

Waiting...

It's 1am and I can't sleep. Why? We are right in line for our second round of severe weather tonight. Round one was kind of fun. The two older kids were still awake, and they came downstairs panicked at the Tornado Warning that was flashing on their tv. It turned out to be for a different county, but then one was issued for our county a few minutes later. But it soon became clear that our town would be spared – a few very soft claps of thunder, and we were done. The tornado sirens blared, so we dutifully went to the basement, but before we could even get everyone down there, the sirens were off. So right before bed, I checked the radar again, and round two is headed straight for us. I've had the news on while laying in bed, and after all of the very serious reports of damage and that which is yet to come, I gave up on sleep. My husband and I came downstairs to watch the radar on the news and... wait.

I've got a comforter and some bottled water and snacks waiting by the basement door; it looks really bad. I hope I'm over-reacting, but better safe than sorry, I guess – and it's 1:30 in the morning so it's easy to panic; I'm tired. Plus, preparing for disaster keeps my mind of the feeling of impending doom from outside. The county just north of us has a Tornado Warning. It feels like a pressure cooker outside – the humidity is stifling, and the wind is picking up. So far they're saying on the news that tornadic activity is heading straight for our town, but weather is very unpredictable. But even if we don't get a tornado, they said to expect winds 80-90 mph. Did I mention we invested in an inflatable pool for the kids yesterday? ☐

I'm praying for the safety of our family and friends who are spread all over this county and the next one over. I'm praying for our old house and for all of the tall trees around it. There are reports of heavy damage (possible tornado) in

the county to the east, and we have many friends who live there – praying for everyone.

Well, this thing appears to be in our county now, and no tornado warning for us. The wind is howling, so I better go before I lose power – I have flashlights and battery radios, think we're well prepared... just difficult to decide at what point it's safer to panic the kids by waking them and taking them into the basement... always a tough decision. I've lived in the midwest all my life, but this is so much harder when you're the parent and the one who has to make the calls.

Stay safe everyone... I will leave an update on this post tomorrow, but so far, it looks good for us – the storm turned due east at the last minute...

UPDATE – Yes, the storm turned away from us at the last minute – a miracle. So other than being extremely tired, we are unscathed. Some friends I saw at church today are ok too, so I'll have to do some digging about the rest of the area, but I think everyone is ok! Time to catch up on that sleep...

Crazy Prices!

We live a little over an hour outside of Toledo, Ohio, so it's the 'big city' we visit for extra shopping, better restaurants, and of course, the zoo. We've discovered a little cafe just north of the Ohio toll road called [Nick's Cafe](#), and they have GREAT food (including Greek selections – YUM!!) that comes in HUGE portions at very reasonable prices. Just thought I'd give them a plug since the place is never hopping when we're in there and I would HATE to see them go out of business... Anyway, next to Nick's (well, there is an abandoned honky-tonk bar between them called Bootleggers) is

an old Frank's Nursery and Crafts building that recently opened up as something called Crazy Prices. The first time we noticed it, we were too tired to check it out, but last week we had enough energy left to go in, and it's awesome! They have a variety of wares, from groceries and household items to furniture and clothing, all at discounted prices. Like any store like this, some things you have to be careful about since there might not be much of a discount, but when we went, they had a special sale – 50% off ALL grocery items!! We ended up with about 4-64 oz. bottles of juice for the kids, lots of snacks and granola bars for school lunches, and a whole bunch of other stuff for around \$21! Plus, they give each kid a little squirt gun as a prize for “being good and letting mom and dad shop”, and they also give you a wooden token for each \$5 spent – the token is good for \$5 off your next purchase of \$10 or more! We will definitely be back! There is also a location in Bowling Green, and [if you go to their website](#), they don't mention the Toledo location but it's there on South Reynolds, just north of the tollway. Better yet, we learned that this is a Christian organization! Their mission statement: *The Vision of Crazy Prices is to see a chain of discount retail stores providing income to an ever-growing list of organizations that are supporting young people, many of whom are hungry and hurting, emotionally, physically and spiritually.*

If you are in either the Bowling Green or Toledo Ohio areas and you like clearance shopping (my husband can't get enough – we spent over an hour here last weekend and he wants to go back this weekend – no complaints out of me, I like to clearance shop too AND this gets me yet another trip to the zoo!!), check out Crazy Prices!

The Hot Tub On The Expressway

Because we had such a wonderful time at Splash Universe, the indoor water park in Shipshewana, Indiana, we decided to take the kids to Splash Bay, another indoor water park, this one in Maumee (Toledo), Ohio. Again, we had a blast! Following is a summary of both parks. To abbreviate, I'm going to call Splash Universe in Indiana "IN" and Splash Bay in Ohio "OH".

Water Slides: **LARGE:** IN has 2 large water slides that you travel down in inner tubes (though they are essentially the same slide – same design), while OH has 3 large ones and only one of those is for inner tubes. I personally prefer very tame water slides, so my favorites are the tube slides. The other 2 water slides at OH are much bigger, but the blue one pushed me underwater at the end, and the red one is one of those "toilet bowl" ones – the slide opens out into a huge bowl or funnel, and the rider drops down through the middle into a swirling 7.5 foot deep whirlpool – no thanks. Not for me nor my little ones, but my husband and my daughter's teenage friend really liked it, and we enjoyed watching them from the balcony outside the snack bar where you could see into the bowl and watch them drop. **MEDIUM SLIDES:** IN had many more smaller water slides – kind of like playground slides in water. OH had a few, but more on those in the kids' play area section. **SMALL SLIDES:** IN had 2 tiny slides in a small baby area, perfect for my 2-5 year olds. OH did not have any baby slides.

Swimming Area: There was not much room for swimming in the IN water park. Off of the lazy river, there is a little pool with a bench around the perimeter for families to sit, but not really anywhere for anyone to swim – something I found quite strange for a water park. At OH, the kids' play area has a bit of extra room for swimming in 2 places, although the depth is only 3 feet – better than no swimming at all though! Neither place has a pool exclusively for swimming, however,

nor my favorite water park element – the wave pool.

Kids' Area: Both parks have a large water playground for kids where they can squirt each other with various contraptions and go down slides and stuff. Both places also have a zero-depth entry pool with a soft floor, which is great for really small kids getting ready to crawl and walk. Both parks also have a Lily Pad Crossing, where kids can use overhead ropes to help them cross a path of stepping stones across a pool – this was really popular with my 9-year-old daughter and her 6-year-old boy cousin. OH also has a really cool “shark” – a piece of playground equipment that is bolted to the floor of a 3-foot pool. The kids can try to climb on the shark, the adults can try to shake them off and even climb on it themselves – the thing was really popular among guests of all ages. OH also has a basketball hoop and floating balls which was a lot of fun for Hubby and me – providing we could get a long enough break from the kids to play a game. Overall, I liked the OH kids' area much better, but my husband liked the IN one better for just one reason – the 500-gallon tipping water bucket!

Lazy River: In an indoor water park, lazy rivers are basically moats that carry an inner tube rider around the room. I really enjoy these, even though indoor ones are slightly less cool than outdoor ones, just because they can't get very long nor travel very fast. The OH one was accessible directly after the water slides, and this was a pretty cool design, but the OH one was not very fast – I really enjoyed the feeling of getting swept down the river in certain parts of the IN lazy river. It was really fun to try to time our trip down the lazy river so that we would meet up with the kids after a trip down the slide.

Hot Tubs: The hot tub at IN is adults only, and we never made it over there. That reminds me, the temperature in the IN water park was always very warm – TOO warm when entering while wearing street clothes. In contrast, the OH park is actually kept kind of chilly for my taste, and the water wouldn't

really warm up until a few hours before the park closed at night. My kids were often cold in the regular water at OH. But the OH hot tub was my favorite part of the entire park. It was incredibly relaxing, and there was even a waterfall you could sit under. AND, you could swim outside! The weather was somewhere in the mid-70's, so it was beautiful to sit outside in the hot tub, tucked in kind of a hidden corner just off the expressway where you could watch cars pay their toll and go about their days, but they couldn't see you unless they knew better than to take a peek under the water slides. And that's another thing – since the water slides go out of the building, you can sit in the hot tub and see water sliders travel above – we would have our daughters and their friend put their hands against the water slide and wave to us; it was so fun!

In Summary: For me personally, I preferred the OH water park over IN, just because I liked the hot tub a lot and even though they only had one tube slide, it was a really great slide! I liked the more open areas for swimming and the basketball court OH provided, and I loved watching my daughters try to conquer the shark. IN was fun for other reasons, especially having fun with a larger group of family, but if we're just talking about attractions, then I definitely prefer Splash Bay near Toledo OH. I don't think I can get an unbiased answer if I ask my kids – what could beat being at an indoor water park with their grandparents, cousin, aunt and uncle and great uncle all at once?

By the way, don't ask for pictures. If you think I was going to take our camera into any place with all that water, you must not know about my uncanny ability to lose and/or destroy cameras!

EUREKA!

There's been a lot of buzz around here about a few new restaurants that are to be opening soon in our county. One is a replacement for a restaurant that closed due to the tough economic times. The old place had good food, but their prices were kind of high for the area, and their service was always very slow – perhaps two reasons that led to their demise? I don't know much about their replacement, except that it's to be called 'Union Street Grille' and will open in May sometime. Hmm, grille. Does that mean burgers and the like?

Next we will have a Sonic drive-in. For those of you who aren't familiar, Sonic is a fast food place, with burgers, french fries, chicken sandwiches and the like, but they also have outdoor booths where you can sit in your car and eat after your food is delivered to you. I try not to eat too much fast food, but I do enjoy Sonic from time to time, and they have excellent slushies, ocean water, and especially flavored iced tea – YUM! And Sonic has a Happy Hour from 2-4 when their drinks are half-price, so I'll be there...

The other new restaurant in the area is a place called '4 Seasons' and it's about 20 minutes away. They have (among other things) Greek food – my favorite! Not a full spread, but enough to make me happy! Their gyros are great (awesome tzatziki sauce), and they even have homemade hollandaise sauce for eggs benedict. I think I've already rambled on in a few blog posts how important it is for good eggs benedict to have homemade hollandaise. My husband and I have searched many states for good hollandaise sauce, and many places will say their sauce is homemade even if it isn't. I guess to a lot of people, "homemade" means that they've mixed the powder into the water. But not to us – you can really taste the (ew) difference if there is powder involved. The other night, we ate at 4 Seasons, and I made a comment – now we just have to ask them when they're getting Saganaki (one of my favorite

Greek dishes – it involves goat or sheep cheese, whiskey, fire, and yelling OPA! Good stuff). So my husband asked the waitress about it, and that's when we found out that they HAVE it! Of course – we find out when we're way too full to even consider trying it, and on the eve of one of the busiest weekends we've had in a long time. We will be up there to try it soon – no doubt! Before that lovely piece of news, we thought the nearest Saganaki was Toledo or South Bend, Indiana!

Anyway, 3 new restaurants opening up within miles of my house is a big deal for us – especially for one to have THREE of our favorite dishes! We eat out a lot, partly because the prices are reasonable in our area, partly because we're very busy people and I'm not home a lot to cook, and partly because it's really difficult to cook with 8 extra little feet in the kitchen to trip over! Maybe some day I'll have the time and the patience to cook more often, but until then, new restaurants opening in our area to give us more variety is a cause for celebration! EUREKA!

Vacation!

In case you've been wondering where I've been lately (or even if you haven't) – Grandma has helped us get one last little vacation before baby arrives. We were going to head to New York, but decided not to do that, thank goodness. Admittedly, the gas prices were the original deterrent, so then we explored taking a Greyhound bus there, but in my huge condition, I didn't see any opportunity for good rest on a long bus trip. I am really glad we declined the big trip, though, because my feet have been killing me, just from everyday tasks, like cleaning or shopping. I would have had

to cut short all of our sight-seeing in New York or rent a wheelchair for the week. And staying home had afforded us time to do much needed catch-up work around the house. We've been making landscaping plans, and I will be very excited to see how that turns out in a few weeks when it's finished. We cleaned out the famous closet o' games, and we didn't even need to knock down the wall to expand the closet as I was talking about in another post. We found enough room for all of our games by sending all the kids' games upstairs to their room. Our house has lots of built-in shelving and drawers, and the kids had a huge cabinet in their closet that wasn't even being used. So, up went all the kids' games. I am a little concerned that they will tear apart their game collection and scatter pieces and whatnot, but they will have to be taught somehow that this is not going to be tolerated. Most importantly on our vacation without the kids, we achieved the cleaning of their room. It is a huge bedroom, and we have all 3 of our girls sharing it, but until we cleaned it, they could barely fit in there because they had so many toys. Whenever we'd make them clean it, we noticed that they would play in there for such a long time afterward because they actually liked having all the open space. So we donated about 90% of their toys to charity while they were visiting with Grandma. It might sound mean, but we kept the important stuff, and like I said, they actually enjoy their room and the things in it much more when everything is picked up and they have fewer things to appreciate. I will keep you posted on how well (or not) this is received when they get home. They will probably forget exactly what toys they once had, and by donating everything, more kids can enjoy them.

Even though it took an entire day of cleaning to reach the bottom of the toy pile in their room, we have managed to fit in lots of fun for just hubby and me. We've gone shopping several times, and yesterday we were in Toledo all day getting good food, seeing a movie, and taking in a [Toledo MudHens](#) game. If you're not familiar, the MudHens are minor league

baseball. I've been wanting to get to a [Chicago Cubs](#) game last year or this year, but with the baby coming, I've ruled it out until at least next year. So, minor league baseball it was, and we had a blast – I got my live baseball game fix for awhile... there's just something about hearing the crack of the bat, the slap of the ball in the glove and the other sounds of a baseball game in the beautiful summer night air. And it was a great game. Seems a player from the [Detroit Tigers](#) was rehabbing with the MudHens, so we got to see a major-leaguer pitch for a few innings. The Hens were up 3-0 early in the game, then they let Indianapolis tie it up, only to hit a walk-off homer in the 9th with 2 outs to win the game – awesome! And if you're not from the area and want to experience food that is uniquely Toledo, I recommend a restaurant called [Tony Packo's](#) to you. Their menu is somewhat limited; there aren't very many choices, so pass on it if you're a picky eater. But if you're like me and you like to try all different kinds of ethnic food, give it a whirl. They serve Hungarian food, namely sausage, cabbage rolls, and chili mac over dumplings. It's really good and a unique dining experience. It's also really interesting how we heard of the restaurant in the first place. We were in a thrift store and I saw this stuffed baby in a diaper with a tomato head. I thought it was really cute, even though it creeped my husband out, but it was only 5¢ so I bought it. Turns out, it's a character from Tony Packo's as labeled on the rear end of the baby tomato. I googled Tony Packo's, found out it was a restaurant an hour away from us in Toledo, looked at the menu, and we decided to give it a try. The guy who works their marketing in the gift shop really liked that story. What's weird though, is that while gutting my kids' room this week, the baby tomato never surfaced. Hmmm, I wonder what happened to it?

Sometimes you get more of what you want from a vacation by staying home. In this age of the horribly high gas prices, the media has even coined a new word for the 'vacation taken

at home', but I can't recall what it is. If you know, post it in my comments – it's bugging me that I can't think of it. Anyway, by staying home, we saved a ton of money on gas alone, and we got some things done around the house that we will appreciate for months or even years to come, all while having a great time with just each other, no kids! Thank you, Grandma!

Taylor, Teeth, and Toledo

Our poor little 8-year-old daughter, Taylor, was born on the short side of the genetic crapshoot when it comes to teeth. The poor kid has cavities, teeth that are fused together, and other dental problems. They wanted to do so much dental work on her that our small town dentist referred us to the big city of Toledo to get it taken care of. So, yesterday saw an all day excursion to Toledo so the poor kid could undergo some major dental work. It actually went quite well; she handled everything like a trooper. I'm sure the laughing gas and novacaine somewhat helped the pain, but when it was all said and done, she did freak out a little about all the blood. After that whole ordeal, we wanted to make the day special for her, so we made a quick stop at the zoo between dental appointments. We only had about an hour, so we didn't get to see our favorite animals, but we did have time to check out the reptile house, which, crazily enough after all of our visits to the Toledo Zoo, we had never been in. It was a typical reptile house, full of snakes, lizards, and frogs (even though they're not reptiles, zoos always put them in the reptile house I've noticed), but what I really enjoyed was the crocodile. I can't tell you the last time I saw one of those, especially indoors. It was huge, and unlike their cousins the alligators, crocodiles are not friendly nor docile. They are

very aggressive animals, and you can almost see it on their faces. The Toledo Zoo also has a Chinese alligator, and I was wondering if Chinese alligators are similar to American alligators in temperament. I know the Chinese alligator is smaller and much more rare, but I wonder if that is where the differences end... I'll have to do some research.

After the second dental appointment, we made a stop at Chuck E. Cheese, gauze packed mouth and all. The kids had a blast, although it wasn't very crowded, so Chuck E. didn't venture off the stage for a visit, much to my 3-year-old's disappointment. But I came to a realization that it was our youngest-for-now's first visit to a Chuck E. Cheese, at least her first one where she was old enough to enjoy it. Since we live in the boondocks, we just don't find ourselves at Chuck E. Cheese nearly as often as when we lived in the Chicago suburbs like when our oldest was a toddler. But that's quite alright, the place is expensive, and going infrequently really teaches the kids to appreciate the times we do make it there. Over the years, not much has changed there... when I was a kid, they called it Show Biz Pizza, and I was able to find pics of the old characters for others my age who like nostalgia.



The main character for the chain, a bear named Billy Bob (top right picture), really scared me as a kid... for some reason, he had long claws, which can be really scary for a kid. In Kindergarten, we got to go on a field trip to Show Biz; they took us behind the scenes and “undressed” one of the robots and took us back into the room where they have all the control panels for everything. Why they wanted to show a bunch of 6-year-olds that the characters were actually robots is still beyond me, but it was a very cool field trip and something I still remember.

Gas Gouging in NW Ohio – Alive and Well

My fellow Northwest Ohioans, this is a call to action!

Have you noticed that we are being taken advantage of? Yesterday, the national gas price average was \$3.22 / gallon for unleaded. Yet here in NW Ohio, every station in this town had gas for **\$3.39 / gallon**. The price of gas in the Northern suburbs of Chicago has reached \$3.27. We (especially in our family since we have loved ones in that area who we have to watch pay through the nose for EVERYTHING) have always prided ourselves on having lower prices than they have, MUCH lower actually. We used to have gas prices about \$.25 / gallon lower than Chicagoland. This is no longer the case! Their gas is now \$.12 **cheaper** than ours! What will follow? Will we no longer have cheaper food than they have? Will we soon be paying \$10 for a hamburger, have an average restaurant bill of \$30 for lunch for two, movie theater tickets at \$10 each? Where does it end? I can't help but feel the gas stations have called our bluff. We can't boycott them, because let's face it, we're an island. We get to enjoy our relatively crime and pollution free existences because we are so far from the nearest large cities. However, the local gas stations are starting to take advantage of this, because they know it will cost way too much for us to get out of town to get some gas somewhere else. The average price in Toledo yesterday was \$3.22 / gallon , but to get to Toledo, it would cost about \$5-\$10 in gas, depending on your car! And who has time to run to Toledo for gas, anyway? But why is it that Toledo has cheaper gas prices than we do? Everything was always cheaper here... at least it used to be.

I'm just worried about how they will gouge us next. I looked into filing a complaint with the attorney general of Ohio, and their website said to contact the stores first. So I guess it's only fair that we first let the gas stations know that we're terribly unhappy. I would write to the newspaper here in town also, but they've never printed my letters. Maybe I complain too much? Actually, one letter was very nice thanking the person who turned in my lost wallet with all the money still in it, but they still didn't print it. Anyway, if

someone else wants to write to the paper, that'd be great. The more the merrier on this, I say, what could it hurt? Complain to the local gas stations and ask them questions, write to the newspaper, write to the attorney general, anything and everything anyone can do will help. Remember, driving season hasn't even officially started yet, and when it does, the price gouging at the pump will only worsen! Here is a link to the complaint section of the Ohio attorney general's website – it tells you how to fill out a complaint online, and also gives phone numbers and email addresses:
<https://www.ag.state.oh.us/citizen/consumer/complaints.asp>

Please help me – let's do SOMETHING!

Good Times

As I said this blog is about things I really enjoy doing. If there were one thing I would choose to do for the rest of my life, it would be to act, sing, perform, or just be on a stage. I do not care if it is making millions of dollars in front of tens of thousands of people or on a small, intimate stage in front of 10 people. From September 2006-September 2007, I was in 6 community theatre productions. I played everything from a walk-on cameo, to scene stealing supporting actor, to lead actor. I also was the backstage manager for Grease which was very rewarding because it gave me the opportunity to work behind the scenes for the first time and still be on stage in a limited role. However, my greatest accomplishment thus far on stage was bringing to life the character Morat Notboratnichkov in the musical Idol Night at the Karaoke Place. Morat was initially a clone of "Borat". However, I feel that he grew apart from that stereotype. Sure, I have heard of Borat but I still have never seen any of his

shows nor the movie. I do not know how to explain but I think I took a bit of Yul Brynner from The King and I, added a dash of Ricky Ricardo, and something of myself and came up with something unique. Of course, the writer responsible for the show was there on stage and off to guide the entire cast. The fun and excitement was not limited to the stage. On May 11, Chris and I were interviewed on Toledo 24 News in order to promote the show. The lady doing the interview was totally caught off guard. The weatherman could be heard in the background laughing. I think I even amazed myself because this was at 6:45AM. Never before have I ever been involved in a show which brought with it so many memories. EVERYONE WINS!!!

