I'm Thinking... I'm Thinking...

Some comic relief in the title of this post to distract me from quite an overwhelming day today:

Received some devastating news (for us, but don't worry — it's great news for some friends of ours) prayed about it, and examined the possibilities that may arise from it. There's also been several intriguing and exciting doors being revealed to us lately, and we are praying on, thinking about, and waiting to see which ones will open and where they might We've been contemplating a huge decision in the past few months regarding our family, and it's time to finalize We spent some time with friends today that decision. gathering information and establishing a support system for this possible lifestyle change. I'm excited but for the lack of sleep wearing me down and making me feel overwhelmed — it's all a lot to process. I will write more in a bit — as you can see, I have a new keyboard. I have a whole July manifest half-written that's kept me busy — I want the kids to be able to read about our family's stellar July 2011 on my blog someday, so I'd better get around to it. Same thing with my chronicle of the Florida trip we took in January that still has the last part missing 6 months later - oops. know what my problem is — the only thing that distracts me from blogging is doing homework for my Bible study class — and the fact that I found my Zoo Tycoon game; that's really distracting from productivity. And oh yeah — the 4 kids running around the house because it's been too hot to play outside; that can make blogging a bit difficult.

Easter 2011

Easter is definitely a favorite holiday of mine. Can't be THE favorite because nothing beats Christmas, but it's proven to be even better than Halloween these days. No matter how you celebrate Easter, there is always lots to do this time of year, and I think our family found the perfect balance between

celebrating the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and the traditional kids' stuff like Easter eggs and bunnies.

Every year, our community has an Easter egg hunt, and my kids always love it. My oldest is now too old to participate, but I was proud that she chose to come along with us and that she was a HUGE help with the little ones. Our community's Easter egg hunt is more of a candy scramble now. They used to have it in the park, and the volunteer teens from the high school would hide the candy all around the park, but they got tired of having to move the event indoors at the last minute because of inclement weather. With Easter being in April, you just can't guarantee a sunny, dry, Saturday morning without muddy ground in which to hide the Easter surprises. So now they have it in the middle school gym, and while they can't exactly hide the candy, the kids seem to love it all the same. kids find a piece of candy with a colored dot on it, then they win an extra prize, and 2 of my 3 kids did just that — those of you who know our family can guess who was the one with the (as always) bad luck — poor kid.

At church the following day, we had two special guests join us — one friend who doesn't go to church but began to come after falling on hard times in his life, and a new friend who is also going through tough times and looking to switch churches. I'm so happy to report that New Friend now calls our church her church home — she and her kids really like it! Also, Friend #1 has been coming to church every week since! God is amazing!

Monday, we were invited by some friends to attend "The Living Last Supper", a show near Fort Wayne Indiana staged solely for God's glory — to depict the last days and the death and Resurrection of Jesus. It was an awesome, powerful show; one I strongly recommend. This will be an annual tradition for our family for sure! Especially since all 4 of our children were moved by the performance, and we didn't even need to use the child care!

Friday saw the annual kid-friendly tradition of egg coloring, and I think this was really the first year we've done egg coloring with a little BOY in the house. Our son is 2, and what a difference there was between his rowdy excited way of dropping the eggs into the colors versus his sisters' delicate quest for prettiness in their egg designs. Our son barreled through his allotment of eggs so quickly that his sisters were still working on theirs when he was done, and this is what happened:

After dinner, our family sat down in a circle to do another one of our favorite Easter traditions: Resurrection Eggs. It's a set that was given to us by my sister last year, and I have to remember to tell her how much we enjoy doing this every year. We even lent our set to some friends this year for them to enjoy! It comes with a booklet, and we take turns reading the little paragraphs that tell the story of Jesus' death. The booklet asks questions and gives you places to pause, and you open each of the 12 eggs when prompted. Each of the different colored eggs contains a little something that represents the part of the story that was just read, and we have kids take turns opening eggs. It's a wonderful way to combine the eggs aspect and the spiritual meaning of Easter into a fun-filled educational

Saturday morning the kids got a nice surprise — the Easter Bunny had visited early and hidden their gorgeous eggs! I think the Easter Bunny thought it would be too much for us to

family activity, and we love it!

search for eggs while trying to get to church on time Sunday morning, and he was right [] Oh, here's a pic of the kids with their eggs; Dude is still recovering from his egg coloring tantrum:

After the egg hunting , we attended a fun Easter event at the community theater up the street, and the weather actually cooperated. There were Easter egg hunts, games, lunch, and plenty of prizes for everyone, and the kids had a blast. We returned home and made a last minute decision

to check out another Easter drama at a friends' church.

