

Brown Hogs

Everybody knows that kids say the darndest things – there was even a tv show or two about the subject. If you go back and watch the Art Linkletter version, you can see him coaching the kids and moving his lips for the kids to see what they were supposed to say. I don't know why they had to do that; kids come up with enough cute stuff on their own. The reason I decided to write this post is because it came to my attention that my 3-year-old daughter Disney calls groundhogs "brown hogs". Just a cute little tidbit I wanted to share, and hey, she's got a point – the critters **are** brown! Makes sense to me! ☐

Potty Training Celebration!

Ok, I know it might seem weird, especially to those of you who aren't parents. But in my family, we are celebrating a major milestone – 3-year-old Disney is officially potty-trained!!! In lieu of this triumphant moment (congrats to Disney but let's face it, one of the best parts about this is that we only have to buy and change diapers now for ONE instead of TWO!), I thought I'd share a cute potty-training-themed email forward, here goes, and again, forgive me if you are not on the same page with me – potty-training kids is a big deal, and this is our THIRD success story!



THE POTTY

A LITTLE THREE YEAR OLD BOY IS SITTING ON THE TOILET. HIS MOTHER THINKS HE HAS BEEN IN THERE TOO LONG, SO SHE GOES IN TO SEE WHAT'S UP.

THE LITTLE BOY IS SITTING ON THE TOILET READING A BOOK. BUT ABOUT EVERY 10 SECONDS OR SO HE PUTS THE BOOK DOWN, GRIPS ONTO TO THE TOILET SEAT WITH HIS LEFT HAND AND HITS HIMSELF ON TOP OF THE HEAD WITH HIS RIGHT HAND.

HIS MOTHER SAYS: "BILLY, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? YOU'VE BEEN IN HERE FOR A WHILE..

BILLY SAYS: "I'M FINE, MOMMY.. I JUST HAVEN'T GONE 'DOODY' YET."

MOTHER SAYS: "OK, YOU CAN STAY HERE A FEW MORE MINUTES. BUT BILLY, WHY ARE YOU HITTING YOURSELF ON THE HEAD?"

BILLY SAYS: "WORKS FOR KETCHUP."



:)

Wow – that last post was such a downer that I decided to write a little follow-up – I’m feeling better! I took forever in the shower, and my son is still napping! And the two girls have been playing together... funny how the house calms down when a certain little Kindergartner is at school. Coincidence or instigator? You tell me ☐

My little parakeet JJ likes the sound of running water, so my shower music today was supplied by a happy little bird – that was a mood lifter! I’ve been reaching into his cage as part of training to get him used to me, and he’s been letting me touch him! So today I was touching his belly, and he started to close his eyes, and it occurred to me that we didn’t have to just do training – I could pet him! So today, I would say that JJ became a REAL pet – he enjoyed my company, let me pet him, and he cheered me up!

And now I get to sit here at the computer for a few minutes, and I actually get to have my glass of water next to me since there is no one to come drop things into it (one of my son’s favorite activities is the put things in water, you’d think

he'd appreciate his baths more than he does). And I treated myself to a piece of chocolate. Ah, a long hot shower, chocolate, and peace and quiet... what more could I want? Sorry about the grumpy post I made before ☹

My Job Is To Make People Miserable

My husband works from 9:30 to 5 on weekdays, which leaves me the job of holding down the fort. My kids are generally good kids, and they are adorable, so it should be a fun job. But I'm not having fun today. I've had 3 kids crying literally constantly today from 9-12:30. Taylor is 10, and she's home sick from school. She's the only one being good, but I can't give the poor kid a break because her sisters and brother are acting so crazy!! This is the 2nd Wednesday in a row that the kids have acted up – what is up with that?!? I have 5 minutes of peace right now because we got Sammie to Kindergarten and the baby is napping. I just need to blog about it because I feel like I'm going to explode!! The baby is getting over being sick, so if he's not being held, he's crying. I don't know what the deal is with 3-year-old Disney, she's usually pretty good, but today she is screaming about *everything*. And she has this loud, shrill, ear-splitting scream like you wouldn't believe. In the meantime, Sammie was provoking everyone and starting fights with all 3 of her siblings; I was trying to referee, hold the baby, clean up his messes, change dirty diapers, and make lunch all at the same time. Now that I have some "peace", I feel worse – Disney has asked me 6 questions just in the short time it's taken me to write this. I'm trying not to snap at her, but I'm in a really bad mood. It would really help if I had my dog to snuggle, but she died

