

July 2011 (part 1)

The July 2011 page on my calendar has been filled since spring, so I knew we had a busy month ahead. Organizing everything I had jammed into those little squares on the calendar was going to be challenging enough, but then we were even able to add a few family mini-vacations to the mix! It's been a great summer so far despite the challenges of sometimes trying to be in 2 places at once, and I wanted to chronicle everything to enhance the wonderful memories we made as a family this summer – but be prepared; this will be quite the manifest when I'm finished!

June 30 and July 1 – We began the month with a last-minute trip to an indoor water park that's an hour away. After a sudden burst of cabin fever, my husband found a super internet deal that afforded us some much-loved family time. The kids loved the indoor water park, and Christopher was old enough this time to go on some water slides which he found to be a blast!

Best of all, the constant lower back pain that had been making me short of patience, irritable and tired all the time seemed to be remedied by my getting to sit in water for 2 days. I should note for future reference also how interesting it was to pack different people for 3 different trips at the same time. Simultaneously, I was packing 6 people for an overnight stay (with a separate bag for changing into street clothes from bathing suits, I might add), 1 little girl for a 4 day stay at camp, and also for a 3 day trip for 6 people. It felt hectic at the time, but not unmanageable – due to the fact that my wonderful family did much of the work for and with me. And you know what? I don't think we forgot anything!!

July 2, 3 – After the water park, we got a day of rest (and unpacking, re-packing, laundry) before we set out Sunday for the 4-hour drive to Nashville Indiana – with one small glitch: Hubby had food poisoning. He had to miss church to rejuvenate, and then we were off – well, after packing up the car and some other in-town odds n ends.

July 3-6 – We spent the 4th of July in Nashville – a yearly trip Hubby and I take with our 4 kids, my parents, my uncle, and my sister, her husband and their 2 kids – there were 13 of us staying in a large house in the middle of the Brown County woods. It was a beautiful place, and we're torn on where to choose to have next year's gathering. Last year, we had a beautiful house where each family had their own bedroom and bathroom. The few downsides to this house (called The Oaks) was the large steep hill that led down to the pond and fire pit – it proved to be dangerous last year when someone took a nasty spill (but was uninjured), so we didn't want to gamble with it this year when we have an adult who is practically incapacitated (me being 5.5 mos. pregnant). Also, the kids have to be watched constantly down by that pond, so it was a nice break for the adults this year to not have to worry about who was going to take them down there. Also, there wasn't really any yard for the kids to play in at The Oaks. There

was a swingset, but really only the two 3-year-old boys were of the age to enjoy a swing set this year, and that leaves 4 other kids with no yard to run around in. Both houses had pool tables inside and hot tubs outside (which became little swimming pools for the kids since we didn't want to turn on the heat in 90° weather), and The Oaks had tons of dvds, board games, and a foosball table, but then again, this year we brought our own dvds and games and the kids had TONS to do and were never bored. Another plus to this year's cabin vs. The Oaks: the large dining room table that fit almost everyone at the same time so we could enjoy meals together. The Oaks had only a small breakfast nook that seated 4 people or about 6 kids, so the adults had to eat elsewhere. Given these pros and cons of each cabin, it's going to be a tough decision next year on where to stay!!

The kids' favorite thing to do this year was to go down to the creek that ran around the property (this cabin was called "Ginley's Gulch" for future reference). There they would walk the creek, hunting for crawdads, geodes, and minnows, and they found quite a few of all of the above. As I said, this property had a larger yard, and also 85 acres of forest, and in the future I would like to explore the gorgeous property more since I wasn't quite feeling up to that this year. I did enjoy walking down the cleared path into the forest though – there were many beautiful butterflies, cool looking insects, and birds to see and hear. And oh yeah! I forgot to mention another huge plus of Ginley's Gulch – the screened-in porch! It had a ceiling fan, so it was a wonderful, mosquito-free place to spend our Brown County evenings together. A great trip!!

July 6 – We arose at the crack of dawn to pack up the car and get the kids roused for the 4+ hour drive to Michigan to drop daughter #2 at camp. We were all exhausted, and the kids slept much of the way. We did stop in Fort Wayne for something to eat, and we finally tried a little cafe where we had always wanted to try their eggs benedict since reading an

ad for them years ago. The eggs benedict was a bust – sauce from a packet, don't you know, but they did have one of my seasonal favorites that's very hard to find in the northern part of the country where I live: fried green tomatoes. And they were yummy! We dropped Sammie off at camp just a little late, and we were excited for her after seeing what a great place [Camp Selah](#) is (Camp Selah is a Christian camp in Reading Michigan, and both of our kids who went had a SUPER time!)

July 7-9 – These next few days were a bit quiet without the whole brood together, and we fit in another family min-vacation: since Sammie had to be picked up in the morning in Michigan, we took the other 3 kids to the drive-in in Coldwater Michigan and spent the night there – lots of fun! Saturday the 9th we picked up Sammie, and she said she had a good week during her first ever time at camp.

July 11 was the 3rd birthday of a very special little guy, and we took him out to dinner at the local Mexican restaurant where they sang to him, put a sombrero on him, and dabbed his nose with dessert. I of course forgot my camera ☹ but he liked it all the same. It reminded me of last year when the staff at Bob Evans sang to him, and he dove into my shirt to hide – the year of experience helped him to enjoy the attention more this year. And in the morning of little dude's birthday, I had to drive Taylor to camp in one of the nastiest storms of the year. We made it there without a problem, but the ride home was dicey with driving rain and wind. I was glad I didn't have any kids with me which would have made me nervous, and as you can tell I made it just fine – even if I did arrive sopping wet and very late to Bible study. In the newspaper the next day, I saw a picture of a power line that fell into the road which turned out to be the same road I had been driving down during that storm. Just goes to show you what kinds of things to look out for when driving during inclement weather in the middle of desolate farm country, and I feel blessed to have made it safely.

July 11-14 – So with our eldest away at camp, the week flew by... even though we missed her (I especially missed having someone old enough to have a normal conversation with me during the day). We had 3 days of doctor appointments (me and our youngest-for-now had his 3-year-checkup) and meetings, and then... freedom!

July 15 – Hubby and I met my mom in South Bend, and she took “the littles” (our family name for the younger kids in our family; in this case it meant our 3-year-old, 4-year-old, and 7-year-olds) to Grandma’s for a vacation – which left Hubby and I kidless for a whole day! So Hubby took me to the Potawatomi Zoo in South Bend, and the amount of walking and the weather was perfect for me even while pregnant since it was just the two of us. What a great idea as I was just starting to get zoo withdrawl! After the zoo, we decided to take the scenic route home from South Bend and fell upon a perfect date purely by accident: in Middlebury Indiana, there is an excellent Amish-style restaurant called [Das Dutchman Essenhaus](#). We were driving by on a day when they had a buffet, so we could sample many varieties of their very delicious food. Even better, there were some Amish men offering carriage rides in the parking lot, so we took one! It was so romantic, the grounds of the mini-resort were beautiful, the weather was perfect, and hearing the history of the grounds as told by our Amish guide was wonderful – best date day ever!!

(below is a picture of a horse and buggy like the one we drove in (ours was more of a carriage than a buggy). I had to take the picture on the way home since I had forgotten my camera and couldn’t take any pictures while on the buggy ride!)



July 16 – This was the day we picked up our oldest from camp, and we got to hear every detail about her awesome week while driving from Michigan to Fort Wayne to see... the new Harry Potter movie ON IMAX IN 3D!! Yes, it was as cool as it sounds, and it was fun to take Taylor out for a fun day with only parents and no younger siblings – dinner was at Golden Corral, one of her favorite places since she loves steak. I'm thankful that the awful nausea I felt earlier in the day did not persist through the movie, and the cause of it that day still perplexes me... such is a mystery of pregnancy, I guess.

July 17-18 – The 3 of us tackled the huge project of cleaning out our spare room – what a mess! I wish we had taken some “before” pictures, but the most important thing is that it got done, even if I felt like I was going to fall over in exhaustion by the end of it. I'm so proud of Hubby for all the hard work he did for this project, and especially that it was his idea to tackle it earlier than we had scheduled – we began Saturday night after Fort Wayne rather than Sunday after church as we had planned. But it looks GREAT, and as I'm writing this at the end of July, our family has gotten so much use out of it already. We made it into a craft / hobby / school room, and it has a computer, Taylor's new sewing machine (a present from Grandma), all kinds of paper, crayons, glue, etc, and all the many, many arts and crafts kits and supplies we had been saving (and losing) for the past 5 years.

(July manifest to be continued – need to give your eyes a

break! But first, here is a pic of a creative, cute fire hydrant in downtown South Bend Indiana I snapped while sitting at a stoplight – look for it near the silver van's rear bumper)



Cool Summer

The kids are growing by leaps and bounds before my eyes, and it's unbelievable because I'm used to seeing them most of the day, every day – and I can still see the changes. They are growing up literally before my eyes!

So far this summer, the kids and I have carried a normal daily schedule that finds our time divided between fun activities and miscellaneous appointments (like Bible study class, violin lessons, doctor's and dental appointments, etc). I think we've done a good job of making the days fun, and we've also had some great family weekends since school has let out. Father's Day weekend saw us heading out to the [African Wildlife Safari Park](#) in Port Clinton Ohio. We love that place, but it's almost 2 hours away so we hadn't made it out there in a few years. But there was a Groupon a few months ago, and we got a great price on admission, so Hubby planned a

trip there. Can't go to Port Clinton Ohio and not stop at [Cheesehaven](#) – 88 types of cheese, meats, sauces... yummy stuff. They have free samples so you can try before you buy. Should you find yourself in this little Lake Erie town (which is near the more well known tourist attraction: roller-coaster filled Cedar Point), stop by Cheesehaven and get a fresh corned beef sandwich – YUM!!

