

In the beginning...

Sunday morning. Most of my things were packed the night before, so I thought I would make it on time without a problem. Big mistake. The few things left still occupied enough time to make me about 20 minutes late. There were no worries of course about missing the bus as leaders were scheduled to be there before dropoff time, so instead I got there in the midst of things. Good thing I was only assigned to help load gear onto the bus. At about 9AM everyone was checked in and we were off on our four-hour bus ride to Michigan. The kids watched videos all the way there, but I later learned that our friends from Iowa only got to watch one video- on the way home. In case you missed it, they are from Iowa and therefore had a trip time over double ours. That means a lot of time remained for social activities, to put it mildly. Anyway, we arrived at about 1PM (time zone change, you know) and were welcomed by big banners held by a cheering staff. After unloading and moving into our cabins- I had a group of six plus a junior leader- we headed to the swim front for swimming tests and a fort-building competition. Note the non-mention of lunch. The kids brought their own lunches, and I even remembered my own this year (it was last year or the year before that I had left it sitting on the freezer at home). This year I was a representative for the army team, moving out of the air force from the last two military themes prior two and four years ago.

Starting a new paragraph just because I can, the fort contest began while various cabins two-by-two (or one by one in the case of a few very large girl cabins) took their swim tests. The sand forts (remember- this is a swim front so there was a beach) generally had moats around them because digging in the sand was probably the easiest thing for the kids, but there were buckets for making buildings like garages for tanks and

whatnot. No air strip this year, though I suppose they could have done a helipad had one of us had thought of it. The Iowa team, the marines once again, was not present for much of this but they did arrive in time to take 2nd place. Army ended up 3rd, the highest we would ever get this week outside of the upfront games. As for the swim tests, just about every cabin has its non-swimmer. Mine had three, half the kids. Well, it doesn't mean quite as much for this age group as water activities are limited anyway.

Since this along with cabin check-in and welcome/rules took up most of the afternoon, we can move on to after dinner. Throughout the week post-dinner would mean the daily game competition, but for Sunday we just moved on to the teaching time. It was here the theme for the week, the armor of God in Ephesians 6, was introduced. Each day would focus on a different part of the armor but not until Monday. the format was typical of a weekend service, but longer. Game activity time (the competition game in the case of this week, gym or crafts in the case of weekends) followed by worship, teaching, and small groups. Mornings would replace the field game with an up front game- unfortunately I missed most of these as I took this time to put in my contact lenses while the Nico, my junior leader, stayed with the kids. This first small group time was a great way to really start to know the kids, most of whom I already knew through small group time over the weekends. This year they tried to keep small groups from the weekend when possible- a matter simplified by there being three service times plus Iowa to make the four teams, each team then being divided into 4th/5th grades and boys/girls. four cabins per team. Since I stuck with my 4th-graders from last year, my cabin was all 5th grade.

Finally, there was free time on the courts where kids could

play tetherball, nuke-em (played on a volleyball court where any number can play catch with the ball- dropping or missing causes an "explosion" so someone is out), four-square, trampoline basketball, regular basketball, or just hang around and talk or play in the sand. They also had the opportunity to buy treats at the canteen. I was disappointed to see that they doubled the price on pop this year, though I think they also lowered ice cream a bit though I didn't buy any. They told me that the higher price on drinks balances with the loss they take on ice cream, and keeping most things at \$1 just makes managing the accounts that much easier. I can't argue with that, but I did make sure to stick with the one 20-oz offering all week- Dr. Pepper. Everything else was in cans. Of course, being right before bed, many kids chose Mt. Dew... Speaking of bed, it was a little difficult getting my six to sleep that night. I could blame the Dew, but it was really mostly the excitement of being there. Unfortunately Steve, the man in charge and two cabins away, had to visit our cabin not once but twice that evening. Oops...

more to come.

SIX IN A ROW!

WOO HOO!!!! Game day party that seemed like a pre-Thanksgiving feast. I certainly ate like it was a feast... well, just call it another holiday! But OSU has now defeated the dreaded "Team from the North" six years in a row with an awesome 21-10 victory including an end zone interception turned TD on the Wolvies first series! Now.. outright Big Ten Champs off to Pasadena on New Years Day!

