyway and so great to see the old tease that is my grandpa back in action. So we left their house in Schaumburg and headed to Aurora to see the rest of the fam. After little sleep the night before and the 2 hour tantrum in the morning, I offered to drive so my husband could take some much needed rest. Wanting to think as little as possible, I turned on Jill the GPS and sat back and let her lead me through the tangle of expressways that is Chicagoland. Except that Jill had apparently had one too many morning cocktails. She directed me to stay on I-290 rather than to merge onto I-355. I knew better than that – I had made that trek many a time when my husband and I were dating. But my brain was fried, so I lemmingly went along with Jill's directions, and next thing I know, we're traveling east TOWARD the city, instead of west toward Aurora! Finally I saw the toll road we needed – I-88, and now we were finally headed in the right direction, after going 10 miles out of the way! Oh, well, at least we were running early since my kids had decided to get up at the crack of dawn!

Just writing about this makes me tired. I think I'll take a break here, unpack a little and save the rest of this huge weekend for another post!

---

# The Unborn Gran Torino

Luckily for us, Tuesday's date night was not hindered by the recent barrage of snow in any way. We ventured to the larger town nearby to see what all the Golden Globe fuss was about Clint Eastwood's latest movie, [Gran Torino](#) (they didn't have [Slumdog Millionaire](#)). But after the previews and especially when the movie started, it became painfully obvious that there was something wrong with the theater's sound – you couldn't hear the dialogue. My husband went to report it, and all that did was cause several loud popping noises and lengthy annoying electronic burps while they tried to fix it. There were 3 other people in the theater with us, and we all left – seemed like a movie where you really need to hear what the characters are saying. They offered our money back, but that wasn't really enough because we had spent \$7 on pop and popcorn that we wouldn't have bought if we weren't going to a movie. The incredibly flustered but sensible kid working the counter saw our point, and apparently his manager agreed, so they let us go into another movie AND get a refund – COOL! Earlier in the day, we had been up in the air trying to decide between seeing Gran Torino and The Unborn anyway, so I guess the choice was made for us – We only had 20 minutes to kill before a showing of [The Unborn](#).

The Unborn was just as I expected – a PG13-rated supernatural horror movie, not quite as good as others in the genre like The Ring, Shutter, or One Missed Call. There were some jump-out-of-your-seat moments in The Unborn, but it was obvious when they were coming, at least to me. I don't want to give away too much like an article did that I read in the newspaper, so I'll just say that if you like the supernatural horror genre, check out The Unborn because it's entertaining. Back to the newspaper article I read... seems the little boy who plays a scary kid in the movie is from the area where I grew up, so they featured him in the suburban Chicago



newspaper I sometimes like to read online – but they spilled a major spoiler about the movie at the end of the article! But anyway, that's another thing I enjoyed about *The Unborn* – it is set in Chicagoland, so I enjoyed the sweeping overhead views of the city and some of the familiar sites in suburbia. Apparently the screenwriter of *The Unborn*, David Goyer, has a fancy for Chicago since he also wrote *The Dark Knight* which was filmed in Chicago, although set in Gotham City. But anyway, enjoyable movie for what it was – I might have liked *Gran Torino* better, but I guess I'll have to see that one another time.

And that brings me to the Applebee's saga. We don't really like Applebee's. They try to tell us we belong there, but I don't buy it. Their food seems pricey for what it is, and we stopped going there when the kids are with us because their food takes *forever* to come out (that and the small fortune it would cost our family of 6 to eat there). My husband was given an Applebee's gift card for serving on the board of a local non-profit agency (no, I am not talking about the community theater – did you really have to ask?), which is really nice of the agency of course. We got the same gift card last year, and so back then we decided to give Applebee's another chance. Last year, we got some sort of bland pasta dish and an appetizer sampler and shared everything, but we left there hungry AND having to add money to our gift card in order to cover the check. Flash forward to now, and we find ourselves with another gift card. Time to give Applebee's another try, we decided; after all, how bad can it be? They have lots of corporate suits overseeing those kinds of places, so maybe they've implemented lots of changes in the past year to make it a better establishment. Not the case. First, our food took forever to come out. I had gotten a soup-and-sandwich combo, and the waitress came to tell me they burnt the soup and it would be a few minutes while they made a new one. My husband wondered if that meant his food was sitting under a warmer while mine was re-prepared, and his concerns