The Safari Park is great – you drive around the animals' huge enclosure, and herds of all types of different animals approach your car looking for food! There are alpacas, llamas, white-tailed deer, elk, elands, bison, reindeer (I never found this one in the guidebook, but it looked like a reindeer to me!), even giraffes and zebras at the end (while you can still feed them, the giraffes and zebras are behind a fence whereas the other animals are not). It's so cool to feed all these guys! Some are dainty, skittish eaters (the smaller deer), while the huge animals like the bison will fill your car with this hot, half-digested hay breath. It's delightfully disgusting, and only animal lovers should attempt to stomach this! Here is the best video I could record while getting accosted by a thousand-pound bison (the kids were frustrating us adults since they would freak out and drop the carrot before the bison could grab it – we felt bad for the hungry fella!)

And what is the poor thing in the picture below? A llama, I think? He had a funny lip, which coupled with his flat ear gave him a whimsical look – he was a favorite to feed.



And next is a video of the giraffe – sorry for the shakiness, but he was too tall to get in one shot! You can see his curly tongue that came out and helped him grab his carrot. The car in front of us had the right idea – they were feeding the giraffe out of their sunroof – it was a sight to see and I should have taken video!

The Safari Park also has pig races, an animal show, a small walk-thru zoo, and pony and camel rides for the kids. It was a SUPER day, followed by a special day to celebrate Dads after
□

At Least I Have No Regrets

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

For one thing, there is a wonderful Christian camp that we've been hearing about from a friend, and we've been trying to let our kids go for years now, but it hasn't worked out for one reason or another. This year, it seems that the dates will work, but the fees are a little steep, and the 45-minute trip to the camp x4 (there-back-there-back for two kids) might hurt the wallet a little bit with the price of gas the way it is. Add to that a trip to Nashville Indiana with extended family – SO fun, but 8 more hours of driving, plus groceries and supplies to buy, plus 4 round-trips to South Bend Indiana, and I calculated my mileage from July 4-23 at 1388 – That's one thousand eighty-eight miles in 20 days. Factor in our van's crummy gas mileage and all the pregnant lady bathroom stops, and OUCH. But then I got to thinking about it, and I think I'd rather spend my July driving around the tri-state area than locked away in my air-conditioning with 4 rambunctious

kiddos. As I said, the trip to Nashville will be lots of fun, and most expenses have been paid thanks to a generous Christmas gift. So what if I have to miss the 4th of July fireworks for one year (next year we do have to pick a different date though guys if you are reading this ☐ 4th of July is one of my favorite holidays!). And the trips to South Bend mean that Grandma is taking the kids – so that means fun for them, and a break for us. So what if it's not all 4 kids gone at the same time anymore – that's just one of the small trade-offs for having such a large (wonderful) family. And I'm STOKED that the kids finally get to go to this camp – they are so excited too! So what if we have to leave Nashville at 5am just to drive the 4 hours to get Sammie there on time? But the main reason for optimism for summer vacation was spring break – it was awesome, and it flew by.

For me, the month of March dragged on and on, and I think much of it had to do with my prenatal dr. appointment on the 31st. I just could not wait. Part of it was excitement – this stage of pregnancy is tough in a different way than the rest of it because many of the changes are internal, and you have nothing to show for it. I spend my time looking up sketches of what my baby might look like these days, but unless you count fatigue, nausea, moodiness, or tears, there aren't any outward signs to get excited about – and no, leftover baggage from previous kids does not count as a “baby bump”. Also, I've been extra worried about this pregnancy – I can't put my finger on it, maybe it's that stupid stat I heard somewhere that keeps sticking in my brain – “1 out of 4 pregnancies end in miscarriage”. This is my 5th pregnancy, so that panics me. I wish I didn't read the news so much. Maybe the worry is because of how incredibly difficult this pregnancy has been on me (and my family) compared to the others. Whatever it is, I've been especially panicked, but I've been building a great relationship with my new doctor – she is very understanding and so much more of a problem solver than my previous doctor. But either way, spring break saw me at my prenatal, and

everything looks great! Baby is measuring at exactly 12 weeks, right where s(he) should be. AND... I got to see her (him) dance!! The baby keeps sneaking us ultrasounds – I wasn't scheduled for one, but the heartbeat couldn't be detected (my understanding doctor warned me of this ahead of time, or I would have panicked. Again.), so she took me into the ultrasound room. There, we saw baby on the screen, and my little 2-inch miracle was *dancing* – I saw her legs moving and everything! I keep thinking and saying "she" and "her", but don't place any bets – I've been known to be wrong about my children's genders in the past – *before* they're born, of course, sheesh.