in December and my other dog is too smelly to snuggle. I feel like I work really hard all day, and all I do is make people miserable. How can my husband get any work done with all the screaming in the house? It adds pressure to me to try to keep a suitable work environment for him. I am looking forward to a relaxing evening. No, wait. It's youth group night, which I normally enjoy, but to go try to teach a bunch of preteens after a day like today seems daunting. Not to mention that I have an extra group tonight since a fellow teacher had back surgery yesterday. I hope it went well for her...

I would cry but then I'll get another nosebleed – my nose has been bleeding a lot lately, stress maybe? I sure wish I could figure out a fun way to wind down to give me something to look forward to tonight, but my kids have been refusing to go to bed lately, and the little guy has been waking up all night with his illness.

Ok, that's my vent, sorry to be such a downer, but I thought writing about it would help. Dunno yet if I was right... Time to make the most of the baby's nap and get the garbage out and lunch cleaned up. If I'm lucky and he sleeps long enough, I just might get a nice long hot shower – but that's probably too much to ask.

Those Crazy Kids

Well, it's not a full moon tonight, but you could have fooled me. My kids are acting completely nuts today; I just had to get away from them for a few minutes for some "me" time to vent and blog this out. Ok, it's not really "me" time; the kids are right here, they just happen to not be needy at this moment – first time all morning. I actually just checked the

moon's forecast, and we are only 2 days away from a full moon. Oh, my – does that mean I have 2 more days of this? My [blogging teacher friend](#) wrote about how she used to be able to predict her students' daily behavior by the way a herd of Clydesdales were acting when she passed their farm on the way to school each morning. If the horses were running around, there was a good chance the kids were going to be crazy. I'm betting that if I had a herd of Clydesdales in my backyard, they would be running around. And that would be cool – I've always wanted a bunch of animals. But hopefully I'm wrong about something crazy being in the air and the chaos is just localized to only our house because I have to teach youth group tonight, and I don't know what I'll do with crazy teenage girls if I have to deal with crazy little kids all day!

Sammie, my Kindergartner is still sleeping, and it's almost lunch time. I can't complain about her behavior because for the past 3 days now (knocking on the wood floor), she's been good as gold. Yes, I am counting the days of her goodness because we just endured an incredibly bad phase of hers that lasted a few months – it was really bad. Why dwell on the negative, though? Today she was playing with her little brother without even being asked, and they were so cute together! They played tag, and she read books to him – I would have taken a picture, but I was busy meeting the demands of my 3-year-old, Disney. She was always the one I could count on to be good; she's always been a sweetheart. But lately, she's been in a really intense phase, and it's hard to handle. She has a very loud, shrill little voice, and she's always using it to yell "MOM", and you wouldn't believe how often she needs something – hungry, thirsty, help with something... we starting heavily potty training; I'm talking no more diapers during the day, so of course that makes her even more needy. By the way, the potty training is not going very well.

Well, I'd better wrap up; I'm sick of all the interruptions – I've found it's better when I don't really try to blog or work while the kids are around because it causes more frustration than productivity. But it's amazing how positive things look when our Kindergartner is in a "good" phase! And her older sister has been completely awesome lately too, so that makes 3 of my 4 kids in good phases. And Disney's bad phase can't even be called "bad" when you compare it to one of Sammie's bad phases. It's funny how our family dynamics are constantly changing as the kids go in and out of phases – kind of like the moon!