were legit because when he got his food, the shrimp was cold. Not only that, but they had given him the wrong kind of buffalo wings. So they apologized, and that's another thing about places like Applebee's that really bug me – the pesty fake gushy niceness. I do appreciate a friendly server, but the people who work at these places are way over the top... I will cite an example in the hilarious movie [Office Space](#) – there's a character in the movie who is Jennifer Aniston's coworker at a TGIFriday's type of place who acts just like these people... annoyingly and unrealistically enthusiastic about his job – funny stuff, but only in the movies.

So anyway, we're waiting for my husband's new wings when the manager comes out to say that they have now put the wrong sauce on them, and they'd have to make him yet *another* order. Honestly, what is the cook *doing* back there? Again, for the second time this day (see my Dawn's Great Idea post), my fears of starring in a hidden camera show run rampant... And what has happened to all the food that they've messed up? From just our party of 2, they must have had 2 orders of wings and a bowl of soup all go to waste. I've often thought that restaurants should have a deal with local homeless shelters, giving them their leftovers and food mistakes, but I guess that wouldn't be considered sanitary. I wish they'd change this; something tells me that food is food and many people would be very grateful for restaurant "leftovers"...

We calculated our bill correctly this time, and we were about to rid ourselves of the entire giftcard, when the waitress showed up to tell us that because of all the errors, they were going to give us the employee discount on the bill. That was really really nice of them, but that means we STILL HAVE \$ LEFT ON THE GIFTCARD for another trip to Applebee's! I told my husband, maybe we'll just stop in for a couple drinks sometime, but of course, you can't use a giftcard on drinks, at least on alcoholic ones, and after trying their flavored tea yesterday, I won't be stopping in for any more of that –

yuck! And in case you're wondering, both my sandwich and my soup were virtually tasteless, save for the cheese on top of the soup – that was really good!

[poll id="7"]

---

## Windy City White House

"Windy City White House" is more of a reference to our visit to the Windy City rather than a blog post about the recent election – it's over and done with, and although I won't talk much about the outcome, I am happy to not have to hear about it on the news anymore. While in Illinois, my mother-in-law kept talking about what huge news it is that Obama was elected and how his pick for Chief-of-Staff, Rahm Emanuel is a fellow Chicagoan – making it a 'Windy City White House'.

But back to our family – it's my blog, after all. We scheduled an early Christmas with our family in Illinois this past weekend (the early Christmas theme is something that seems popular with tangents.org bloggers), and overall, it was great. There are a few reasons we decided to do things this way – 1) We're sick of the hustle and bustle of opening our presents from Santa and then rushing off to Illinois on Christmas Day – add to that having the flu during this trip twice and UGH. Best to travel *before* flu season. 2) My daughter was off school Friday for parent/teacher conferences 3) We wanted to beat the rush and other travelers. Overall, it was a really great decision, although the trip was last minute, and so we did forget a few of the presents which we'll now have to send. We left Ohio on Friday morning and after a bit of traffic-sitting (of course), we got to my grandparents house about 40 minutes past schedule. But no matter, they're

