

A Not-So-Cynical Look At The 2009 Holiday Season

I was thinking about our family's 2009 holiday season, now come and almost gone already, and I was envisioning words to describe this wonderful season, despite the fact that this year ours was peppered with unpleasant familial dramatics. But about a week ago, I made what was a conscious decision to pull myself up from the depths of despair I had fallen into after losing a beloved family member just one week before Christmas. So, in my good humor, I chose 24 of the best words to describe my holiday season, each beginning with a different letter of the alphabet. Here goes...

Avatar – Saw it and actually liked it, despite my typical sci-fi reluctance. But I liked Avatar so much that I'm really hoping the timing and budget work out so that I can see it again in 3D at a more technologically savvy theater.

Big Family Christmas – We traveled to Illinois on Christmas Day and got to take part in a huge gathering of my husband's large extended family. His 92-year-old grandmother, who speaks with a thick east-coast Connecticut accent (and who smoked 3 packs of cigarettes a day from age 16 until age 70!) told many of her infamous stories that had everyone in stitches! After hearing one of Monie's stories, I could have used the words Blue Boob for B, but I will spare you those details... ☐

Christ Was Born – We went to a beautiful church service on Christmas Eve to celebrate and reflect upon the entire purpose of the Christmas holiday.

De... There are two words that come to mind for this letter based upon certain recent events in my life, but I'm not going to go there; this is to be "A Not-So-Cynical Look..." blog

post. So here, D will stand for Dumbledore, since I'm almost halfway through my first Harry Potter book and lovin' it!

Elf – My favorite holiday movie, and we actually had time to watch it this year! It, unlike a few other favorite Christmas experiences, did not lose any magic this year. I still felt that warm and fuzzy “Christmas Magic” feeling after I watched this movie – I'd pull it out more often, but it's not the same unless it's Christmas!

“I love smiling; smiling's my favorite!!” – Buddy The Elf

Friends – We are so blessed to have such wonderful friends, and I can't thank them enough for the things they did and just for being there during this bittersweet time.

Grandparents – We were able to visit 3 of our grandparents this holiday season! Even being in our 30's, we have 3 surviving grandparents among my husband and I – we were blessed to be able to spend time with all of them this year!

Homemade spaghetti – Best. Christmas. Gift. EVER!! My mother-in-law sent us home 4 huge frozen batches of her out-of-this-world spaghetti sauce! AND a large bag of grated Asiago cheese. AND... something I'll save for another letter...

Ice – Drove through plenty of it to reach IL and get back to Ohio on Christmas day. Luckily, traffic was light and travel for us was smooth and safe. The kids were good as gold and slept for the majority of both drives.

Jill – Screwed us over again! This little story begins with Walmart. Since this is “A Not-So-Cynical Look...”, I won't go off about Walmart, but I will simply state the facts: the pump in our windshield wiper cleaner fluid dispenser stopped working after the last time we got an oil change at Walmart. We didn't really need it until Christmas night, when we were driving past the city of Chicago, and apparently smog + snow = some sort of disgusting pollution paste. So visibility is limited, and we still don't know exactly what happened since

we've driven this route dozens of times, but basically the express lanes on I-90 seemed to suddenly dissolve into city streets. So now it's 10:30 on Christmas night, and we're wandering around in the city. We can't see out the back of the car since there's tons of Christmas presents, and we can't see out of the front of the car because of the pollution paste. This is where Jill comes in – and she directs us straight back to I-90. Only problem is, our van can't just jump guardrails; we needed an entrance ramp, and Jill was only directing us to streets that crossed over the expressway and didn't actually intersect with it. So we crossed bridge after bridge, and we criss-crossed I-90 until one of those streets had an entrance ramp. Then Jill freaked out and tried to get us off of the expressway again, but she got her power button pressed – we knew our way from there.

Kalachkies – I have a fun memory of a Christmas years ago when my forgetful Polish grandmother was sitting in her wheelchair, instructing my equally Polish uncle and myself how to make kalachkies, a usually delicious Polish cookie. The end results were inedible and referred to as “hockey pucks”. This year at Christmas, my husband's cousin made homemade kalachkies – real ones, no hockey pucks, and they were delicious! Thanks Lilly!

Late night drive – One night, we took the kids out in the car in their pajamas with some snacks, and we drove through the snowy countryside to a town about 30 minutes away for a drive-thru lighted display that's just wonderful. Late night drive could also refer to my husband's and my peaceful drive home (after the unscheduled tour of the city) while the kids were asleep all the way from Illinois to Ohio – nice.

Mashed Potatoes – My mother-in-law is a great cook! I guess it's been awhile since the last time I had her mashed potatoes, because I didn't remember how they tasted. But I told her the truth after Christmas dinner – they were the best mashed potatoes I've ever had!

Noodles – My mother-in-law's spaghetti sauce also came with EIGHT pounds of whole wheat gourmet organic pasta! I love whole wheat pasta – it actually tastes better, and you don't get the pasta-stomachache / horrible stuffed feeling that can accompany pasta over-indulgence.

Onions – One of my favorite holiday dishes is creamed onions, and it was a nice surprise to see this dish on the Christmas buffet. Fortunately for me, my husband can replicate the taste of his mother's creamed onions – yum!

P.A.S. – Pompous Ass Syndrome – my poor brother-in-law is a victim. Enough Said.

Quiet – With 4 kids and Christmas celebrations spread out over 2 weeks, there really wasn't much of this.

Revenge – My brother and sister-in-law gifted our kids 3 little gumball machines. Cute, but not when you realize how many gumballs needed to be pried out of our candy-obsessed toddler's little hands, for one thing. Who would give little kids gumball machine gifts? Wait, isn't that what we got her 3 kids last year?!? I'm all for re-gifting; I really think it's a smart thing to do. But maybe next year I'll choose our Christmas gifts more carefully...

Snow – It's been snowing on and off for a week and a half here in Ohio. The Chicago area was unexpectedly blanketed with about a foot of snow on Saturday – thank goodness we left for Ohio on Friday night!

Turkey – We ate it and it was good.

U-Turn – see “J” – Jill the GPS. Besides the time we were lost in Chicago, Jill caused us to make at least one other U-turn on this trip.

Vile – Odor in Gary Indiana – I don't care what the Music Man had to say – Gary Indiana STINKS! Literally!!!

Weather – I was worried about it all week, but thankfully, it didn't impede our journey in the slightest.

X-changing gifts – Ok, that's too generic? What else could X stand for, the rating of Monie's Blue Boob story? We x-changed gifts many gifts, and that's all I'm going to say.

Yellow Puppy – When our friends heard about our family's heartbreak, they gifted us a gigantic (stuffed) dog. This cute puppy's headband wouldn't even fit on my head, and she wears a sweater that could probably fit me – or at least all 4 of my kids in it together... so cute and so thoughtful, and the kids LOVE her!

Zoo lights – With everything that was going on during this December, I'm so thankful that we were able to make it to one of our favorite Christmas destinations this year – the Toledo Zoo for their Lights Before Christmas displays. Beautiful lights in a peaceful atmosphere, and if you get there early enough, you can see some zoo animals, which is probably my favorite thing to do in the whole world!

Hope you had a Merry Christmas, and best wishes for a great New Year!!!

Favorite Christmas Movies

The 'What's Your Favorite Christmas Movies / Tv Specials' poll has been done before, but I thought I would obtain my own consensus. After all, opinions change from year to year, and I'm also interested to see what people like. Feel free to choose more than one answer and also to add something I may have forgotten.

[poll id="11"]

The Happening

We went to see the newest [M. Night Shyamalan](#) movie last night – The Happening starring [Mark Wahlberg](#) and [Zooey Deschanel](#). It's an end-of-the-world type movie, but what sets this one apart from the others is that neither the audience nor the characters in the movie know what is happening to the population and why. People just start acting strange – it begins in parks, where crowds of people freeze in their tracks, and then they begin to slowly and methodically commit suicide. It's really creepy! I especially liked how little gore and there was and how tame the violence was, especially by today's standards and with all the death that was occurring in the movie. Before we went, I had read some bad reviews about it, but I didn't find it boring in the slightest as some of the reviews suggested. It was a gripping, intense, and interesting movie, not to mention effectively eerie. I don't want to give too much away, so all I will say is that I was hoping for more of a resolve and explanation at the end, but since I've seen other M. Night Shyamalan movies, I was also expecting even less closure than we received. He writes, directs, and produces his own movies; they are usually thought-provoking suspense films, often laced with twists – I recommend [The Village](#), [Unbreakable](#), and [The Sixth Sense](#) to try a few. Overall, I would say it was a really good doomsday-TYPE movie. Please don't think it compares to the movie called [Doomsday](#) – one of the most awful I've ever seen. But The Happening has an interesting premise, and it achieves fright without overdoing the gore, which is unusual for scary movies in this day and age. My one problem with the movie is Mark Wahlberg's acting – at times it's just awful! I don't

know why he was cast in this movie, but at least he doesn't ruin it. Zooey Deschanel is good – didn't even see any glimpse of her character from [Elf](#) -and [John Leguizamo](#) has a strong performance as well. It is 90 minutes well-spent!