It seems that the Easter Bunny made another visit to our house on Saturday night since Sunday morning the kids woke up to a laundry basket for each of them full of surprises. We went to church, and I enjoyed a whopping class size of 13 firstgraders to teach! Problem was, all of their jacked-up-oncandy brains could only think about the other aspects of Easter, and we had difficulty doing some of our planned It's often difficult to accomplish much when I activities. have a class of that size anyhow, so I took it in stride and we went to the gym early to run around and burn off some of that sugar! At adult worship, we were blessed to see enough friends join us so that our group filled up an entire row! It's not about quantity, but it was amazing to see some friends there who don't regularly go to church and some whom we've been inviting for years and haven't come until now. am so excited to see what God is doing in the lives of those I care about!!!

We went out to brunch, took a family nap, and then we took the kids to the movies. No, we didn't see Hop, which might have made sense for Easter, but our older kids have already seen it. So we took in Rio, which is a cute family movie about a couple of rare parrots — fitting for our family since we reside with a jerky parrot of our own, and we had fun.

Overall, one of the best Easter seasons *ever*; actually, this season just keeps getting better and better every year, especially as I become aware of what the season is all about and how to really celebrate it. I am truly blessed!

So a belated happy Easter to everyone! I hope you all had a wonderful Easter and have many more to come! Celebrate Easter, celebrate Jesus, celebrate love, celebrate family — Easter is great & we have God to thank!

At Least I Have No Regrets

Spring break is over, and for me it flew by- and it was wonderful. I had my concerns about being so tired and keeping 4 kids from getting bored and restless, and those fears mounted last week when I saw the weather forecast — 40s all week, scarce sunshine, and maybe even a little snow. I was especially concerned that spring break would be my own personal forecast to what summer break will be like because hard as I try not to, I have times where I dread the summer a little bit.

For one thing, there is a wonderful Christian camp that we've been hearing about from a friend, and we've been trying to let our kids go for years now, but it hasn't worked out for one reason or another. This year, it seems that the dates will work, but the fees are a little steep, and the 45-minute trip

to the camp x4 (there-back-there-back for two kids) might hurt the wallet a little bit with the price of gas the way it is. Add to that a trip to Nashville Indiana with extended family -SO fun, but 8 more hours of driving, plus groceries and supplies to buy, plus 4 round-trips to South Bend Indiana, and I calculated my mileage from July 4-23 at 1388 - That's one thousand eighty-eight miles in 20 days. Factor in our van's crummy gas mileage and all the pregnant lady bathroom stops, But then I got to thinking about it, and I think I'd rather spend my July driving around the tri-state area than locked away in my air-conditioning with 4 rambunctious kiddos. As I said, the trip to Nashville will be lots of fun, and most expenses have been paid thanks to a generous Christmas gift. So what if I have to miss the 4th of July fireworks for one year (next year we do have to pick a different date though guys if you are reading this □ 4th of July is one of my favorite holidays!). And the trips to South Bend mean that Grandma is taking the kids — so that means fun for them, and a break for us. So what if it's not all 4 kids gone at the same time anymore — that's just one of the small trade-offs for having such a large (wonderful) family. I'm STOKED that the kids finally get to go to this camp — they are so excited too! So what if we have to leave Nashville at 5am just to drive the 4 hours to get Sammie there on time? But the main reason for optimism for summer vacation was spring break — it was awesome, and it flew by.

