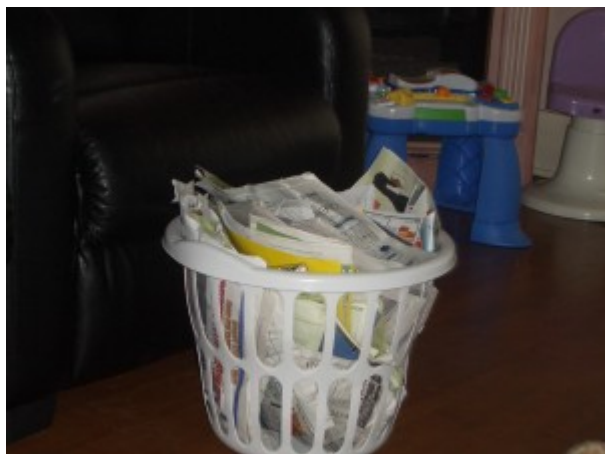


Camping Pictorial

If you've been reading my blog lately, then you know that I was away last week camping with my family – my husband, 4 kids (ages 9, 5, 2, and almost 1), and 2 dogs. Camping for the entire week with 4 little kids has its ups and downs; mostly ups. But one of the major downs is the amount of house-mom work that awaits my return: 6 persons worth of laundry for a week and a half, which I refer to as “Mount Washmore”, grows to be the size of a small county's dump. And my Week 0' Heap 0' Paperwork I must sort through is picture-worthy:



But when all is said and done (a week or more from now), I will say it was well worth it. It was worth it to be (mostly) away from the internet and other electronic distractions for a week, especially tv. During that week, it wasn't my job to dwell on horrid and depressing headlines from around the world. And it was worth it to spend a distraction-less 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with my family, just the 6 of us in the wilderness (of Indiana) with only the bare necessities (a furnished cabin with refrigerator and a store within walking distance) with which to survive...

A great time was had by all, and camping is definitely something that we will do again in the future.

This is our cabin. It has two beds downstairs where Daddy, Mommy, Disney, and Charity and Beasley (the dogs) slept. Along with the two beds are a table and chairs, a bench, shelves, a half-bathroom, a mini-fridge, and a microwave. There is also a ladder which leads to the loft that spaciouly houses two twin mattresses where our two oldest girls slept. As you can see, there is also a picnic table out front and a grill and fire pit. Our cabin's porch also came with a great view of the fishing creek and the sunset.



We did lots of fun activities while we were camping; including boating. We took out a rowboat (thanks for rowing, Dad!), and the little ones caught a nap before we set sail:



We also took out a large pontoon boat and made ourselves quite comfortable watching for wildlife for hours at a time:



I think I could get used to being a boat captain; I just loved driving the boat (and my husband says I'm good at it, whatever that means). But I really did love being the captain, deciding when to pull close to shore, idling the boat or even keeping pace with the wildlife as we did when we followed a young hunting raccoon. We were able to see SO much wildlife; all in its natural glory; it was great! Among the highlights: butterflies, dragonflies, water snakes attacking fish, fish attacking fish, herons, swan families, frogs, crayfish, geese families, raccoons, does and their fawns, turtles, and even lots of campground dogs and puppies. Here is an example of the beautiful scenery with a doe getting a drink at sunset – I missed photographing her fawn, oops:



And the next picture combines two of the kids' favorite things about camping – frogs and marshmallows – I guess "Big Buddy" does not eat marshmallows... not raw ones anyway. For those of you who are wondering about my frog phobia, you should know that there was a mandatory 5-foot-diameter 'frog buffer zone'

around the cabin for me. But I did come to terms with the phobia in some ways during the trip, maybe it will lessen with time, who knows.



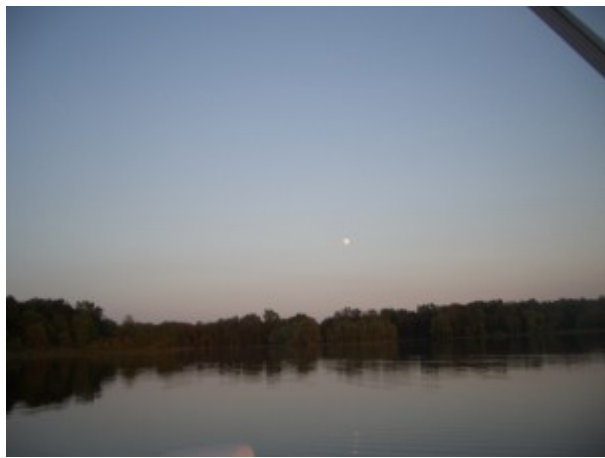
Next is a pic of our baby boy – he was so excited to finally get at that basketball that we had to take a picture. Never mind that he's going to play baseball for the Chicago Cubs some day – or the Chicago Bears if my husband gets *his* way...