Joshua, whom I was mildly surprised to see at the house, was anxiously awaiting kickoff time. At half-time, I challenged him to a good ol' game of the ORIGINAL Donkey Kong (not the newfangled Super Mario endless array, but the original quarter munching variety... on the Wii). I surprisingly defeated him. After that, we saw little of the 13 year old (so much for the football game).

Then, I learned that Jeff is planning to take Elizabeth to see the new Twilight movie tomorrow after her play wraps. Honestly, I don't get the hype... too much, I think. Maybe, one day I will sit and watch it to see what it's all about; it looks like a teenage, vampire meets girl with a werewolf best friend love triangle. I'll pass.

So, now off to church... then to watch my niece on stage with a couple other little ones.

GO BUCKS!!!!

Like A Good Neighbor...

I don't think State Farm could have helped in this case that fittingly enough happened in the state up north. Until recently, a Michigan woman has been helping three of her neighbors by making sure that their children were safely put on the school bus for the 6 mile trip. Shortly after the beginning of the school year, [Lisa Snyder](#) received a letter from the Michigan Department of Human Services warning her that her charity was in violation of a law aimed at unlicensed day care centers and she would be fined if she continued. This for watching THREE children (not including her own daughter) who each had their parent's permission. They each spent about an hour at the woman's home preparing for school.

One has to wonder how and why the authorities learned of this generosity. I can understand a houseful of children but 4 children do not a houseful make (of course others might disagree).

At least after learning of this travesty, the state powers that be are in the process of changing the regulations allowing good samaritans like Mrs. Snyder to continue making sure that a few of her neighbor's children make it safely to school. I realize that not everyone can be trusted but this individual was just doing a good deed and known well enough and trusted to do it.

Tri-State Weekend

We were all over the place this past weekend. I guess it was the nice weather... wait, it rained Saturday!

It started with game night on Friday night – my intentions were to take it easy and end somewhat early so we could rest up for a big day with the kids on Saturday. It didn't end up that way – we began the weekend by staying up too late! But it was a fun game night, kind of a different crowd, so it was interesting to mix it up a little. Our new friend brought presents for the kids to game night, and I can't express enough gratitude – she basically saved game night! Our will-be-5-yr-old-tomorrow Sammie was in a mood, and seeing the new friend (the presents didn't hurt either!) actually got her out of the mood she would have otherwise stayed in all night probably – thanks Mary!

Saturday we were going to take the kids to the Binder Park Zoo in Battle Creek, Michigan. My husband and I (and Taylor in her fetal days) went there in '99, and we loved the zoo. We

found out it was only about an hour and a half drive from here, so we decided to check it out. An hour and a half drive doesn't seem like a long time if there's no traffic and the kids are good! Besides, an hour and half drive home after a busy day can sometimes (if we're lucky) cinch the deal and put all 4 of them asleep *for the night*. Well, anyway, it was raining on Saturday. And we didn't want to take 4 kids through an unfamiliar zoo in the rain. So we ended up at Crazy Pinz in Fort Wayne, Indiana. It's a place where they have arcade games, bowling, mini-bowling, mini-golf and the kids' favorite, Ball-0-City – a giant play area with levels and tunnels and balls to shoot at each other. I was really happy when my husband pointed out the Chicago Cubs game playing on the huge tv in the bar. So I stood over there and watched the Cubs wriggle out of a dicey situation – they had been winning 4-0 when all of a sudden, Houston scores 4 in the 9th and ties it up! They also had bases loaded, but the Cubs got out of it somehow and came back with a win in the bottom of a 9th! The bar at Crazy Pinz erupted in a cheer – Cubs fans everywhere! So we stayed there for awhile and then got home late but not too late for us to catch up on watching the season finales of our two favorite tv shows – Lost and The Office.

I guess I should save it for another post, so let's just say we were really happy with the finales of BOTH shows. Lost actually answered a lot of questions that were outstanding, and it can finally be seen how events are starting to come full circle for the characters. Something awesome occurred on the Office, well, it was alluded to anyway, but I think it was obvious what the next *development* is for the Pam and Jim characters. Ahem.