For me, the month of March dragged on and on, and I think much of it had to do with my prenatal dr. appointment on the 31st. I just could not wait. Part of it was excitement — this stage of pregnancy is tough in a different way than the rest of it because many of the changes are internal, and you have nothing to show for it. I spend my time looking up sketches of what my baby might look like these days, but unless you count fatigue, nausea, moodiness, or tears, there aren't any outward signs to get excited about — and no, leftover baggage from previous kids does not count as a "baby bump". Also, I've

been extra worried about this pregnancy - I can't put my finger on it, maybe it's that stupid stat I heard somewhere that keeps sticking in my brain - "1 out of 4 pregnancies end in miscarriage". This is my 5th pregnancy, so that panics I wish I didn't read the news so much. Maybe the worry is because of how incredibly difficult this pregnancy has been on me (and my family) compared to the others. Whatever it is, I've been especially panicked, but I've been building a great relationship with my new doctor — she is very understanding and so much more of a problem solver than my previous doctor. But either way, spring break saw me at my prenatal, and everything looks great! Baby is measuring at exactly 12 I got to see her weeks, right where s(he) should be. AND... (him) dance!! The baby keeps sneaking us ultrasounds — I wasn't scheduled for one, but the heartbeat couldn't be detected (my understanding doctor warned me of this ahead of time, or I would have panicked. Again.), so she took me into the ultrasound room. There, we saw baby on the screen, and my little 2-inch miracle was dancing — I saw her legs moving and everything! I keep thinking and saying "she" and "her", but don't place any bets - I've been known to be wrong about my children's genders in the past - before they're born, of course, sheesh.

So I took the kids to the zoo on Monday of this spring break, and last night I'm still on cloud nine from seeing my baby dance, and the more I thought about it, the more I realized that I could not resist going back to the zoo on the last day of our season's pass. We aren't going to renew because as much as I love the zoo, it feels like a waste to renew right before summer, especially when I'm pregnant and (probably?) won't feel like going as much. And I know I won't be able to go after my surgery for a month or so... So I took the kids to the zoo not once, but twice this spring break, and I didn't even feel like I was going to keel over by the end of today, which means that my first trimester fatigue might be fading (afraid to get too excited). I even took an extra kid with

me to the zoo both days, a gamble that paid off both times since we all had a blast — even if I was late getting Ellyn home today (that's why I didn't stop to chat Justj — I've been kicking myself ever since. I really wanted to see your daughters! But I was late, and you just don't expect to run into a friend 60 miles from home so I was caught off-guard).

So yes, I missed the Chicago Cubs opening day game taking my kids to the zoo, and I'm proud of it! Nevermind that I was looking forward to that game for months. Hubby recorded it for me, and I watched it as soon as I got home anyway. And I'm telling you what, the Cubs did not play badly (except for Dempster — if I still cussed he would be on my you-know-what-list), but they lost. But as I said, they did not play badly, so there is MUCH hope for the season — you can't tell anything decisive on opening day. Well, except for last year but we'll leave that out of it. But the best part is, I have no regrets. I can't imagine how I would have felt had I missed my last chance to take my kids to the zoo in order to watch a game where the Cubs lost.

Super decision on my part, and if this spring break was any kind of predictor for summer vacation, BRING IT ON!

The Dude Is Growing!

My son had his 30-month ($2\frac{1}{2}$ years for you laypeople) check-up at the doctor today. All is well, though he wasn't very cooperative for the student doctor in training when it came to getting his nose and ears checked. And he had to get a shot, which of course was sad to witness. Unlike his 3 brave older sisters, he did cry, but he got over it quickly and proudly showed off his "owie" for the rest of the day. The little

dude weighs 29.2 lbs. and is 2 feet and 10.5 inches tall.



Crazy Cat Lady = Me?

Seems like it's been a long time since my last griping-about-Walmart blog post. Either I'm getting used to their secretive price-gauging ways, or I'm too busy in my personal life to spend as much time feeling wronged by the corporate giant. Maybe it's a little of both. But a few weeks ago, a couple of Walmart employees made themselves worth mentioning on my blog for their roles in turning a normally hectic pre-Christmas nighttime shopping trip with 4 little kids into quite an irritating adventure.

After wandering past empty shelf upon empty shelf and compromising my shopping list due to all of the out-of-stock items there were (and I'm talking everyday items, nothing gourmet nor exotic), my frustrations were growing. But finally I was finished in the grocery section, so I split off from my family and headed for the garden center. It might seem like a strange time of year to get those cement garden-