Here are all 4 of my kids on the beach – they all loved playing on the beach!



And, some more examples of the beautiful scenery – the rising



moon over the lake at sunset:

A hot air balloon over the lake:



And that reminds me – we also spotted some parachuters in the sky (and lots of cool airplanes – the airport was across the highway at the front of camp) who landed in a field nearby. Our daredevil 5-year-old Sammie said, “I want to do that!”. It’s really funny that she said that if you know Sammie. And

ironically, when she was in the womb, I even said that she would be the one to parachute and do crazy things like that to scare her parents! I could just tell by the strength of her kicking and the fact that she was *constantly* moving... Well, anyway, another great trip, and let me close by recommending camping as an inexpensive family vacation that pays dividends in quality time and togetherness!

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:



Misc Kid Updates

My 10 month old's physical appearance is about to change dramatically. Well, first, let me start here – he's been suffering from lethargy, crabbiness, diarrhea, and diaper rash lately. You seasoned parents out there know what I'm talking about – teething! Sure enough, the other day when we were playing and he was upside-down, I saw not one, not two, but THREE little tooth buds on his top gums. Poor little guy. So pretty soon, he will have a *mouthful* of teeth! I just hope that's the end of his awful diaper rash – he's been taking about 3 baths a day; it's one of the things that helps his sore little bottom. And being 10 months old, he's been doing all sorts of other things: climbing stairs, pulling things down, pulling himself up on everything... they grow so fast and it seems that his trouble is just beginning!

His 2-year-old sister, Disney has gotten a Dora the Explorer obsession from somewhere. She wants to watch Dora constantly, and it's so cute to hear her talk back to Dora on the tv – she is even learning Spanish as a result!

And today is their sister Sammie's birthday! She is

officially 5! We already had her birthday party, but I think we will take her out to dinner and maybe to the store. She has been a little better behaved lately, but still not as great as she was a few months ago – her behavior comes in waves, I guess. At least we're not stuck in horrible-acting Sammie-ness as a constant any longer – there have been glimmers of hope! She is getting ready for Kindergarten in the fall and has been practicing writing her name. A note about this – she would have aced the writing her name part already if we had just named her "Maps", a word she writes over and over!

Taylor is 9 and almost ready to go to middle school next year. You read that right – where we live, kids go to the middle school for 4th-8th grades. She is VERY responsible with her school work and also when it comes to taking care of their 4 pet rats, so I think she'll do well in middle school. We have noticed an increase in her displaying a poor attitude – typical tween stuff, but I wish my child was somehow exempt. Is there an exemption card I can get for this?

So anyway, there's just been a lot going on with the kids lately, and I wanted to share some things before time passed me by and they moved out of the house before I had a chance to blog it. TIME FLIES!

HAPPY BIRTHDAY SAMMIE!!!!

Bloggging Break

I don't know what's happened to me lately. For over a year, I was pretty diligent about publishing my 5 blog posts per week, one for every weekday. Sometimes I did more, sometimes less, but rarely as few as I've been writing lately. I figured that

if I were to lose enthusiasm for this blogging thing, it would have happened already and I'd be done with it. But that's not the case. I've stuck through it while being pregnant (of course it was easy to sit on my pregnant butt in the summer heat last year and blog – didn't want to do much else!), and I even caught up after having the emergency surgery and the recuperation period associated with that, also while caring for a new baby and 3 older kids. And I also caught up after spending a week in Florida with no blogging! So yes, it's something I enjoy, and something I'm going to stick to. I think I'm just going to back off a little bit for now and not publish quite as many posts as before. I still have a lot to say, and a lot of things with which to bore my readers, so have no fear!

But the weather is nice, and I have 4 kids to deliver to places around town constantly. We've had to recently make some sacrifices – I always wanted to give my kids the opportunity to be in every activity they wanted, but I'm finding out that it's just not possible with 4 kids. My oldest is in Girl Scouts, and she also wants to take piano lessons, swimming lessons, be in 4-H and be in plays. Our very-soon-to-be 5-year-old is old enough for Safety Town class this year, and we kind of wanted to get her involved with swimming lessons also. Not to mention all of the projects that Mom and Dad have volunteered to do; the list seems endless. I think our summer is jam-packed already and it's only May! Plus, we've embarked on some rather large home improvement projects that need finishing...

So don't wonder where I am or if everything's ok – it's GREAT to be Über-Busy!

Thrice Upon A Potty

Yesterday saw the official beginning of potty-training for our 2-year-old. She has used the potty a few times before, but now it's official – we went out and bought the toddler sized potty. She was excited about using it and has done so twice yesterday and once today! I just worry about the time it takes to stay consistent. She still needs reminding and accompaniment, and those things might become impossible to do at times depending on what her baby brother is doing at the moment. But for now, we're really excited about her progress, and maybe we can build up some consistency so that she can tend to her own needs in case baby brother is running me too ragged to help.

There are MANY methods of potty-training. There's the famous video/book set, Once Upon a Potty, but that is a bit graphic (I don't think it's important at this age to learn WHERE the poo-poo comes from), and I don't know about your kids, but mine find it difficult to relate to a little girl named Prudence. The "diaper free infant" method of potty-training is becoming increasingly popular. This entails holding the newborn baby over the toilet and not letting him wear diapers. I'm not one to complain about other people's parenting methods, but 'diaper free infant' parents seem like lunatics. The average newborn baby needs his diapers changed 8-10 times per day, and I don't even know how they determine what a 'day' is when referring to newborns since they are often up all night, needing their diapers changed in the middle of the night as well. Who is going to hold a newborn baby over a toilet 8-10 times a day and all throughout the night? A lunatic. But seriously, as I said, the popularity of this method is increasing, so I guess some people are having success with it. Personally, I wait until the kid is old enough to understand. She understands that older people and especially older kids use the potty and don't wear

diapers. She's old enough to not like getting messy anymore, and she's old enough to understand rewards. We had a very hard time potty-training our oldest daughter. The daycare she went to at the time gave us a suggestion that finally worked – sprinkles. When a kid successfully uses the potty, give them sprinkles (the kind you put on cookies, not the kind they're putting into the toilet). Once the sprinkles came into the picture, our oldest was potty-trained almost immediately after months of trying everything else. Our second daughter was a snap to potty-train, well, ok, first we had to wait for her to get out of her “painting with poop” phase, but again, I wait until they're old enough to understand things. During the “painting with poop” phase, she wasn't even 2 years old yet, and so it was really difficult to explain to her why the poop should go in the potty rather than being artistically displayed upon the walls, her crib, her toys, and even her face... YUCK!

Ok, this post has taken a turn for the worst, so I will take that as my cue to sign off. The point is, CONGRATS to Disney for doing such a good job on the potty!

This Economy Stinks!

A few weeks ago, we found out that one of our favorite summer activities will not be an option this year. [The Fun Spot Amusement Park](#) in Angola, Indiana will not be opening in 2009. This park was absolutely perfect for a family with kids the ages ours will be this summer: 9, 5, 2, and 1. They have (had) lots of rides for the little ones, as well as zoo animals like tigers, lions, parrots, and deer. They also had a few awesome coasters for Mom and Dad, and we were planning on bringing along a friend or a Manny (man who is a nanny; see

some of my previous posts) so we could indulge in some coaster action together, a rarity for us. But alas – Fun Spot is a victim of this bad economy. The message on the home page of their website says it all: “Due to the Economy, Fun Spot Park and Zoo Will Not Be Open For The 2009 Season”.

Where is President Obama? I thought his campaign promises entailed the repairing of the economy? The Fun Spot in Angola was perfect for our family – it was only about 45 minutes away, the price was right – it was only \$56 for our entire family to see the zoo and ride the rides and even the waterslides all day. And that was before using any coupons that were always available (they would even offer good grade discounts that allowed our oldest FREE admission!) Compare these prices to Cedar Point, which is 2 hours away AND would cost our entire family \$128 for one day, not to mention that Cedar Point is much less targeted to young kids – plus Cedar Point has long lines in which to wait, something that wasn't a concern at Fun Spot. I can only hope Fun Spot will re-open in 2010 or at least before my kids grow up – we have some amazing family memories of Fun Spot, and I can only hope there will be more to come!

Adding to my angst about losing Fun Spot, I just found out yesterday that Ball Quest in Defiance, Ohio will not be open this season either. Ball Quest had a mini-golf course, a driving range, and batting cages. We had lots of fun there last summer as well, and it was a place we visited often with friends. We even had some batting cage tokens left over! But the sign on the gate of Ball Quest says, “Not open due to increased taxes. Thank County Commissioner Kime”. Ouch – a little bitterness, it seems? Ball Quest was a small family owned business. My friend once showed me the “tea room” they had decorated beautifully in a Victorian motif. I wonder what will happen to gorgeous room and its antique furniture, complete with an antique wooden high chair? I really loved min-golfing at Ball Quest – the course went up a small hill

that overlooked beautiful NW Ohio farm fields... and I'm not sure if there are other batting cages nearby! Yet another source of family entertainment – GONE! If they keep going at this rate, we'll be left with nothing in no time! People complain all the time that families just don't do as much together as they used to and as they should, but if family entertainment keeps getting shut down, that trend will only continue and increase! Here is a picture of my girls having a blast at Fun Spot last year – their baby brother was to be born only two weeks later. It was over 85° that day, and I was physically miserable, but we all still had SO much fun!



I Smell A Rat...

Make that 4 rats. We now have 4 pet rats. How did that happen, you ask? A bit of mistaken identity when they were picked out at the pet store resulted in rat babies? No, all 4 are male – I don't think there's any mistaking that. What happened is this...

We got our two pet rats, and the kids' friends decided they wanted pet rats. This family has a history of obtaining and disposing of pets at a record rate. It bugs the heck out of

me, but I don't want to say anything to them and step over the boundary of telling people how to raise their kids. We took a cat they decided they didn't want anymore, but we had to give it back because our dog was constantly trying to eat her and I was more allergic to that cat than I am to most cats. So anyway, this family is notorious for getting pets and then "getting rid" of them when they're tired of them, want new pets, or just plain can't take care of them anymore. To a degree, circumstances like these are understandable. We had to "get rid" of a dog because she bit my daughter in the face – understandable that we can't have a dog in the house who bites kids when we have 4 kids. Getting "rid of her" upset me at the time, but I also knew there was no choice. I'm putting "get rid" in quotes because it's a term I don't like to use about pets. I don't like to think that this is something people should regularly do with animals. I'm a firm believer in pets being commitments – you must keep them until they pass away (extenuating circumstances don't count – stuff happens sometimes, but not to EVERY pet, as in the case with this family). You need to do all the research about care before you obtain the pet; such as cleaning up after it and how much it will cost to feed it – which is why our daughter's friend's family needed to "get rid" of their rats.

It was a fine line to walk. I don't want to encourage these people to get more pets by taking their leftovers, but on the other hand, I'm an animal lover, and I can only imagine what would happen to unwanted rats (snake food, turned loose in a field = hawk or cat or coyote food, etc). Besides, my kids have been just GREAT about caring for their pet rats. I barely know the rats are in the house, except when I actually have time to play with them, which is exactly how I wanted it. The girls feed and water their rats, clean the cage weekly, and play with them and give them exercise daily. So how could I say no to getting their friends' rats and yes to sending them to certain doom?

So, yes, we now have 4 rats in the house. Please don't start calling me 'crazy rat lady'; it wasn't entirely my fault; I was just trying to help! Here are the new additions – Buckeye and well, I can't remember his name, so here is Buckeye and what's his name (his head is barely visible underneath Buckeye – he looks just like Oreo, one of our original rats).



And while I'm at it, here are our original rats, Oreo and Bobby Jack:



My Bookshelf 0' Rats – just what I've always wanted ☐



Busiest Weekend EVER!

Whew!!! It's Sunday night – the finale of what just might be our busiest weekend ever!

Friday night we stayed up late to tie up loose ends and organize our film shoot scheduled for Saturday. Christopher, our 9-month-old, has decided to start waking up in the middle of the night again, so despite our best efforts (and going to bed early didn't work out either since there was SO much work to do for the film shoot), we did not achieve the much-needed good night's sleep on Friday night after not getting very much sleep Thursday night either. Saturday we were up bright and early to take the kids 20 miles into the country to their new babysitter – our regular babysitter had stopped doing weekends some time ago, and it finally became time to find a weekend babysitter. I know what you're thinking – a new babysitter in a different town = scary! But of course we had met with her beforehand, and we liked what we saw. Not only that, but she lives in a very small town, and her husband's a teacher (so he had an established reputation, and also would need to protect it) AND she is a friend of a very good friend – ie, she had awesome references that checked out, and when it was

all said and done, the kids had a GREAT time over there. As for us, we had a VERY busy day trying to shoot our "short" film. I put 'short' into quotes because the short film took so LONG to film – at least in some of the cast members' opinions. I actually thought the shoot went quite well, considering certain factors. But the bottom line is, it was a heck of a lot different than doing live theater (how didn't some of us see THAT coming – it seems obvious that film and stage would be like comparing apples and oranges), and we did not wrap all of the scenes in one day. So guess what we're doing next Saturday? No complaints out of me, as long as attitudes stay positive...

Saturday night after the shoot we were exhausted. We were going to take the kids to the park, but it started to sprinkle, and so we were able to catch an AWESOME Cubs game on tv instead. This entire series with the St. Louis Cardinals has been so great to watch, even though I've actually only caught *parts* of two of the games – more on that later. Saturday night saw us staying up too late again because it took awhile to settle down the kids after their big day. And, lo and behold, Christopher was up all night again. Right when we flopped into bed, he sat up in his crib. I pretended like I was sleeping for a few minutes so I could be a fly on the wall and see what he did to entertain himself. I almost giggled as he sat up and clapped his hands to himself – it was adorable! I must have fallen asleep though because the next thing I knew (after a few hazy awakenings throughout the night when kids were crying), it was morning and time to get up and get ready for church.

Church this morning was entertaining (I always find it entertaining and enlightening, but I really do need to get some more sleep – I SO don't want to be known as the lady who dozes in church!) as always, although our usual pastor did not give the sermon. I liked the sermon, but not as much as when our usual pastor does it... oh well. After church, we went to

our usual brunch and there we decided to take the kids to the Hannah Montana movie. Except that once we decided, we had only 20 minutes to finish eating, get to the theater, and find a row of seats – what it takes to hold our family at the movie theater nowadays.

Come to think of it, it was such a busy weekend, and Sunday was busiest of all, so I think I'll end the post here and make it a two-parter. My regular readers can consider this a cliff-hanger because they know that any time we take all 4 kids to the movie theater, it's nothing short of an adventure... Until part two...

Sammie Hasn't Done This... Yet

Our almost 5-year-old Sammie is the firecracker of the group. She likes to be the one to stir things up, and she sometimes has some crazy ideas. My mom sent me an email with the following video and a message: "I'm surprised Sammie hasn't tried this."

I can't imagine what those poor parents were going through. First I'm sure horror and panic set in as they worried their little one would get injured or stuck in there – notice they wisely killed the power to the crane game. Then, once she got out, they were probably extremely embarrassed! I half expected to see them spank her little butt when it was the only part of her sticking out! Not that I condone spanking really, but you know how extreme relief often gives way to anger, especially when kids are involved... I'm certainly glad it was their problem and not mine. I know I will **not** be showing this video to Sammie nor any of my kids for that matter – they don't need any more “good” ideas!

Time Flies When You're Having Fun

I was musing today about something...

Sometimes my son gets this look on his face where he looks more like a kid than a baby. He's 9 months old, so he's still very much a baby, but more frequently I can see on his face how he might look as a toddler. It's hard to explain, but my husband feels the same way. The bottom line is, time flies when you're having fun, and I'm having the time of my life watching my kids grow up!

I got a little overtired and frustrated with them once during our last road trip, and I was thinking to myself, ok, no more doing **this** for at least five years. Then it hit me – in five years, my kids will be 14, 10, 7, and 5! No more little little ones, in just a short half of a decade!

So I asked my husband the question – why is time flying so

fast? Does it fly faster as I get older? More quickly when I have more kids? Is it just because our youngest is a boy and we're used to how girls grow up after having 3 of those? I just don't know, but as hard as the work is with 4 little ones, 2 still in diapers, I still wish they'd stay little longer – I really do.

Sunrise, sunset, quickly flow the years...