He Ate The Cheesy Fiesta Potatoes, And Then He Wore Them

I have an 18-month-old little boy, and the other day, he tried cheesy fiesta potatoes from Taco Bell. I think the title of this blog post pretty much says it all.



Patience

Our new bird is so cute! Not having parakeets for years has made me forget how pleasant they are to have around. JJ chirps and sings, and even when he's quiet, he's adorable to look at. My husband (who is not known for his patience anyway) mentioned the other day that he's having trouble with his temptations to reach into the cage and grab the bird to play with him. It's partly his impatience, and it's partly because he's used to just reaching out and grabbing his obnoxious parrot. But my husband knows that if he is disruptive to the training process I've chosen for JJ, there will be big trouble!

I'm having trouble being patient too, but I understand how innately nervous parakeets are. Once you build their trust, they can make wonderful interactive pets – but the key is taking it slow and being consistent. As much as I want to cuddle my baby bird, I can respect his need for space right now too. But try telling that to my excited kids. The older ones (ages 10, 5 and 3) are ok about it; for the most part, they're content to just stand there watching JJ and talking to him. But my 18 month old toddler is another story. He is fond of banging on metal cages because that's what makes the most noise, and the rats don't really mind. My poor little baby bird, on the other hand... We usually shut the door to our bedroom since that's where JJ lives, but the other day, we forgot. I figured shutting the gate at the bottom of the stairs would keep the dog away from our bedroom, but kids opened the gate. While the dog was fine (I don't think she even realizes there is another bird in the house), I found little Beeber (that was our then-2-year-old's nickname for her baby brother) next to JJ's cage, and he hasn't been the same

since. He still chirps and acts happy, but he now tries to fly around the cage whenever I come near – he used to let me put my finger right up next to him... He was doing so well with the training, we were bound to take a step backward. I still have confidence that I can train JJ to be a nice family bird, or at the very least, a little buddy bird for me. We just need to have a little patience.

A Big Sarcastic THANKS

THANKS – to the one who got us the 300 piece puzzle for Christmas. Granted, 300 pieces are not too many for a puzzle. But normal puzzles usually have the person putting together a broken portrait, like a picture of a landscape or a scene. But the puzzle given to my 10-year-old back in December was a depiction of a collection of small toys clustered together on some shelves – what seemed like 300 toys broken into 300 pieces which we were supposed to piece together...

I wanted to do this puzzle together as a family days after it was given to us, but since that was one of the worst weekends of my life, we didn't get around to it. Tonight, my 10-year-old was having trouble sleeping after her little sisters had gone to bed, so we hauled it out and went to work. Thank goodness the little ones were asleep. There was no way that they would have felt anything but frustration when trying to do this puzzle – it was too daunting for even my husband to try, but then again, he is not a puzzle person in the slightest. As a matter of fact, when he saw our completed triumph, he asked, "How do we preserve this?" I answered, "Why bother, we'd probably like to do it again; it was fun." He gave me the strangest look and said, "I guess our definitions of fun in this case are completely different."

I'm proud to say that together, my daughter and I finished the "impossible" puzzle about 15 minutes under our two-hour goal. Here are some pics:



Despite my clever blog post title and in all seriousness, I am thankful for the time that we spent together doing the puzzle, and we will look forward to doing it again. The thanks I would like to expend to the puzzle-giver is not at all sarcastic; we actually had a lot of fun. But that same puzzle-giver should keep a watchful eye... there are now two of us looking to challenge you to an equal payback ☹

Let It Snow... Well, Just For Tonight

I am glad to be home. I've got a nice warm cup of coffee next to me as I sit at my computer... but don't let my facade of relaxation fool you. I've already changed 3 dirty diapers and broken up 4 squabbles in the past hour since I've been home, with more of both sure to come. But my errands today went even worse – one of those days where most things, even the littlest things, are going wrong – too many things to list, and I'm exhausted.

And it's snowing, which made everything I did today more difficult. It depends upon the news outlet of choice; the radio says we are to get 2-4" of snow today with another possible inch tomorrow. I am also a fan of weather.com, who says my area is due for a possible 3-5" today, and another 1-3" at night. Basically the same forecast, but I know they weren't exaggerating this time – there are already at least 3" of snow on the ground. I know because I had to trudge through it, both on foot and in the car. The roads are terrible, but walking is a breeze thanks to the boots I got a few months ago. Well, it would be a breeze if it weren't for all the little ones I have to bundle and re-bundle and lift out of the car at every stop. I had so many stops to make and was so sick of the snow today that I decided to not go to the library and pick up the second Harry Potter book. I know, it sounds great to be snowed in with a good book, especially because hubby is working all night, but it's difficult to imagine that I will achieve any kid-less time. I just couldn't bring myself to make that extra stop, especially when the day's other errands had already gone so awry. Some of it was just plain bad luck and some had to do with the fact that all 4 kids – well, ok, 3 of them, but I'm not mentioning any names – have been terribly behaved lately.

In what has turned into a ranting blog post of complaints, where was I?

My husband had a major issue with his work in December, so he needs to work basically whenever he's awake to get our family back on track. I lost my other best friend in this house in December, and it feels kind of lonely when the people you hang out with all day do nothing but poop, cry, or argue, sometimes all doing all 3 things at once. And I started today on such a good note; where on earth would I be right now if I hadn't? I stayed positive this morning while I cleaned the poop out of the bathtub, and I even smiled when my son pooped again on the floor and slid on it like it was a banana peel – disgusting, that's obvious, but you have to admit that it makes for a humorous mental picture (no one was hurt, unless you count my bathroom floor).

The trip to Walmart today went surprisingly well, even though I didn't leave myself enough time for lunch. But then the kids lost it as I was loading the groceries into the car, and between the yelling and the snow, I realized I was not really IN the drive-thru at McDonald's – I was kind of taking up the drive-thru lane AND the drive-past lane simultaneously. It was too late for me to move over, at least not until the car in front of me moved, and sure enough, there came someone *squeezing* past me... I turned my head, ready for the dirty look I knew I was about to receive, and the driver did not disappoint. He glared at me, and that's when I saw it was a county sheriff, and I sank low in my seat – how embarrassing. And great – I feel sorry for the other red vans that get pulled over if this guy is looking to get revenge on me; he looked awfully perturbed at my ignorance.

So then I get home, and my little boy has fallen asleep (only took 15 minutes of crying in the car), so I put him in his crib and venture back out into the snowstorm because I forgot milk – a morning requirement in this house o' kids. But because it was today, and because anything that could go wrong

was going wrong (remember that I've left out still most of the gory details), the first store I check is completely *out of milk*. So I go to another place, and they do have milk, but there I run into an acquaintance with whom I am forced to make chit-chat. Normally, I'd be ok because I like most people I meet, but there are a select few (usually those afflicted with [P.A.S.](#)) who really get on my nerves. Enter this guy, today, one of "those days". But I'm nice, I'm still in a positive mood, I've got my milk, and I'm on my way home. When I slide into my driveway (reminding me it has to be shoveled later), I want to sit at my computer with my cup of coffee and relax, but I decide instead to play a game of Dora Candyland with my 3-year-old because it's something we can't do when her brother is around and wreaking havoc. No sooner do we get out the Candyland than her brother wakes up – great, so all I accomplished during his nap today was getting milk! No "me" time and worse yet, no quality one-on-one time with my daughter – just errands, UGH!

Well enough ranting for now, let's just say that I did end up with my cup of coffee and my quiet time. But if you think the kids relented and gave me this on their own, you should read more of my blog posts because that is SO not the case. My husband had to take a break from work and spend it with the kids. So now it's my turn, and my quiet time is over. But let it snow – we don't have anywhere to be because Girl Scouts was canceled this evening due to snow. Maybe we can counteract some of today's unpleasantness by spending some quality family time together tonight while we're snowed in... but please, not another day off school for the kids – after today, I don't think I could handle a snow day!

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!!!