Sunday after church we decided to reclaim our Saturday plans and head up to Battle Creek to [Binder Park Zoo](#). Sunday was a gorgeous, picture-perfect day weather-wise, and it ended up being a great decision – it would not be fun to tour this zoo

in the rain with 4 little kids. The zoo is mostly outdoor, and there is a bit of walking if you want to see the majority of the zoo. You climb aboard a (free) zoo tram that takes you 5 minutes into the wilderness, err Wild Africa as the zoo calls it. But whether it's the wilds of Michigan or the savannas of Africa, the view that awaits you when you arrive in Binder Park's Africa is breathtaking. Beyond the authentic-seeming African village is a wall, and beyond the wall:

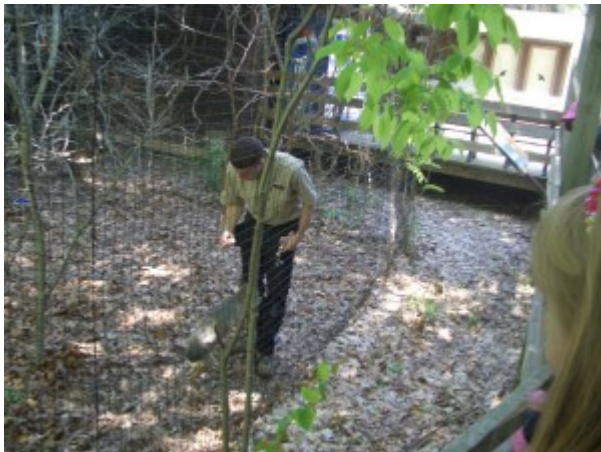


Click the picture to see a larger version – those are zebras and Thomson's Gazelles grazing in the huge pasture. And a clutch of ostrich eggs (real?) on the edge of the exhibit (lower right middle of picture). The giraffes can go out there too, but they are usually over here:



where you can FEED them! It was a great day at a great zoo, and we even saw an animal I had never heard of – the Patagonian Mara. Fully grown they are about 35-40 lbs. (the one here at Binder Park is 9 mos. old

and about half that), and they are rodents most closely related guinea pigs. At Binder Park, the keeper was in the cage with the mara, and she was jumping onto his leg and doing tricks for food – very cool. I didn't get the best picture; there was a tree in the way – again click for a larger pic, maybe you can actually see the mara:



The Binder Park Zoo also has a cute rabbit exhibit where the kids can crawl through a tunnel and end up “in” with the rabbits, a cool children's zoo (housing the happiest Guinea pigs I've ever seen – the first time I've seen Guinea pigs that weren't squealing with fright or freaking out), and a carousel, among other fun things. Here is my son on his first carousel ride:



And two of my 4 happy kids at the zoo:



And my other two riding a giant ant:



So... a great weekend, even if we were never home sweet home. I was going to share my pastor's story he told on Sunday, but this post is long enough, that will have to wait for another post! Until then...

Zoo Traveler

I really like to travel (NO FLYING THOUGH!), and we were fortunate enough to do lots of it – before we had so many little kids, of course. We still try to make a yearly trip to Florida, especially while we can still fit the entire family in one car – something that soon won't be easily accomplished

as the kids grow older. At each travel destination, I have to admit that my favorite tourist attraction is always the local zoo. I made a list of all the zoos and/or wildlife parks I have visited, and I hope to add to it soon! Here is the list by state, country, or territory, followed by the city in which it's located. An asterisk following the zoo means it no longer exists. I put notes about some of the places in *italics* as sort of a guide in case you're interested in visiting one of those particular attractions and want some info straight from a tourist's mouth.

California:

Sea World San Diego

San Diego Zoo

Canada:

Bird Kingdom Niagara Falls Aviary, Niagara Falls, Ontario

Marineland, Niagara Falls, Ontario – *this place is very cool.*

You can hand-feed deer, Beluga Whales or even Orcas (Killer Whales). You can throw food down to bears who beg and do tricks. There are also a variety of amusement park rides for the whole family. Look at me petting the Orca!



Washington, DC

National Zoo

Florida:

Wooten's Wildlife Park, Florida Everglades – *a cool, family owned place where you can see animals on display; including alligators, crocodiles, and Florida panthers. You can also hold and feed baby alligators! I wonder if they still exist; their website hasn't been updated since '06!*

Sea World, Orlando

Gatorland, Orlando

Animal Kingdom, Orlando

Idaho:

Zoo Boise, Boise

Illinois:

Brookfield Zoo, Brookfield – *this is the zoo I grew up going*

to. In the 80's when I was a frequent visitor, they had many 'celebrity' animals, with interesting stories to match.

Shedd Aquarium, Chicago

Peoria Wildlife Park, Peoria

Cosley Zoo, Wheaton

Glen Oak Zoo, Peoria

Henson Robinson Zoo, Springfield

Miller Park Zoo, Bloomington – yuck, not one of my favorite places. Their tiger exhibits consisted of teeny tiny cages, and they had a really scrawny, terrible looking tiger, at least in the late '90's when we lived in the area. Hopefully they've cleaned the place up.

Scovill Zoo, Decatur

Indiana:

Ft Wayne Children's Zoo – a perfectly sized zoo to visit with kids. They have a wide variety of animals and some nice exhibits. They just recently built a chair-lift type ride that will take you over the lion exhibit once it's finished – cool and scary at the same time!

Potawatomi Zoo, South Bend

Fun Spot, Angola

Michigan:

Binder Park, Battle Creek

Minnesota:

Minneapolis Zoo, Minneapolis

Missouri:

St Louis Zoo, St. Louis

Nebraska:

Henry Doorly Zoo, Omaha – I know they've since rebuilt it, but when I visited back in 2001-2002, they had a teeny-tiny exhibit for the gorillas, which made them none too happy. I actually witnessed a huge male gorilla charge a kid and beat on the glass from his small exhibit – scary!

Henry Doorly safari park, Omaha

Folsom Children's Zoo, Lincoln – *a very nice little zoo located in the heart of Lincoln. It's so well-laid out that you can forget you're in the middle of a capital city, and they have lots of animals in a variety of nice exhibits.*

Ohio:

African Safari Wildlife Park, Port Clinton – *I love this place! You can feed deer, elands, huge buffalo and a variety of hoofed mammals from the comfort of your own vehicle. In season, they have pig races, animals shows, and camel and pony rides for the little ones.*

Akron Zoo, Akron – *I was really impressed with the layout, exhibits, and the happiness of the animals – a very impressive little zoo!*

Cincinnati Zoo, Cincinnati

Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, Cleveland

Columbus Zoo, Columbus – *a zoo no one had heard about until my favorite celebrity, Jack Hanna got ahold of it and made it a world-reknown facility. Huge zoo, and the only place to see my favorite animals, manatees in my home state of Ohio!*

**Sea World Ohio, Aurora – we actually lived in Illinois at the time we visited here, but I'm glad we got to see it before they sold it to Six Flags, who sold it to Cedar Fair. Any of the other Sea Worlds are quite a hike from IL or OH for that matter, especially for a non-flyer such as myself.*

Toledo Zoo, Toledo

Pennsylvania:

Pittsburgh Zoo – *very impressive zoo! Lots of kid-friendly playgrounds and interactive areas. The polar bear habitat looked really cool – people go through a tunnel that the bears can swim over – but we didn't see it since the bears weren't in the pool. I NEED a second look at this zoo and will definitely allow more time when I get back there!*

ZOOAMERICA North American Wildlife Park, Hershey – *We did not care for this zoo at all. We visited in the late '90's, so*

maybe they've added more to it by now. But at that time, they only had animals indigenous to North America, and let's face it, those are easy to spot in most areas of the U.S. And let's face it, the real star tourist destination in Hershey is the chocolate factory!

South Dakota:

Great Plains Zoo and Museum, Sioux Falls – I visited here with my family when I was 15. This place was amusing to us because attached to the zoo is the museum, which has many taxidermied specimens. We joked that this zoo had more dead animals than live ones!

**Marineland, Rapid City – note the asterisk, this place doesn't exist anymore, thank goodness. When we visited in the summer of '93, they had dolphins and sea lions held in such tiny cages and pools, it was sickening. I haven't been able to find much info on this place, but I'm sure they were shut down because of poor treatment of their animals. I can only hope the animals found a better home.*

Bear Country USA, Rapid City – a cool drive-thru bear habitat experience – keep those windows rolled up!!! And check out the baby bear nursery – so adorable!

Wisconsin:

Henry Vilas Zoo, Madison

**Serpent Safari, Wisconsin Dells*

GRAND TOTAL AS OF 2009:

41 animal-themed places in 2 countries, 13 states, 1 district... and counting!

Big Papi's Curse

There have been several rivalries among sports teams over the years ([Ohio State/Michigan](#), [Chicago Bears/Green Bay Packers](#), and [Chicago Cubs/St. Louis Cardinals](#) to name a few). However, one of the most celebrated rivalries in all of sports is the extreme battle between the [New York Yankees](#) and the [Boston Red Sox](#). It dates back to 1920 when the Red Sox sold one of the most famous sluggers of all time, Babe Ruth, to the Yankees. From 1920-2004, the team from Bean Town was unable to win the World Series. Many 'Sox fans jokingly blame the deal; however, there were several more radical followers who faithfully curse the day the Babe put on the pinstripes. In order to curse the new Yankee Stadium, a Red Sox fanatic working as a construction worker, buried a David Ortiz jersey at the site. Although the jersey has since been unearthed and is going to be auctioned off for charity, I say **FIRE THE BUMB!!!!**

[The Big Dig: The Yanks Uncover a Red Sox Jersey](#)

Ironically, the curse seems to have worked **IN REVERSE**. Big Papi has batted an embarrassing .070 hitting just 1-for-29 since April 2. Hopefully, recovering the jersey will not have a positive impact on Ortiz' average.

If Music Be The Food Of Love, Play On

This afternoon two communities who are usually big rivals came together to honor someone who has touched the lives of quite possibly every person who either lived in either town or attended school in Edgerton, Ohio. Emily Curtis grew up in

Edon but has taught music in Edgerton for 27 years at all levels (junior high, high school, and, most recently, elementary). Last year, she was stricken with leukemia and is in Columbus at the medical facilities on the OSU campus undergoing treatment. Through it all, she has been the same tough, strong, stubborn woman she has been for at least 20 years. She has given so much to everyone not only in this area but worldwide. Since 09/11/01, she has spear-headed a Troop Care package program sending supplies to the armed forces in Iraq and all over the world. The program has sent tons of necessities and has received numerous plaques, letters, and medals for its generosity.

At the benefit, there were thousands of dollars worth of donated items in a silent auction. Ohio State and Michigan memorabilia, beautiful artwork, Edgerton apparel, too much stuff to even begin to describe. School children danced and sang. Mrs. Balser, who started her teaching career at Edgerton 40 years ago, has generously taken Mrs. Curtis position for the year. A second grader sang "Rainbow Connection" and sounded like he should have provided the voice of Kermit the Frog in the "[Muppet Movie](#)."

There are just so many personal levels on which I could write about my experiences with Emily. She is one tough cookie and will push you until you have reached your potential. During my four years in high school, she arranged for the band to travel to Chicago to see [Phantom of the Opera](#). We attended a performance of Annie in Toledo as we were just beginning to stage our own production. Speaking of our production of [Annie](#), I originally auditioned for the role of Daddy Warbucks. The day after tryouts, I was called over the PA to report to the band room. "OH, LORD... what have I done now?" I was asked to read for the role of Rooster. Read a bit of dialogue, sing "Easy Street," and CROW. Emily and the drama director told me then and there that I had nailed the role of Warbucks, but they thought I would do even better as the villain.

In November 2006, I played the part of Vinnie in [*The Odd Couple*](#). This was the first time I had been in a non-musical play since 1991. Two people were instrumental in my decision to try out (aside from myself that is). I called Emily the night before auditions and asked her what she thought. She has told me for years that I need to let my light shine bright (among other things) and that she knew I would do well. And following the Sunday matinee, she told me "Who is it that has been telling you for years to stop limiting yourself?" Thanks Ma