border-blocks, but they are just over \$1 at Walmart, so I use them as a cost effective way to keep my puppy from digging holes under our fence. He digs a hole, I stick in a Walmart cement brick and solve the problem for under \$1.50 - done. won't be long until I have a pretty little brick fence bordering my chain link fence. Except that my puppy dug a hole the other day, and just because it was December in Ohio (never mind the thunderstorms and rain we've been having), Walmart decided that they are going to lock up their cement bricks in the outdoor garden section and not let customers back there to get them. I get back there and find the door to the outside blocked with a bench (so THAT'S where they're putting the benches they removed from the entire store. Walmart decided to make seating scarce in their store is beyond me. Don't shoppers stay longer and spend more money if there is a place to rest their feet? Don't they want to come back to a store that lets them rest while their shopping companion goes at it? But that's a whole 'nother post, I quess, even if I entertained the tangent). So anyway, I hunt down an employee and ask her about the cement bricks, and she tells me that the garden center is closed for the night and to come back another day. And this is AFTER I've already spent almost 2 hours in the store, wandering amongst empty shelves that it seems they don't know how to stock. It was difficult to explain to her that I had come there that night with all my kids and that this would not be happening again any time Take a bunch of kids into a store that sells toys that time of year if you want to know how draining it can be - go on, I dare you to borrow some kids and do it next year. But the bottom line is, Ms. Walmart employee was not nice when she told me to come back another time, and she didn't offer to go back there or have someone else get me a brick or two or She acted like we were both just stuck there in Walmart, and if she could deal with it, so could I. But guess what? She is GETTING paid to be there, while I have to PAY to be there - see the difference? She did not.

So what's with the Walmart policy of selling an item but not letting customers buy it? Are they hoarding cement bricks to build a top-secret Walmart price-gouging planning party fortress or something? Well, I was crabby that night, but I was not going to cause a scene; I don't like to be the scene-causing type. I had some good advice from a fellow tangenteer floating around in my head, "Walmart employees are people too", so I got over it and moved on. But by the time the second Walmart employee wronged me that night, I was really mad... The woman at the check-out did not want to take our coupon, even though it was clearly for the item we purchased. Not even worth writing about now; I might as well move on to the incident that inspired the title of this post — thought I would throw an amusing Walmart story into my grab bag of gripes...

I had to run to Walmart on New Year's Eve. Yes, New Year's Eve, the day when even our normally not-so-full rural Walmart is filled to the brim with people who can't wait to get where they're going to stuff themselves, get drunk or do both at the same time. The mood in Walmart was festive, but I couldn't find a parking spot. I opted for one a mile away, especially because the weather decided it wanted to be more like May than December; it was in the 50s. I'm picking up some last minute New Year's goodies, and I notice that the mixed shelled nuts are on sale for only \$1 /pound. Cracking fresh nuts is one of my favorite ways to snack - hold comments on this please, this isn't Facebook, it's a mostly family-friendly blog □ nuts are nutritious, one of the natural foods I believe the human body is meant to consume, plus I have a monster parrot that loves them. So I called Hubby, and he told me to buy 30 pounds. By the time I got done putting 30 pounds of nuts into sacks (still holding on the comments), my little boy had bitten through an orange I was going to buy (I put it back instead — haha, just kidding, I had to buy the dehydrated orange at the end of the trip), and I had fielded the same exact question from at least two different people: "What are

you going to do with all those nuts?" I had some conversations about my parrot and my 4 kids, and then I had had enough and wanted out. Here's the funny part.

We returned to our friendly local Walmart on January 2, and my husband runs in and finds the same nuts for now only a quarter a pound!! I'm not going to think about how much money I could have saved, not going to do that; it's not the funny part. At a quarter a pound, they were out of the nuts, so my husband asked an employee if they had any more (wait, the 30 pounds I bought weren't enough?) to which he replied, "No, some lady came in here on New Year's Eve and bought most of them for all of her cats." My husband thinks that somehow my stories of us having a nut-eating pet parrot turned into Crazy Cat Lady Buys Nuts among our local Walmart employees, and that's ok with me — I could be crazy cat lady. If only I weren't allergic to cats...

Happy holidays from me and Walmart!



Nothing Worse...

Than having to care for sick kids when you are a sick parent.

Ok, so there are plenty of worse things, but this is one of my

least favorite things about daily life, getting sick at the same time as my kids. The hits just keep on coming — is it December or what? (in case you aren't aware, this is in reference to my family's annual dose of uncanny bad luck that seems to show its ugly face every December)

This time around, it's a nasty stomach virus, which means loads of extra laundry and some very crabby kids. The two little ones were up all night last night, and even though Hubby was the one who got up with them, I was still awakened all night, so neither of us got much sleep. Today was a take-it-easy day, and somehow I found the energy to get through it while being sick and on little sleep. I'm slightly concerned about the little ones being kept up all night again because it's the night of our oldest daughter's birthday party, and we have 8 screaming, shrieking 5th graders running around the house. But they seem to be having a blast (while us sickies keep our distance), and that's what matters. Now I just have to figure out how to talk them out of wanting to watch Twilight Eclipse, which in my opinion, does not seem appropriate for a bunch of 10 and 11 and one 6-year-old.

In a way it stinks getting sick on the weekend- there goes any chance we have of a fun family outing tomorrow, and I'm going to be really upset if I have to miss teaching my Sunday school class on Sunday morning — those 1st graders are adorable, and we have so much fun together every week; I really look forward to seeing them. But on the other hand, getting sick on the weekend means that Hubbydoesn't have to worry about missing work, so that's a positive.

Well, here's to hoping that we are well soon and that there is some way that the rest of the family (2 left standing) does not come down with this. I guess if there was a weekend in December for the whole family to come down sick, this was the best one. We have my daughter's birthday party, but nothing that involves travel like the weekends in the rest of the month.

Take care of yourself and your family in this, the lovely month of December!!

The Little Boy With The Black Eye

We took the kids to the county fair on Saturday, and we had lots of fun. It may have rained most of the day, but we stayed comfortable using an umbrella and our stroller awnings for the little ones. There was only one or two major downpours, and we spent those in the animal barns, looking over the fair kids' 4-H projects.

It's always amazing to us how much our 6-year-old loves going on all the most extreme carnival rides, and my husband and I took turns with her on this:

and this:

To her disappointment, she is not yet tall enough for this, but maybe next year:



My little guy took his nap at the fair, and when he woke up, we stopped for a snack. He began to cry; at first we thought he was just crabby from his nap and that his sister had taken his cookies. But then his cheek up near his eye began to swell up and turn black and blue. When he said, "Bug hurt me", we knew that he must have gotten stung. We made a precautionary visit to the fair's EMS squad, and they were excellent with him, even though he wanted no part of it. He soon got over his ow-ie with the help of some fair rides, but if you look at his right eye, you can see that he was sporting a minor shiner:



I know, the clowns are scary enough, but our son loved this ride despite how upset he looks — it was just his swollen eye. When the ride stopped, he got off the clown and immediately climbed into another one. Hey, you can't expect a 2-year-old to understand the concept of fair tickets being \$.75 each!!

I'm happy to say today that the swelling on his face is down a little bit, and good thing too — I got tired of the scrutinizing looks from people who were wondering, "How did that cute little boy get that black eye?!?"

Disney's First Day Of School!

My almost 4-year-old daughter Disney joined her sisters in the profession of "student" the other day- it was her first day of prechool, and she LOVES it!!

Here is the cutie on her first day:





BLACK Raspberry - A New Meaning

Labor day weekend was a busy one, but it was packed with lots of fun family time. On Saturday, we packed up the kids and drove out to South Bend Indiana which is kind of a hike but worth it as you'll see in a minute. They have a nice little zoo there, the Potawatomi Zoo, and our Toledo Zoo membership gets us in free in South Bend also. There is also Megaplay, a fun place for the kids (and adults!) to play. But this is the first time we've been to Megaplay when my son is old enough to play there, and he thought the ball pit (perhaps one of the last remaining in the world?) was just about the best thing he's ever seen! After Megaplay, we were all starving, some research on the internet before we left told us that a favorite place of ours on the way back from South Bend (Dakota's in Elkhart Indiana) had closed. So we were left to find something new, and that we did — there is an excellent BBQ place right across the street from Megaplay. They had the best dessert I think I've ever had: pig ears, which is some kind of fried dough with butter and brown sugar or something else yummy sprinkled on top. I'm not normally a dessert person, but I probably would have taken on all 4 of my kids for a pig ear. It wasn't necessary though, since I ate theirs while they were in the bathroom □

Last time I blogged about Megaplay, I think I mentioned how the strip mall where it's located looks like it's from the 80's. I don't know how else to describe it, but every time I'm there, I feel like I've been in a time warp. It's difficult to explain, so I tried to take a video, but it didn't turn out. Next time...

Sunday was kind of a restful day, and each of our two oldest daughters had friends over. They were well behaved friends, and we had fun.

On Monday, my husband had to work unfortunately, and rather than try to pass all day with all 4 of my kids at home, we took off for the Toledo Zoo. I know, 2 zoos in 1 weekend? But what can I say, I am a zoo addict. The only problem was that the zoo was MOBBED - probably the most crowded I've ever seen it. Good for the zoo, but not for the mom there by herself with 4 kids trying to navigate a large double-stroller through the crowds. We couldn't get near the great apes to see them, and the rest of the animals weren't doing much of anything except for the hippos. Toledo has an underwater viewing glass on the hippo exhibit, and their two extremely large hippos kept swimming past. One opened his mouth underwater, and the other one rose out of the water, opened his mouth REALLY wide and shook his head back and forth; it was great. The hippos made the entire trip worthwhile. Not that a trip to any zoo could ever be a waste of time for me. if I can't see that many animals, there is just something about zoos that make me feel happy and peaceful. Besides, the kids got to play on the playgrounds for a long time, so they were happy too. The only problem was we had such a big day that all of the kids fell asleep on the way home. And the 4:00 nap did not set them up to go to bed at a decent hour to get enough sleep for school on Tuesday after their long weekend. Oops...

We got back home only 10 minutes late (there was traffic! Labor Day, who'd a thunk?) for our dinner date with Dad. Last week we discovered that Friendly's restaurant has kids' nights, which means that kids eat free with purchase of adult meals. That means for our family of 6, we leave with a bill of just over \$20 to eat out, and that includes all we can drink (kids too, and they don't have to get water — they love this!) AND dessert for all of us. But while we were eating, the lights kept flickering; they went out but came back on again. But then they flickered again and went out for good (we still don't know why, there was no storm or anything). But luckily we had already eaten, so we didn't really have

anything to worry about. The kids were a little frightened, and of course all of a sudden the 3 girls had to use the bathroom, which had the employees scrambling for a flashlight for us to use. As I held the flashlight for my kids in the bathroom, we had a little talk about Amish people and how they live and how maybe the rest of us are too dependent on electricity. I made a bad joke about my black raspberry sundae since I was eating it in the dark, and that's where I got the title for this post.

So overall, a great weekend, though I should add one thing. At Friendly's, my husband overheard a college-age kid at the next table mutter something rude after our family prayed before our meal - "Jesus freaks". I feel badly for him that he has to think that about people who appreciate taking time to thank God for their blessings throughout their days. were quietly minding our own business, so his comment was completely unnecessary. We do our thing, he can do his. didn't even say anything when he and his friends were casually tossing around the f-word during their meal, even though my kids were sitting right next door. But people are people, and as I said, I feel badly for him. Besides, God gave us an opportunity to really help someone before we left the restaurant, and I hope that maybe our kindness can show the light of God to others. Maybe the mutterer was still there to witness God at work.

Hope your Labor Day, your "last hurrah of summer", was safe and happy. Here are some pictures from our wonderful weekend:



Ok, and I have to include the following pictures for the Star Wars fans. Megaplay has all these life-size cardboard cutouts of Star Wars characters hanging up. Sorry the pictures aren't better, but I took them from far away since I was trying to fit as many into the pictures as possible. Look for them high on the walls, near the ceiling:



And my

favorite of the cut-outs — I've always liked Marvin the Martian:



Could This Be... Boredom?

The word "bored" has not been in my vocabulary for years — I always have too much to do with not enough time to do it. Such is still the case, but with the kids (half of them anyway) back in school, I'm finding myself with 45 minutes to an hour of time on the weekdays when I am alone, by myself and without kids. Problem is, I don't FEEL like doing any of the things I once thought I would do if I had spare time. I could put aside the lack of motivation, except that the household projects I want to tackle can't be completed in an hour, so I'm reluctant to begin big projects just to have to pack up after 45 minutes so I can pick up kids at school or have one awaken from a nap. Other things I might feel like doing seem pointless or not productive enough for me to waste my time doing them.

I always thought boredom meant lack of things to do, which I don't think will ever happen to me. But if boredom can also mean having a ton of things to do and not feeling like doing any of it, then I am actually bored!