So I took the kids to the zoo on Monday of this spring break, and last night I'm still on cloud nine from seeing my baby dance, and the more I thought about it, the more I realized that I could not resist going back to the zoo on the last day of our season's pass. We aren't going to renew because as much as I love the zoo, it feels like a waste to renew right before summer, especially when I'm pregnant and (probably?) won't feel like going as much. And I know I won't be able to go after my surgery for a month or so... So I took the kids to the zoo not once, but twice this spring break, and I didn't even feel like I was going to keel over by the end of today, which means that my first trimester fatigue *might* be fading (afraid to get too excited). I even took an extra kid with me to the zoo both days, a gamble that paid off both times since we all had a blast – even if I was late getting Ellyn home today (that's why I didn't stop to chat Justj – I've been kicking myself ever since. I really wanted to see your daughters! But I was late, and you just don't expect to run into a friend 60 miles from home so I was caught off-guard).

So yes, I missed the Chicago Cubs opening day game taking my kids to the zoo, and I'm proud of it! Nevermind that I was looking forward to that game for months. Hubby recorded it for me, and I watched it as soon as I got home anyway. And

I'm telling you what, the Cubs did not play badly (except for Dempster – if I still cussed he would be on my you-know-what-list), but they lost. But as I said, they did not play badly, so there is MUCH hope for the season – you can't tell anything decisive on opening day. Well, except for last year but we'll leave that out of it. But the best part is, I have no regrets. I can't imagine how I would have felt had I missed my last chance to take my kids to the zoo in order to watch a game where the Cubs lost.

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

I Would SO Try This!!

In past summers, Hubby and I have been lucky enough to have all 4 kids watched by Grandma for an entire week. This gave us time for some kid-free fun together with just us, as well as time to catch up on necessities like work and sleep. For the past two summers, we've made a trek down to Cincinnati for some FUN. We've been going to [King's Island](#), an amusement park in the suburb of Mason. Their VIP tours are quite reasonable, considering all the benefits you get (your own personal park guide for the day, all you can eat for lunch, and front of the line ride access, to name just a few!). We've been making a weekend of it, going to the world-class Cincy Zoo one day, followed by a VIP tour at King's Island the next.

I was on their site today, and I saw this cute little teaser video starring Don Helbig, the public relations manager at King's Island: the same guy who meets us by the awesome 5-minute long wooden coaster The Beast for our backstage tour,

which is also included in the VIP ticket. Having ridden King's Island's wooden coaster The Racer over a whopping 12,000 times and holding the Guinness record for coaster riding, Don is fascinating to talk to. He made this video to unveil King's Island's new 2011 attraction – or so I thought.

So after seeing the video, I did a bit of internet searching, and it didn't take me long to find the attraction being unveiled on March 18; here is [your sneak peak](#):



The Windseeker is a swing ride, but it's going to suspend riders 301 feet above the ground, swinging at speeds over 30 mph!! Even though I have not been enjoying the height of the coasters in the past few years, I would try this!! Thing is, we won't be making it to King's Island this summer because buying a ticket to enter the park would be a waste of money for me this year – I am due with my 5th child in the fall! I'm not too broken up about missing the new ride or any of my old favorites; after all, I'd rather have a baby than a trip to King's Island a million times over, but for the record, I would try this ride!!

We're going to have to find something equally fun and pregnant-lady-in-the-summer-friendly to do this summer, but it might be a challenge – everything I can think of involves being outdoors and also lots of walking. Not only that, but since there are now 4 kids, Grandma wants to split their vacations with her into shifts during the Grandma week, meaning Hubby and I are down to zero kidless days. Oh well, there is plenty of time for that in about 20 years, right?!?

Playing Tourist In Toledo

It began with terrible news – my husband's uncle had a massive heart attack and was in a coma. His uncle was in Youngstown Ohio, on his way from Illinois to Washington DC where he was going to take his two sons for a vacation. A week ago Sunday, we packed up our family and were ready to head to Youngstown to be with the boys since they didn't have any other family in the area, but at the last minute, we found out that their mom was on her way.

We were all packed and ready to go, plus the summer almost got by without us taking a family vacation. Sure, we had some fun excursions with extended family and friends, but nothing with all 6 of us, just the 6 of us. So we changed our destination from Youngstown to Toledo, cut out a bunch of that driving, and were able to utilize a hotel gift certificate that had been burning a hole in our pockets. Although Toledo is not our home town, we live only an hour away so we visit often, which is why I used the term 'playing tourist'.

We went to the zoo (for the umpteenth time, but I could never get sick of the zoo, NEVER!), ate some delicious food, and swam in the hotel pool a bunch. We visited a mall; something I haven't done in probably over a decade (I don't count our local mall – it's more than half vacant, and its food court has only one restaurant left!), and I was disappointed to learn that the mall's Dippin' Dots store (which is the only one anywhere nearby) DOES NOT carry my favorite flavor – Root Beer Float! But the Dippin' Dots were still delicious, and besides, that's just one more thing that makes Orlando that much more special – plenty of Root Beer Float Dippin' Dots in the store near Disney World, how I miss that place. We couldn't believe how crowded the Toledo mall was on a Wednesday afternoon, and because I hadn't been in one in years, there were all these new gadgets, gizmos, and what-nots that our family had to check out and play around with,

probably making us look like total hicks. But that's ok, we had fun! And not only do I love living in a rural area because we have no crime, crowds, or traffic, but it makes things like visiting malls or big movie theaters rare treats and fun vacations!



4 party animals in the hotel

Probably the most fun I had on this vacation was when we rented a pontoon boat and took it into Lake Erie. Now, don't be fooled by stats – You wouldn't know that Lake Erie is the second smallest of the Great Lakes in surface area when you're out there on a boat – you go out far enough, and you can't see shore, like all of the Great Lakes. When we looked at a map when we got home, we found that we had barely even gotten into the lake, yet it took us about 30 minutes to get there and there was water as far as the eye can see. Setting Lake Erie apart from the others is its relatively shallow depths, at least on the west side of the lake where we were visiting – the water averaged 1-3 feet in depth! It looked really strange to see people *standing* in the lake, really far from shore, with water only up to their knees!

There were some interesting and fun islands to explore; we anchored our boat near the Woodtick Peninsula and waded onto the beach for some sea shell hunting and sand playing.



My kids were well behaved on the boat, and they enjoyed themselves, with the little guy even finding time for his afternoon nap.



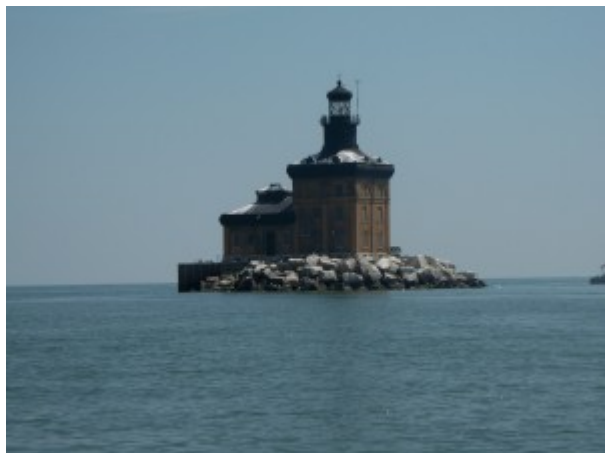
(Note the can of precious Coke Zero clutched in his hand. He stole it from his dad, but apparently it didn't help keep him awake!)

We wanted to dock at a cool looking place called Turtle Island, but it didn't seem very kid-friendly – maybe next time if Hubby and I can get back for date night. [Turtle Island](#) (click the link for more history) was once destined to be a great resort island, but plans fell through, and it remains abandoned. There are some abandoned structures that remain on the island, including an old lighthouse and an old-fashioned crane (on the right of the island in this picture).



Since Turtle Island is way out in the lake, you wouldn't expect there to be wildlife, but we saw this fox looking for fish on the beach – so cool to see!! Perhaps because of the shallow nature of this part of Lake Erie, animals can just walk out to the islands, or maybe the fox was a stowaway. Pardon the bumpiness of the video – taking pictures and video was something I struggled with the entire time on the bobbing boat!

There is also a “haunted lighthouse” (in reality it’s called the [Toledo Harbor Light](#)) that looks very cool and emits a ghostly warning horn every few minutes.



As we were floating nearby gaping at it, a Coast Guard boat came speeding up to us, lights flashing and all. What the...? There were four Coast Guard officers on the boat, all armed, and the one in charge informed us that they “had the authority of the US government” and were going to board our boat and search it.

As serious as it seemed, they must have liked what they saw because we were awarded a “good as gold” form, which means that we had been following all the maritime laws and regulations. But it was kind of a strange experience to be all alone floating in the middle of Lake Erie one minute, only to have a boat full of gun-wielding government agents on your case the next... They were nice enough, I suppose, but sheesh, why our boat? Later when we returned to shore, the owner of the boat rental place said that in all their years of renting out their boats, none of their clients had ever undergone a boarding inspection by the Coast Guard. Lucky us. Perhaps with all my kids on board, they were suspicious of some illegal Canadian smuggling, eh?

Despite all the high-seas adventure, the vacation was fun and so refreshing to be able to spend time together as a family without distraction, not having to worry about household

chores, responsibilities, or Dad's work for a few days. Just what I needed to get out of my kids-are-fighting-constantly-rut at home, and hey – I even lost track of that back-to-school countdown I had been swearing by before the vacation!

And the best news of all this? Hubby's uncle has been released from the hospital and is now recovering at home. Time will tell us what he will need to make his heart healthier, but for now, he is out of immediate danger and for that, we are so thankful!

VIPs For A Day (part two of even more parts)

So, where did I leave off when I blogged about our kid-less [day trip to King's Island](#) amusement park? I don't remember; I got kind of side-tracked and have made a few unrelated blog posts since then... But no matter, I'll just begin by rating the rides at King's Island; my scale is 1-5 ♦'s, 1 being not so good and 5 being a perfect ride experience.

The Beast – 4½♦. I have an in-depth description of this one in my previous post, but I will recap again – very cool wooden roller coaster; built into the existing terrain of the Miami River valley in southern Ohio which means you can be speeding along not more than 3 feet above the ground, thinking you must travel a lift before you can drop, but that's not the case! This is the longest wooden roller coaster in the **world** with a 4 minute and 50 second ride time. Like any wooden coaster, it can be rough and rickety (I was sure I threw out my bad back on one of the speeding curves, but thankfully, I did not. Shhh, don't tell anyone I ride coasters with a bad back, but

it must not be that bad since my back was one of my least sore parts the day after King's Island), but these sensations improve if you ride the front row – I HIGHLY recommend the front seats on this one!

Diamondback – $4\frac{1}{2}\diamond$ – I also talked about the park's newest addition in my previous post, so here is another recap. Exceptionally smooth ride, with no upside-down air time. Rather, the only air time is achieved when your butt *lifts* from your seat on the multiple drops. The sensation of free-falling is achieved by the restraint system – one smallish plastic piece that sits between your legs – that's it! The picture I posted in my previous blog doesn't do justice to the coaster, so here is another:



I know certain readers of mine will notice that this is indeed a computer-generated picture, so I might as well just say that outright. The first time we went on Diamondback, I **loved** it, and it would have gotten an even higher rating from me if it were not for the time we rode it in the front row. Unlike The Beast, the front row of the Diamondback adds an entire new dimension to the ride – one I was happy enough without! I respect our tour guide's opinion that riding front on Diamondback is a must-do experience, and even though it wasn't for me, I'm glad I got to do it once. But it was S0000 scary!

Firehawk – Holy (excuse my language) crap. This is one doozy of a coaster!!! Wow, I forgot to rate it, hmmm let me think... $3\frac{3}{4}\diamond$. First let me explain what this coaster is, and then I can explain what would have made it better. The riders load

into Firehawk, and then the seats recline until the rider is *lying down*. Not for the faint of heart – you are strapped into flexible (not hard plastic like most) shoulder harnesses, and then you are tilted backward until you are lying on your back – and it even feels like your head might just be lower than your feet. So anyway, lying down, the rider leaves the station, and proceeds to go up a hill, head first, facing the sky. So of course you can't see when you're going to reach the top. And when you finally do reach the top of the lift, you flip until you're flying Superman-style through the trek of the coaster. Overall, it was awesome, and I have to say that I truly misjudged how ultimately different the horizontal sensation would be – it was VERY different. What kept me from giving this coaster a higher rating, however, was this (and a discussion on the long ride home found my husband thinking the same thing): For a unique roller coaster where you were supposed to feel like you were flying, especially for one of the first and only of this type (this is the only one in Ohio, I believe), they really could and should have simplified the design. Instead of all the inversions, corkscrews and loops, they should have actually slowed down the coaster and left the rider suspended belly-down for the majority of the ride. After people experienced that, THEN they could have added the speed and all the inversion stuff in an update version of the ride, and it would have been like a 2-fer – 2 rides, one idea. The way it was, the ride was so fast that you really didn't have the time to pretend to be Superman, and that was a shame. The woman in our row the second time we rode Firehawk was, and I quote, "terrified". My husband told her it wasn't that bad, and when he told her that, I was thinking, "What are you thinking? It IS terrifying!". I just did not think that being on our backs face up on our way up the lift was the right time to tell a stranger that my opinion differed from my husband's – it's not like she could check my face for my true feelings. The woman found out for herself. I think she liked it though, as did I in the end, despite the changes I would make. Another fun thing about this coaster is that while

waiting in line (or by-passing the line on your VIP tour, highly recommended please see my first King's Island post), you get to pass next to the part of the ride where it first slows down as the riders come back into the station. You can hear the riders' very first reactions to the crazy configuration of this coaster, and that is a really cool time-filler!

Flight of Fear – 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ ♦. It does feel strange to rate this and the previous coaster the same since they are two very different ride experiences, so I feel the need to disclaim that I'm rating my overall ride experience. Keep in mind that I am no longer in my 20's, so I've lost my reckless abandonment. I really like roller coasters, but I do draw the line and find some things too scary – so my rating system might vary from that of a true coaster enthusiast. But anyway, I liked Flight of Fear, largely because it is like a much better version of Disney's Space Mountain. My husband likened it to the Aerosmith Rock N Roller Coaster at Disney's ~~MGM~~ Hollywood Studios – which I loved, but I found it more like a much improved Space Mountain. All 3 are dark indoor coasters. Flight of Fear and Aerosmith have what they call linear induction launches, which is how smart people say "0-54mph in 4 seconds!". On the way home, I was browsing through (ahh, life without kids in the car!) the super-cool stat sheets our guide gave us as parting gifts, and I noted that Flight of Fear was the first ride in the world with the linear induction launch! It was SO much cooler than Space Mountain; much more smooth and with inversions. Space Mountain is herky-jerky, and there are no drops nor inversions – it's almost kind of like, what's the point? THIS is Magic Kingdom's thrill ride? But then again, Magic Kingdom really isn't like that – you visit with small children and/or for the small child inside yourself. But my point is, Flight of Fear is SO much better than Space Mountain, but not quite as good as the Aerosmith coaster – perhaps something to do with Aerosmith's black light fluorescent graphics versus the plain

darkness of Flight of Fear; I preferred the graphics. For a tangent, here is an interesting story about Flight of Fear: as I mentioned, we had a guide for our trip to this park. Other park visitors would see he was an employee and ask him questions throughout the day. One of the questions was "Is Flight of Fear still open?". Our guide said yes, not really knowing what the guest was talking about until later during the behind-the-scenes tour of The Beast when the park's PR Manager, Don Helbig (who has ridden The Racer, another wooden coaster, almost 12,000 times! How does one even count that high, especially when being tossed around on a wooden coaster?) told us that one of his job's challenges was to dispel the rumors about the park given life by the internet. One of those rumors he talked about happened to be that Flight of Fear met its demise. Not true – Flight of Fear is alive and well and also well worth riding, especially if you are a person who is used to Space Mountain. I think I can pretty much guarantee you will like Flight of Fear better.

Well... I have once again ~~talked~~ blogged your ear (?) off with my boring detailed account of an event. I wanted to rate most of the enjoyable rides at King's Island, but I must cut the post short for now – maybe I will be able to get the other cool rides in the next post if I cool it a little and shorten the detail... Until then...

Down And Out In Shipshewanni

Well, life is back to normal, I guess you could say, whatever "normal" is. My 3 girls were with their Grandma in Illinois for over a week, and they had an awesome time. Our house was quite quiet and empty without them, so we made it our business to not be in the house much at all. We were constantly on the

go, getting to do lots of fun things with just the baby and even some things just hubby and me – great times! More on that later since I need to finish writing about our trip to King's Island, and hopefully entice some people to come along when we go back close to Halloween. But for now, here is a re-cap of our trip to Shipshewanni – I'm respectfully poking fun at my mom, who has a tendency to sometimes mispronounce things – love you Mom!

So Monday, instead of driving to Illinois to pick up the kids, we met them and my parents, uncle, sister, nephews, and brother-in-law in Shipshewana Indiana for two days of fun in an indoor water park. Anticipating this trip for months, I was sure I was going to have a fun blog to write – a family trip with 7 adults, 4 kids and 2 babies sounded like fodder for a National Lampoon movie. But strangely, especially considering **this** group of people – you know who you are ☹ – nothing bizarre happened; no one in the group got crazy (except for our baby, but that will be addressed later on...), and we all had a blast!

I have to be honest and say that when we got to the water park, I was a bit disappointed to see that there wasn't a swimming pool. But as time went on, I became happy with the small size of the place since it was easy to keep tabs on the kids and find other members of the family to catch up and chat. There were two large water slides where you go down on rafts, and we had an awesome time taking turns going down with everyone racing each other. You could go down one or two-at-a-time, and after a while, our oldest got brave enough to try and found she LOVED the water slides! Same with her cousin, and the two of them went down together – it was adorable to see the two of them work together to carry their huge raft up all those stairs. I wish I had a picture, but it was impossible to have a camera in the water park – and please, with my camera luck, do you think I could have taken pictures in the water park and still have had a camera when we left?

Doubtful. But anyway, we (exhaustively!) made our way up all those stairs time and time again to race our daughter and my nephew and even my mom and dad down the water slide.

They also had a kids' pool with lots of things to play with and a soft floor for the babies to crawl on. There was also a playground with 4 water slides – the kind you go down without a raft – and I liked those too until I mistakenly went down one before it was cleared... My husband was standing at the bottom of it holding our two-year-old, and I slid right into the back of his legs, bowling them over. Thank goodness no one was hurt, and I'm sure it was an hilarious, stooge-like display of idiocy.

They also had a lazy river – my favorite. You just grab a raft and float on down the river, and my 1-year-old son fell asleep because it was so peaceful to float down the river in my arms. When we are rich, we are going to build a lazy river at my goat farm where I will play with goats, make cheese, and relax in my lazy river ☐

We split up for dinner, and my parents and uncle were nice enough to watch the kids so we could go out to dinner with my sister and brother-in-law. We took the babies with us (our youngest sons are 2½ months apart), and they allowed us sisters and husbands some much-needed catch-up time; I think it's been over 5 years since we went out together which is too long! We went to an Amish-style restaurant, and at first I thought it was going to be a gimmick. You know, yucky Sysco food disguised as Amish style food... but thankfully, I was wrong. The food was SO good! The roast beef was incredible, the mashed potatoes homemade and not out of a package as so many are, and the chicken and noodles tasted like the noodles were also made from scratch. Everything was all we could eat, served family style – YUM! I highly recommend the Blue Gate restaurant!

So then we went back to the water park for a little bit until

it closed, and then it was time to try to get the kids settled down for the night. My parents were gracious enough to splurge (the entire trip was a Christmas gift from them) and get us a room with some extra space for our large family, and the two oldest girls had their own little bunk bed area with a tv and nightlights in their beds. They were out in a jiffy. Not the case with the younger two – our two-year-old Disney had to bunk with us for lack of beds while her one-year-old brother had a crib. Disney and I caught up on life and her week with Grandma while whispering under the covers while Daddy tried to get the baby to bed. Soon, Disney was asleep which just left one standing... and standing... Christopher refused to go to sleep. In a hotel, especially in a room adjoining my sister's where they also had a fussy trying-to-go-to-sleep baby, we could not let him cry it out, so we took him down the hall to the mini-arcade – at least I could read my magazine and my husband could play some Madden while the baby crawled around. Ha. All he wanted to do was crawl up and (fall) down the stairs, so no fun for us. I thought about taking him downstairs so we could at least sit with my dad and uncle and enjoy the evening air, but one of us had to stay with the sleeping girls. Since our goal was to be able to spend some time together, this was not an option. We ended up sitting outside of our room for awhile, letting the baby crawl, but soon he got crabby and we realized we were just assaulting my sister's family from the other side of the room with our noise. Finally we put him back in his crib and hid out in the bathroom so we were out of sight, and this did the trick – 4 down! Except that now it was too late to do anything together, so we just watched a few of those weird youtube-like videos and went to bed. Apparently the baby woke up again in the middle of the night and also early the next morning, and my awesome husband took care of him, even though he was dead tired by the time we got home the next day. I didn't sleep well either, especially with Disney in our bed who kept kicking me.

So the next morning, we were up for breakfast, and I couldn't eat anything because I was so tired. No problem; I'd get lunch later when I was hungry and at the very least, we had big plans to pick up some gourmet cheese from the awesome cheese shop before we left town. We split up for the day since my husband didn't mind taking the older kids to the water park again, and the rest of us had had enough water park, so we went to the flea market instead – what a madhouse! I don't know why it's only open 2 days a week because for those 2 days, the area is MOBBED with tons of traffic! But anyway, the flea market is huge and has a wide variety of things for everyone. Before I left, hubby said to make sure I bought myself something, so I did – isn't he awesome? He takes most of the kids for the day AND tells me to buy myself something, awww... (and this is why I obliged to let him try out for a play – he is a giver; he deserves to do something HE wants to do. Of course, being in a show takes months of rehearsal and prep time – oh, man, what did I agree to???) But anyway, I got a black and white vintage photo of Wrigley Field in 1946 – how cool is that? I bought a Bears Superbowl frame and some hot sauce for hubby, and we left the flea market before seeing all of it – is that possible to do in just one day? Then it was time to go home, and our oldest was really upset to see Grandma go – she has a Grandma addiction, so the more time she spends with Grandma, the more sad she gets when it's time to leave. But she got over it, and we achieved the coveted quadruple-kid-pass-out on the way home. Overall, an awesome time, and I think we should definitely do something again next year. As fun as the water park was, I might suggest a different location next time – maybe a campground or another place where we would have more sit-down time to really get together, catch up, and maybe even play some games. My sole complaint is that I arrived home cheese-less ☹ There was an awesome cheese shop, and we were going to stop on the way home, but the kids were just too crazy and the traffic too thick in Shipshewana for us to stop – dangit. I had been looking forward to that cheese for two

days! Bermuda onion cheese, yummmm...
(drooling...)

Something to Blog About!!

As you know I really don't blog too much... Er... At all! But I do have something to blog about today – MY GIRLS ARE HOME!!!
Waaaaahhhhhooooo!!

Our three little girls were with Grandma for a week (actually, a little over a week) as they are every summer. The girls really love going to Grandma's house and Lisa and I really enjoy the time we have to indulge in each other. This year Lisa and I got to do some really fun stuff too. We just had the greatest time together (with Beeber). But, the girls return home is always a joyous occasion – it is so great to have them home! With much of the summer still ahead of us I am sure we will have soooo much fun.

That is all – no mega-post from me... I just needed to get the excitement out – **THE GIRLS ARE HOME!!!!**

I'm Still Alive!

Don't count me out! I know I haven't been blogging as much as I used to; it's because I've been all over the place this summer! I am just swamped, but in a great way! The girls were with their Grandma for the past week, so I used the opportunity to finish up some old blog drafts and post them.

I haven't really had the chance to sit down and write up my many recent adventures, so hopefully time will allow for that in the next few weeks – it's been totally awesome, and I can't wait to share everything with you! But until I have time for more blogging, please bear with me and check back often for updates! I hope everyone had an awesome 4th of July weekend – happy birthday America! THANKS FOR READING!

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:

