

# Wagon 0' Cuties

With the return of warmer weather comes the return of our locally famous wagon o' cuties:



Except what's that in the wagon, a little red elf? Now I might be biased here, but that is the cutest elf I've ever seen! This is the first time I put that little sweatshirt on my son. I wish I had found it in time for Christmas last year – I don't think it'll still fit him by December for next Christmas. And it seems the kids are starting to overflow the wagon... Might be time to make our oldest walk or ride her bike...

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## Monsters VS Aliens

We took the kids to see the Pixar movie [Monsters VS Aliens](#) last Sunday after church. The good news is, we didn't end up with any nude children running around the theater (see a previous post of mine; I forget which one, but I think this happened more than once so take your pick – we haven't been to the movies in months, and now you know why!). The bad news is that I didn't think this movie lived up to the hype. But I couldn't be sure; I didn't get to see much of it. It seemed

to me like they showed all the funny parts in the previews, but then again, once you read what I was doing instead of watching the movie, you'll see why I could be wrong...

Our family now takes up an entire row at the movie theater. Our oldest starting pouting because she was stuck on the inside and complained that she couldn't see. To her credit, she got over it right away and ended up being the one kid of the four who actually stayed awake for the entire movie. The movie was about to start, and I felt something pelt my back – HARD. I turned to my husband and said, "I think someone just threw something at me, intentionally because it was hard and it hurt!". He said, "It probably was intentional – turn around and see who it is!" Duh – why didn't I think of that? I'm not the type to want to draw attention, so I figured it was some poor kid who was going to get in trouble if I turned around or something... so I turned around and saw some game-nighters grinning at us. "Good thing you finally turned around, " they said, "we were almost out of Junior Mints!" Haha – that was funny, and I learned my lesson, if you get pelted in the back at the movie theater, you should turn around to see who would actually throw candy at the movie theater – you might be surprised to find out it's NOT kids!

The lights dimmed, the previews came on, and my son dirtied his diaper. By the time I got back from changing him, I had already missed a preview – my husband and I love the previews. Oh well, better than missing the movie, I thought... little did I know we would be missing that too. So my son, who is 8 months old and just starting to crawl, didn't want to sit still for a movie. He was happy munching on things, but he was pretty rambunctious when I was holding him. So I spent most of the movie trying to calm him down and keep him busy. My 2-year-old daughter, who is usually the problem (and the nudist) at the movies, actually fell asleep. My husband went to put her in her seat to sleep so we could enjoy the movie, and there was a horrible gushing sound followed by gasps from

the people behind us. Apparently, my husband's pop had gotten knocked over, and wouldn't you know it, it was almost full and of course it poured directly into the lady's purse who was sitting behind us. OOPS! How can you possibly apologize for something like that, especially while trying to be quiet so others can watch the movie? All the commotion of course woke up my daughter, so now we had her to deal with again. Not more than 20 minutes later, my son made a lightening-fast grab for my drink, and I didn't catch him in time, so SPLOSH – another one bites the dust. At least this time it was in MY diaper bag and not the woman's behind me again – that would have been lawsuit-worthy! But now we were drinkless, had 2 rambunctious kids, and were only about halfway through the movie!

Well, we made it through, my 2 youngest daughters fell asleep before the movie was over, and my son was out about 10 minutes before it ended – he waited long enough to keep me from seeing the movie, and long enough to wake up when we left and screw up his nap cycle. But I guess I learned yet again that my kids are too little to go to the movies – at least all 4 at one time. And the lady behind us didn't say anything when she left, thank goodness. But I wouldn't take my word for it that Monsters VS Aliens isn't anything special – I didn't see most of it!

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## New York Trip Diary Volume 5

**NEW YORK TRIP – MARCH 20-23, 2009 – TAYLOR: 9 yrs, SAMMIE: 4 yrs, DISNEY: 2½ yrs, CHRISTOPHER: 8 mos**

*(continued from previous posts)*

**Monday, March 23** – We left the hotel for the Pittsburgh Zoo

and promptly got lost. Many cities are situated on just one river, but some bank alongside 2 or 3 rivers, and that's where Pittsburgh lost me and we, in turn, got lost. Multiple rivers and all those hills – I have lots of trouble navigating my way through hills and mountains for some reason – probably because if you miss a turn, you can't just go a block and correct yourself because there's hills in the way. And Pittsburgh was also not lacking in what had become our nemesis (besides the ever-elusive Waterways bus) on this trip – construction zones. And we already talked about how Jill the GPS doesn't do detours. Lost as we were, we again got lucky and didn't wind up in any bad neighborhoods, but we did have to go without breakfast and almost without lunch. We stopped at a random police station for directions, and they were very nice (though they have some of the funkiest accents I've ever heard there in Pittsburgh – what IS that?), but the directions were very complicated, probably because of the rivers and hills to drive around, and we got lost again. Finally we found the zoo, and we picked up lunch at a little food stand on the river across from the zoo, and we refrained from making good on our threats to throw Jill the GPS in the river. Except now we were down to only getting to spend 2 hours at the zoo before they closed.

[The Pittsburgh Zoo](#) is nestled within some steep hills – like all the zoos we visited on this trip – and you had to take an elevator to get up the main hill and into the zoo. Once inside, we were very impressed. I'm having trouble deciding which zoo I like better between Pittsburgh and Akron – Cleveland is not even on the same level as the other two. Pittsburgh has a thriving elephant herd – 2 calves born just weeks apart last July! Baby elephants are somewhat rare and difficult to come by in zoos – if a zoo can actually get elephants to breed (and I know the baby in Toledo was conceived via artificial insemination, so breeding might be somewhat difficult), they still have to wait through an extremely long gestation period (almost 2 years!) before

seeing if they have a healthy calf. So the fact that Pittsburgh has 2 elephant calves that were born in the same month last year (also the same month as our baby boy!) is nothing short of amazing.

The Pittsburgh Zoo has an awesome aquarium with 3 types of penguin and a huge seahorse tank – next to manatees, seahorses are my favorite animal, and I have never before seen such a nice habitat for them or such huge seahorses! Also in the aquarium is an area where you can pet stingrays, and there's even a tunnel that runs underneath their pool that kids can crawl through and come up in the middle of the pool. Here is a picture of my daughter after she crawled through the tunnel:



And speaking of tunnels, Pittsburgh Zoo has a tunnel that goes *under* their polar bear pool! How cool is that? We didn't actually see it because we were there near closing time, and the bears were pacing by the door to go in for the night – we knew they wouldn't be swimming any more that day, so we skipped the tunnel. But I must go back some day to see that, and also to spend more time in this awesome zoo – ok, I guess I just decided that I like Pittsburgh just a little bit more than Akron, but it was a tough call! Too bad Pittsburgh is almost 5 hours away, or I'd return in a heartbeat! And I forgot to mention how many fun things they have to kids to do, even beyond seeing the animals. They had a totally awesome looking playground, but we didn't go on that one because we weren't sure we'd have enough time. When we got to the end of

the zoo, there was another playground, so we let them play on that until closing time. Our 2-year-old got “stuck” at the top of the playground – she was too scared to go down the slide and refused to come back out through the tunnels. I was worried that we’d get locked in the zoo like a couple of college kids I read about in Jack Hanna’s hilarious book, *My Wild Life* – they got locked in the dark reptile house, where they could hear things splashing around all night! After we got my daughter to come down off the playground (thanks to her big sister who lured her away), the sea lions were putting on a little show right in the front of the underwater viewing window – which reminds me, we had also gotten to see an impromptu sea lion show earlier in the day – the zookeepers were training them and rewarding them with fish, it was really cool to watch!

On the way home, we stopped in Elyria, Ohio for dinner at a Golden Corral (always delicious) where my husband was a victim of racial discrimination by the steak griller, and we found what must be the last non-Super Walmart left in the world. Trying to save room in the car, we had neglected to pack enough diapers for our two children who still wear them, and we had to break into the new packs of diapers right there in the Walmart to change a double poopie from the baby and his big sister! It was interesting to be in a Walmart without groceries where the employees were actually preparing to close the store for the night – almost like time travel, but if I traveled in time, the last place I’d go is Walmart!

So anyway, now we had only 2 hours left of the drive home, and it passed uneventfully – the kids slept. We got home sweet home at about midnight, and the kids were really excited to see their pets and their room – they had trouble getting back to sleep. The pets were happy to see us, and my thanks goes to our great friend Carol who kept the pets healthy and happy during our absence. I was really surprised to see how big the rats got in just a few days though, Carol, what did you feed

them?!? ☐

So, I had an amazing adventure with wonderful people. And this is the end of my diary. Well, not really, I will have one more entry to go back to the World Trade Center site visit, but I'm waiting for the right time to blog about that – it was a very moving experience. So thanks for reading, and I hope you had fun and maybe even learned a little something about places you may or may not want to visit some day!

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## New York Trip Diary Volume 3

**NEW YORK TRIP – MARCH 20-23, 2009 – TAYLOR: 9 yrs, SAMMIE: 4 yrs, DISNEY: 2½ yrs, CHRISTOPHER: 8 mos**

*(continued from previous posts)*

**Saturday, March 21** – We awoke about 8:30, which seemed early since we had arrived at our hotel late the night before and the kids stayed up for a little bit even after we arrived. So we went down to the hotel's restaurant to get breakfast, which was a mistake. I had thought it'd be cheaper to eat in the restaurant rather than get room service, and I had also thought we'd be cramped trying to eat in the room. But down at the restaurant, our kids went nuts, and continued to do so while it took about an hour for the food to come. And this was a nice restaurant – not a friendly mom n pop place where they actually like and tolerate kids like we're used to back home. They did have pretty good hollandaise sauce for their eggs benedict, but my enjoyment of it was severely compromised due to the stress of the kids. Our server kept walking by and mumbling things, and I'll admit that our 8 month old son does make a mess when he eats, but don't they all? We cleaned up the best we could, but that didn't stop the server from

“stealing” our change. That’s right, when we paid the bill, the included 14% gratuity apparently wasn’t enough for him because he failed to bring the change back. Rather than try to track down Mr. Rude (we are SO not in Kansas anymore!), my husband took up the issue with the front desk.

Next it was time for the business meeting (the reason we came, I guess), and so Manny Jamy took the kids down to the pool while hubby and I met with the clients. Except they were late, and while we were waiting, I began to have doubts about the baby and I being disruptive to the meeting, so I took him back to our room to put on his bathing suit so he could join his sisters in the pool. Just as I arrived, so did Manny Jamy with the rest of the kids, and we decided to take them for a walk outside instead. Our hotel was on the New Jersey side, and offered a postcard view of the New York skyline:



Even though I had never been there before, it seemed to me that there was indeed a gaping hole where the twin towers used to stand, and Jamy who had been there before confirmed this. We watched many a garbage barge sail by, and I was surprised to find that the sea gulls in New York are quite bashful – I guess I’m used to the ones at Sea World and Marineland Canada where they’ll just swoop down and swipe the fish you buy to feed the dolphins and whales. But it was a nice day, and our hotel offered a nice little pocket of solstice tucked away from the frenzied traffic of the city. I wanted to kill as much time down there as possible since we were short on room



in the car and my packing of toys for the hotel room had to be limited. But my oldest was tired – she fell asleep on a bench outside – and her little brother started losing it because he also needed a nap so badly. So we went back up to the room to wait for my husband's meeting to be over. Manny Jamy was nice enough to watch the two middle girls so that I could catch a nap with my oldest and the baby, and it was MUCH needed and MUCH appreciated. Our 2 year old fell asleep as well, which was a good thing, but I was disappointed I couldn't take her to be shown off to the clients when my husband called – she is awfully cute! So anyway, I went down to meet the clients, and they were extremely nice. They have a baby who was born just 9 days before my son, and she was really adorable! I was disappointed – if I had known they had brought the baby, I would have stayed at the meeting and let the babies play together! Oh, well, at this point, I was just glad to be done with work and ecstatic to be well-rested so that we could go to the city and have SOME FUN!

Because we were on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River, every time we wanted to go into the city, we had to wait for our hotel shuttle to take us to the ferry station, then wait for the ferry to take us across the river, and then board a Waterway bus (different from a city bus, as we later learned) to take us to our destination in the city. Not a big deal, but by the end of the trip, it had gotten a little tiresome to add that much traveling time to get where we wanted to go. So anyway, Saturday night, we ventured into the city to take a bus tour on one of those double-decker, open-topped buses. On the way to the tour bus stop, we weaved our way through the massive crowd that is the Manhattan theater district on a Saturday night. We did have a few celebrity sightings; including the actor Morgan Freeman:



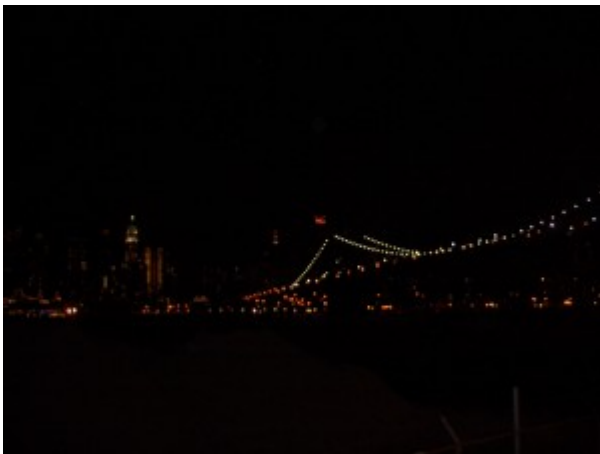
though Mr. Freeman did have the personality of a candle, as [Jamy](#) pointed out. We also saw multiple Statues of Liberty walking around, but a few of them were getting into trouble with the police. Now that's something you don't see everyday – a Statue of Liberty getting arrested – too bad I didn't get my camera ready in time to take a picture, that would have been one for the scrapbook! We also saw Bugs Bunny, Elmo, 2 Cookie Monsters, a walking sandwich, a naked cowboy (don't ask), and Batman. Except I don't think it was the real Batman unless he's always been African American – besides, the real Batman would have been fighting crime in Gotham City, not posing for pictures on the streets of New York. Here is one of the Cookie Monsters – look carefully and you can see Elmo to the right:



We got suckered by some street vendors and sampled their wares of smoked meat, hot dogs, and art. My husband bought a caricature of our oldest daughter and a sign with our youngest

daughter's name in calligraphy, but walking around with those souvenirs was like writing "suckers" on our foreheads – we got hit up for everything after that, from purses to sunglasses to comedy show tickets. Actually, we kind of got "had" again – when my husband bought the \$5 sign for our daughter, the artist started putting a frame on it, which would have upped the price to \$20. My husband kept saying, "no frame, no frame!" but all of a sudden, the artist no longer spoke English, so he went ahead and framed it and charged us \$20. My husband did not pay him the full \$20, but I know it was still more than the \$5 it was supposed to have cost – oh well, you only visit New York once, at least in our case – I won't go back, at least not with little kids!

So then we boarded our tour bus, and that was really neat, informative, and offered gorgeous views of the city at night.



Ok, the picture obviously doesn't do it justice, but here is my 2-year-old daughter seeing her first skyscraper:



It was kind of chilly, and we tried moving down to the first floor of the bus, but the view did not compare with what we could see on the top, so we ended up moving upstairs again. The city was gorgeous at night, but when we went over the Manhattan Bridge, it was so high up, it was kind of freaky! Being on the top of the bus and looking down, you couldn't even see the road, just the water below, and I couldn't help but think how easy it would be to just leap over the side... not that I would do that of course, I'm just saying.

After the bus tour, we tried to find the Waterways bus – the one that would go back to the ferry station, but we had some trouble. We ended up sitting on a street corner for about two hours. We stopped a passing taxi, figuring we'd just pay the expense just to get us and the kids off the streets of New York, but we couldn't even all fit in one taxi. I was strongly against the idea of splitting up in any way, shape or form, so our next idea was to stop a passing horse and carriage. While asking the very friendly Irish driver directions to the ferry bus, his horse took a gi-normous leak right there on the street, but at least the girls were momentarily entertained. We declined the \$70 horse and buggy ride, and finally the Waterways bus arrived – my husband practically jumped in front of it to stop it since the previous one had passed us by, but it worked – the bus actually picked us up!

Overall, an interesting night in New York. And it's not like

I expected people to be overly nice. I certainly didn't expect it to be like my hometown, where you can't walk down the street without strangers saying hi and you can't walk around with kids at night without people offering you a lift. But it was still an adjustment – every time we'd ask how to get to the Waterways bus, people would just point off in a general direction and grunt, even police. And it was amazing to me how a family with 4 small children could set up camp on a street corner for 2 hours without one soul taking notice – I swear, we could have moved there and no one would have known nor cared. By the end of it all, I can't believe how sick of Times Square I was... Oh, and I forgot to mention, while we were searching for the Waterways bus, we came across a small deli that was actually recommended to us by our tour bus driver – Z Deli. The place had amazing falafel and gyro sandwiches! And their prices were reasonable, especially for New York City – no, reasonable is not even the word for them. I'm talking \$.99 slices of pizza, and the huge gyro sandwich was only \$3.99! Its only shortcoming was the lack of places to sit, but the guys who run the place went out of their way to accommodate us (in anti-New York style, it seems), letting us dine at their "internet cafe" area.

So after the "miracle bus" picked us up, took us to the ferry station, and we rode the ferry and picked up the hotel shuttle, it was very late and we were exhausted. It exhausts me just to type out the story, as it probably exhausts the reader to absorb my excruciating details, so now's a good time to cut this volume short – more later...

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# New York Trip Diary Volume 2

**NEW YORK TRIP – MARCH 20-23, 2009 – TAYLOR: 9 yrs, SAMMIE: 4 yrs, DISNEY: 2½ yrs, CHRISTOPHER: 8 mos**

*(continued from a previous post)*

**Friday March 20 (cont'd)** – We arrived at the Akron Zoo about 2pm, which was right on schedule pretty much, although it would have been nice to have more time to explore the wonderful zoo that awaited us. From what I saw, Akron looked like a dumpy little city with a beautiful little zoo. All of the exhibits seemed to be of newer construction, and the animals seemed really active and happy. The Akron Zoo has many unique animals in their collection; including the super rare Sumatran Tiger, (most people are used to seeing Bengals, also called Siberian tigers as those are the ones frequently exhibited at zoos) and the Sumatran tiger was roaring when we saw him. They also have 2 types of animals that I was looking forward to seeing – the hyacinth macaw and the capybara (largest rodent on earth) – but both species were off exhibit waiting for warmer weather. No problem, we had seen capybaras at the Cleveland Zoo earlier in the day, and I have a macaw at home, not a rare hyacinth, but a macaw just the same. Akron has a Malayan sun bear, the type of bear that was the inspiration to A. A. Milne for his Winnie the Pooh stories, and these are also not commonly on exhibit in zoos. When we stopped for lunch, we were pleased to find that the cafe is attached to a building with a Galapagos tortoise habitat, a komodo dragon exhibit, a really cool marmoset environment (a little marmoset – it's a small primate, if you don't know – came running up to the glass when he saw us with our nacho container and started licking the glass!), and an awesome jellyfish exhibit. Before Friday I had only seen one type of jellyfish – moon jellies – but the Akron Zoo has several different kinds on display. My favorite were the bulbous blue blubber jellies. Here is the marmoset trying to taste

our nachos through the glass while my daughter is in the middle of a blink:



And next is a picture of the komodo dragon; I couldn't resist posting it. These things are incredibly ferocious and huge. Once they claw (and *look* at those claws!) or bite their prey (and I'm talking prey as large as water buffalo), they hang around until the animal succumbs to the 28 varieties of deadly bacteria the komodo has in its saliva and then devour it. [Sharon Stone and her husband Phil Bronstein have something to say](#) about the danger of komodos after one bit off his toes during a behind the scenes visit. You can't really tell from the picture, but this thing was almost 10 feet long!



The Akron Zoo is a place for great family fun. The girls got to be penguins:





and measure their wing spans:



Even though their baby brother didn't quite make it long enough to see all of the animals and activities Akron had to offer:





Another cool experience we had at Akron was hearing the bald eagles chirping. I always kind of assumed they would have big voices to match their size, but their tweeting was really cute! Overall, we had a wonderful day zoo-hopping. After our visit to Akron, it was time to head for our hotel in New Jersey. The ride was uneventful; the kids got some sleep and so did I. The traffic in New Jersey was absolutely horrible, which we totally expected, but what we didn't expect was all the detours. There were police and road construction everywhere, which amounted to a ton of traffic, especially for one in the morning. It was a bit stressful, but we did it, and kudos to my wonderful husband who kept his cool and guided us through the many detours for which Jill the GPS couldn't compensate. But who needs Jill? We made it without getting lost! And as we were walking down the hall to room 913 to turn in for the evening, I turned to Jamy our great friend and traveling Manny (man who's a nanny in case you missed my first diary installment) and said, "At least we're not staying in room 911 for our trip to New York." He showed me his key, which did say 911 – oops. Thankfully it was just a coincidence, not an omen:



And here is a parting shot of our family outside the Akron Zoo from earlier in the day – stayed tuned for Trip Diary Volume 3!



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## New Jersey Is Lovely This Time Of Year, I Hear

Right now, I'm in the car with my husband, our 4 kids, and our volunteer "Manny" (a man who's a nanny – thanks Jamiahsh!); we're on the way to the New Jersey / New York City area! How did I manage to make a blog post, you ask? Well, I've actually typed this out days ahead of time and then used the brilliant [tangents.org](https://tangents.org) feature "schedule a post", choosing the

exact date and time for which my post will automatically publish itself! I love technology AND tangents.org!

So I think we're probably between zoos right now; the itinerary had us stopping at both the Cleveland and Akron Zoos in Ohio on the way to New Jersey. Two zoos only 20 minutes apart? How could I resist? And why can't *my* utopia of a hometown be located within a 20-minute vicinity of two zoos?!?

I hope we made it to both zoos without being too pressed for time, and I also hope the kids are being good on the long car ride. I hope our business meeting goes well tomorrow and that we have a lot of fun before making it home safely. Until I return...

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## Dream Sequence...

My youngest daughter Disney has a cold, so lately, she's been waking up every hour (at least). So my sleep has been totally interrupted, which, for a person like me, is not good. I'm barely functioning. My body aches, my head pounds, I have no attention span, no patience with anybody, and I've been very grumpy – the fact that I'm admitting it says a lot :). It's been difficult for me to find joy in things lately, just because I'm so tired, and the thought of retiring to my bed at night now fills me with dread because of the 'night terrors' – waking to my daughter's screams and demands. Even if I don't wake up, I can still hear them in my sleep, and it's causing chaos in other aspects of my life. I'm barely even looking forward to this business trip we're taking this weekend to New Jersey. A few weeks ago, before this all started happening, I was ecstatic about this trip because it's right next to New York City and I've never been there. Not only that, but we're

planning on stopping at TWO zoos on the way there, which as you might know, would normally put me over the moon with excitement. But now I'm just worried about getting there in one piece. My husband is the one who is actually crawling out of bed with our daughter; he is the slave to her every demand. So if I feel this bad, is he going to feel well enough to get us through the 10-hour drive and back safely? He assures me he is, but I don't know; I just feel SO crappy all the time!

Anyway, to help try to regulate my sleep until this passes, I've been taking the diet supplement Melatonin. It's been providing me with some calm before I fall asleep; I used to lay there for about 30 minutes at least with a pounding heart and tense muscles before I could fall asleep, just waiting to hear my daughter's screams. But the Melatonin is helping me calm down a little bit, and hopefully it will make my bedroom feel less like a prison and more like the restful haven I was used to. One side effect of the Melatonin I've noticed is that it's given me VERY vivid dreams. The other night, I dreamt that my mom gave us these yogurt containers all stacked in rows that spelled out some sort of life advice. You know how they print stuff on product containers? Well, she had collected different flavors of yogurt that said different things and stacked them all up until they made a few sentences of wisdom. It was a gift for something; we got to read the advice and then keep all the yogurt. I wish I could remember the life advice they spelled out, but I don't. And after she gave us the gifts of yogurt, we found out that she and my friend Megan had been awarded shared custody of one of my daughter's friends whose parents were getting divorced and didn't want her anymore. *That* was random... but aren't dreams always that way? Here's to hoping our family's sleep can regulate in the near future. I'm taking Disney to the doctor on Thursday – I'm at the end of my rope. Luckily our pediatrician is also a sleep expert, so maybe he can help. I have so much going on right now that it would be SO great to

be able to actually enjoy it!

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## Manners, Kid-Style

When I stopped at the gas station the other day to get the kids a snack, there was a “little person” working the counter – is that the preferred term these days for someone with dwarfism? I certainly don’t want to insult anyone, so pardon my ignorance...

So anyway, I decided to give my kids a talk about why it’s not polite to stare at people; I was especially targeting my almost-5-year-old since she is very curious about people and the differences in the way people look, that sort of thing – and she’s not very discreet about her curiosity. So I was explaining to her about why we shouldn’t stare at people, and she had a sincere question: Is it ok to stare at broccoli?

I told my husband this story when we got home, and he was wondering if she was joking, but no, her tone was indeed sincere. My eldest daughter and I laughed when she asked it, but not AT her, we only thought it was cute and silly. But like I told my husband, I really don’t think she was *trying* to be silly. Like us, my husband knows by now that Samantha is a very unique individual, and she just has strange questions sometimes. She was more than a handful as a two-year-old, but the further away we get from that stage in her life, the more we can enjoy her very individualistic personality and free spirit!

**SAMMIE**



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## The Mayor And The Macarena – Part Deux

About a year ago, I had a blog post called “The Mayor And The Macarena”. It was about my family’s first roller skating outing (it was a birthday party for the Girl Scouts organization), and my post was so titled because our county’s only roller skating rink is owned and operated by the town mayor. Not quite being fully assimilated to small town living, I guess, I got a big kick out of watching the mayor play DJ; especially when he spun old has-been but essential tunes for us to dance to on our roller skates like “The Macarena”, “YMCA”, “The Chicken Dance”, and “The Hokey Pokey”. So it’s that time of year again – Happy Birthday Girl Scouts! – and we attended the birthday party at the roller rink again on Sunday. That reminds me, did you know that the infamous chicken dance now has lyrics?

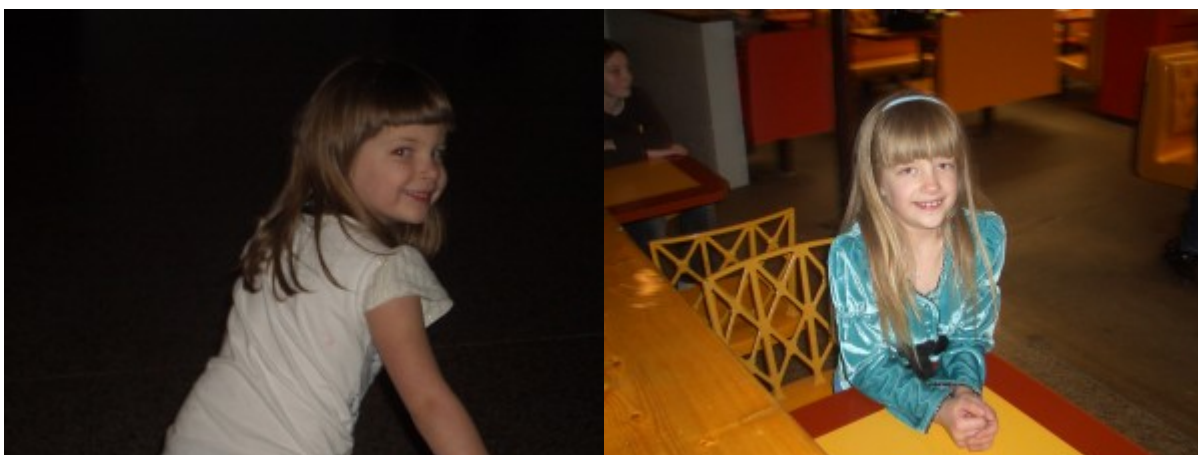
“I don’t wanna be a chick,  
I don’t wanna be a duck,  
I just wanna shake my butt”  
CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP

Well, that was news to me because as far as I knew, the chicken dance was just that – a dance with motions and no lyrics, but I bet you can guess which word the kids absolutely LOVED putting the emphasis upon... ah, kids!

Coincidentally, our Girl Scout's younger sister was also invited to a birthday party at the roller rink on Sunday. Which meant 5 straight hours of roller skating! After 5 hours, the girls had showed so much improvement! We even got skates for our 2-year-old, but those skates were practically bigger than she was, and they were so heavy, she didn't have a chance:



But like I said, after a few hours on the skating floor, the older two really got the hang of it, despite a few spills and some breaks, err, rest periods, not broken bones, thank goodness!



The girls' baby brother even had a great time singing and bopping



along with the music...



A great way to cap off an extremely busy weekend... we had so much fun, I think we'll make a few more trips over there even *before* the Scout's party comes around again next year!

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## What Sets Him Off?

What sets him off? Everything under the sun and even the sun itself. I'm talking about our lovely scarlet macaw parrot. I would not recommend these things as pets for ANYONE – it's true when they say that wild animals cannot be tamed! Why we have our bird is a long story, and it's not important now because we're stuck with him. I'm not one to just "get rid" of pets unless the circumstances are extreme. It's a pet peeve (pun intended) of mine when people get animals and then discard them just because they're sick of taking responsibility for them. And in a way (though I can't dwell on this right now because I'm extremely upset with Squawky – who really lives up to his name), I love our parrot and wouldn't want to ~~curse~~ see him go to another home.

So that brings me to the point of this post – parrots scream constantly. They might be beautiful to look at, but their



ear-splitting screams are beyond annoying. They're unstoppable and headache-producing, and more than once, our parrot's screams have made our kids cry. We've adjusted our lifestyle to avoid his upsetting the kids, and for the most part that works; it seems to be me who feels the brunt of the negative parrot side effects. Thank goodness we were able to move into a bigger house a few years ago where Squawky was given his own room. Unfortunately, he shares the laundry room, and since somehow I was voted the family laundry-doer (gender?), it seems that Squawky's screaming affects me the most. I cannot do laundry during the day because I can't bring my young children in the laundry room with me. I do have a basket of toys in there, and they enjoy playing in there because there's lots of light and a nice soft carpet to lay on. But we get screamed at by the parrot. By nighttime, I'm too tired to do all the laundry, so much of the time, I'm left to worry about when to do it. Ideally, I'd do some here and there in between kids' lunches, naps, diaper changes and my errands, but then the parrot gets all riled up and screams me right out of the laundry room.

I looked to the Internet for advice, and one site suggested noting his "triggers". What sets him off and makes him scream? Making the list of his triggers hasn't helped, however. It's only made me see that getting screamed out of the laundry room seems unavoidable. Here are his triggers (if you're thinking about getting a pet parrot, use this list as reasons on why you should NOT):

the sunrise or light of any kind – it's a parrot's natural instinct to be quiet in the dark so predators won't find them. But heavy drapes and a sheet over his cage do not block out all the light during the day, and it's really difficult to do laundry at night in the dark – believe me I've tried more than once!

yelling – any yelling in the house gets him going – kids fighting, kids having fun, just raising our voices to hear

each other when we're in separate parts of the house. He especially likes it when I yell at him for yelling!

singing – if my husband is in a show and needs to practice, everyone has to leave. And not because my husband is a bad singer – he's actually very talented. But the bird will join in, and HE is a BAD singer!

talking on the phone – any time anyone is on the phone, the bird thinks we're calling out for him I guess, but he takes it upon himself to yell. So I can forget folding laundry while talking on the phone, which was a great way to pass the time while doing this boring task.

having his door open – closing his door not only muffles his screaming, but it makes him scream less for some reason

something he likes on tv – he has a tv in his room, which was put in there for me to watch while doing laundry. But I can forget about hearing anything on the tv while I'm in there, thanks to the parrot. Sometimes Animal Planet or his favorite show, The Price Is Right makes him scream along with the audience.

happiness – if he's happy, he will get rowdy and play and scream.

anger – if he's upset about not getting enough attention, he will scream.

hunger – if he's hungry, he will scream.

thirst – if he's thirsty, he will scream.

dogs barking – if our 2 dogs bark, which they do at least 4 times per day, the bird will join right in and scream.

So, I guess for now I've decided that the laundry must be a family affair. I've gotten upset several times about this same issue and came to this conclusion before, but it's never

worked. My husband works during the day, and at night, we're usually busy or the kids have their own chores or homework to do, so my getting help with the laundry has not been a consistent solution. The other thing we've thought of is to move the parrot out of the laundry room, but if you look at my list of Squawky's triggers, you'll see that he must be in a room with a door, which eliminates the other spare room we have on the first floor because it's doorless. I can't imagine that he'd do any better on the second floor closer to the bedrooms either. The laundry room is right below my bedroom so once he gets going in the morning, I can usually forget about sleeping in anyway.

Well, I guess I'm done venting for now. I have a good hour to catch up on laundry since we have a meeting tonight and we took the kids to the babysitters early, so I have to make it productive. I guess I will have to blast my ipod and leave my husband to fend for himself on his business call... Well, it is HIS bird after all!

Here's a picture of the jerk:



Don't let his cuteness fool you. This is actually a "baby" picture. He's much more obnoxious looking now!