fully aware of the traffic problems plaguing their area. We were treated to a delicious lunch of my grandma's sloppy joes (love 'em), and the girls got to open presents. My grandpa gets tired really quickly, and so we didn't stay too long there, and then it was on to our hotel. My husband uses hotwire.com and got us a suite at the Sheraton for \$49 – a nice price for the area. When we pulled up to our hotel, we were pleased to see it was the same hotel where we spent our wedding night – that was a nice surprise. My mom and my sister brought her two boys over for some swimming, and we all had a blast even though their indoor pool was chilly. Luckily, I had thought to turn up our room's thermostat so when we got back to the room we didn't freeze, although it was quite crowded trying to get 10 hungry people changed out of bathing suits and trying to order pizza at the same time. It was a suite, but it was probably the smallest suite I have ever seen, and we had 6 little kids and 4 adults in there. My mother and sister wisely decided that they couldn't wait for the time it would take to get pizza, and they got something to eat on the way home. That was a good idea because my mom had to get up early the next day and didn't want to be out too late. They know their area well enough to realize that pizza delivery on a Friday night would take over an hour – and they were right. My poor kids were starving and I had to raid my diaper bag. I found a little bag of oyster crackers and two small bags of peanuts, so I divied everything up 3 ways (Survivor-style) and it quieted them a little until the pizza came. Overall, the kids were kind of spastic all day, especially my oldest for some reason... My husband blames the tension of the Chicagoland area, but then again, he hates it as much as I do. We love seeing family, just wish we could visit them somewhere else!

Saturday morning we were up bright and early to meet my mother-in-law for breakfast at Uptown Cafe in Arlington Heights – the place has the best eggs benedict in the nation. And I know this because way back when, before we had all these

kids, my husband and I used to travel constantly, and one of the things we would look for was good hollandaise sauce. We never found any that came close to Uptown Cafe's. And the owners remember us – we used to go there a lot when we lived in the area; I was pregnant with my first daughter. They are surprised every time they see us because we usually have a new baby or two. After breakfast, we went back to my mother-in-law's house, and I felt badly for dropping in on my husband's sister and her family without any notice. This is one of the details that was overlooked in the last minute planning. But it was ok; I didn't have my gifts for their 3 kids, so I'll have to send them. But our kids had lots of fun playing together, and it's important to me that my kids know their extended family, especially since a lot of hatchets have been buried over the years on this side of the family.

Next, it was time to see our good friend, the author of the sublife blog on [tangents.org](http://tangents.org). It was great to see him, especially on his own turf, but he's right in his blog – there really wasn't much time for chatting. The kids wouldn't have allowed us to just sit and talk peacefully, and we wanted to take them somewhere fun, so we went to an overflowing Chuck E. Cheese. After waiting in line to park, I realized that I hadn't seen our camera since I took a picture of the kids on the luggage rack at the hotel that morning. Sound familiar? Yes, I have terrible luck with digital cameras. And worse, this one was not mine – I had borrowed it from Jamiahsh for the trip, so I was sick about losing it. Luckily for me, it turned up when we got home though – YAY! I was especially upset because I knew that I had put it in my diaper bag – I really thought someone had taken it. Pessimistic of me, you'd think, except that we did have our tokens stolen from our table at Chuck E. Cheese with my husband less than 5 feet away. Takes all kinds to steal game tokens from little kids, doesn't it... at least they didn't also steal my digital camera. We got lunch at a Vienna Beef hot dog place in Arlington Heights called Jimmy's – highly recommended you get

real Chicago-style beef sandwiches and 'dogs if you're in the area – YUM!

The ride home was uneventful – the kids slept most of the way, thank goodness. We did manage to stop and get me my crave case of White Castles, and so our car reeked of steamed onions – thank goodness we weren't pulled over or we may have gotten a ticket for disturbing the peace. Maybe I wouldn't have stopped if I'd known what White Castles would do to a 2-year-old's diaper. I tried to deliver some to my friend Carol who graciously pet sits for us, but for some reason, she neglected to pick them up. My husband says that not everyone likes White Castles. We picked up the slyders (as White Castles are known) in Dolton, Illinois; not the best area, but it just off the expressway so we made it unscathed. Ironically, something made me talk about Dolton just before the stop; I was telling my husband how it's gotten to be a really bad area and that I knew a family that had left there in the '80's because it was getting so bad, so imagine it now. Then we saw a sign that said "Dolton Bowl" right across the street from the White Castle, and we laughed at the irony. But overall, a nice trip, especially considering the area where we had to take it. One positive thing I will say about the area is that they have excellent food.

Three quarters of my kids on the luggage cart:

