

# Black Friday Madness

I'm not even sure why most stores opened Thanksgiving night at either 9 or midnight. Did they think perhaps it would be less chaotic than opening at 4am? My brother and his friend hit Wal-Mart at 10. My cousin and her annual group headed out at 11. Me?! I traveled to our area Wally World about 8am to a half-full store. While there, I was even able to chat with a few of my former co-workers. It seems that the store was the place to be earlier. No less than 18 shoppers had to be escorted out. A co-manager stated that next year it would be necessary to rethink some of the procedures and have lines around more of the doorbusters. Seriously, it is **Not at all** worth rushing, clamoring, and FIGHTING to get that 32" LCD tv for \$200 (or whatever the deal was). I was able to find gifts for all but two people on my list (Cyber Monday sounds nice to me) and spend less than \$60 total after getting a decent night's sleep. I even picked up the *All-Star Superman* DVD for \$1.98. Perhaps it would be fun to go in and watch the lunatics have a free-for-all making every effort to get that last Tickle Me Elmo doll (ok... that was **SO** 20 years ago) but not to go in and see 18 people be escorted out. That is lunacy at it's worst and this is SMALL TOWN U.S.A. "Peace on Earth, good will toward men" and Black Friday shoppers.

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## Working!!!! (I hope)

Oh my goodness! I'm so excited, I'm not sure how to express myself right now! Goodwill should be open by Monday the 13th! That means I'll have a job again and will be able to start saving my money again. Ugh, I hated the staying at home all day. I was so bored and kept reading stories online.

Fanfiction.net became a very good friend to me during these months of boredom. I searched over and over again for some job, but could never find anything. Goodwill reopening has brought hope into my future. This means, Tony and I will be able to get an apartment soon (I seriously hope so anyway). It would be so nice to actually have a place of our own, though we wouldn't be living together in it until after we're married. I don't expect us to actually have the money to get a place until after the wedding anyway.

Goodwill will be located near Wal-Mart temporarily, and then by the end of the summer, it will be somewhere else. I'm not sure where that is, but at the moment, I don't really care. I'm going to be working again!

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## There And Back Again

After leaving the NJ/NYC area, we decided to break the drive home in half and spend another few hours of fun at the Pittsburgh Zoo. After arriving at our hotel at 2.30AM (or was it 3.30? "Jill" the obviously feminine GPS was an hour slow), I got a few hours of sleep. The trek to the zoo AGAIN was met with detours and misdirection. We stopped at a police station and parked in a towing spot. Thank goodness Chris & Lisa returned to the van before we were given notice. Once again, Chris seemed to ignore Jill's directions to get us to the zoo. We stopped at a road side dairy treat where they had the largest and HOTTEST fish sandwich ever. It was so hot that I had to let it cool a few minutes, but it was good.

The Pittsburgh Zoo was in my opinion the best of the three. The exhibits were all extraordinary and entertaining. The African elephants were a special treat especially seeing the babies. A keeper was in the area with the 4 or five elephants

and looked right at home.

The aquarium featured more jellyfish (I think Akron's jelly exhibit was better), HUGE (relative) pot-bellied seahorses, and penguins. My favorite exhibit was the sea lions on display. The trainers made them perform for their food and it was amazing to see the animals wave, leap out of the water, bark, and perform other eye-catching feats.

There was also a mole-rat tunnel area for the little ones to play in. Taylor and Sammie made a new friend inside the maze of tunnels. Little Disney was more apprehensive about starting off but once she did, it took some time to get her out. The park was closed by the time we got her out. But we had to stop by the sea lions one last time.

Then, it was back on the road for the final leg of the journey. We stopped in Elyria for dinner and stopped at Wal-Mart (**there is no escaping it!!!!**). Funny thing, this Wal-Mart was still a regular store. I had thought that all the old stores were becoming Super Centers... bigger and better, right? Well...

We returned from our trip around 12:00 Tuesday morning. Once again, I had an absolutely fabulous time in my role of Manny. Thank you Chris and Lisa for having me. Thank you Taylor, Sammie, Disney, and little Beeber. I was so proud of the four of you. There were a few moments when most kids would have been pulling their hair out, but you were all wonderful. The end of this fantastic voyage. Much too quick but memories to last a lifetime. Be sure to check out [taylhis](#)' blog for her own journal of the trip. I found that I had to make one adjustment to my own. HEHE

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# I Know Who To Blame For This Economy

**WAL-MART!** I can find many ways to blame Wal-Mart for the way the economy is tanking. Time for my latest beef about the place. We went over there Friday morning because my husband didn't have to work until after lunch, and we need an oil change. So we thought we'd get the oil change done together this time, which made me really happy because normally it's just me and my two children (ages 2 and 7 mos.) who have to kill around 2 hours there every 3 months (or sometimes even more frequently). If you're thinking that spending 2 hours at Wal-Mart with 2 little kids while trying not to spend a lot of money is both exhausting and frustrating, you aren't very far off the mark. So anyway, Friday I thought I had company for the oil change, but even so, who wants to spend hours at Wal-Mart? When we pulled up, I was pleasantly surprised to see that there weren't any cars waiting, so I thought we might actually be out of there in under an hour – WRONG! The wait time they quoted us was an hour and a half! But we needed the oil change and were kind of trying to kill time until the area restaurants would start serving lunch, so we decided to go for it, especially since they've opened an H & R Block in the Wal-Mart for tax season. Taxes and an oil change – kill two birds with one stone, or so we thought... We get to the other side of the store where the makeshift H & R Block is, and we find out it's not open until 1pm. So we went back to the Automotive Department to sign in our car anyway, and that's when we discover that an oil change at Wal-Mart is now \$30! That is a \$7.50 increase in price over the last 3 months! So no taxes to get done + expensive oil change + long wait = forget it! And I will add the fact that Wal-Mart sucks at oil changes. Almost every time I'd come home with the car, it would act funny or something else would be wrong with it. Once they forgot to put the air filter back in, several times they

didn't replace the wiper fluid when it was checked off on the to-do list, and a few times I had to go back and have them re-vacuum the interior of the car because they said they did it but clearly had not. Those were the days when oil changes were still so reasonable in price that we got the full monty of services, including the vacuuming and the refilling of fluids – not anymore!

We called other places around town, and we found that Wal-Mart is now the most expensive AND takes the longest. But at the other places you needed an appointment, so we'll have to wait until next week – no problem if I don't have to go back to Wal-Mart! Plus I'd rather support the little guy anyway (ever hear the country music song "Little Man" by Alan Jackson? It's a good one and I highly recommend listening to it if you're frustrated about Wal-Mart's world take-over). And that brings me to why I'm blaming Wal-Mart for the awful economy...

They're putting all the little guys out of business, so there go the jobs and the competition in the retail world that was keeping product and services prices reasonable. Wal-Mart sets the pricing trends, unfortunately. Mark my words, as soon as the little guys in town get wind that Wal-Mart upped their oil change prices, they will follow suit and you won't be able to touch an oil change for under \$30. And worse yet, I read in the newspaper just yesterday that Wal-Mart is the only retail place that posted profits for January. In fact, they're doing even better than Wall Street predicted for them, which in this economy, makes them stand alone in that respect.

The state of our economy is so bad right now that I suppose it's not logical to blame just one entity. But moaning about Walmart is a good venting tool, and they p\*ss me off!

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# A Tale Of Ponder-grossa and Wally World

This morning, I was treated to a story by the boss involving a dinner at an area steakhouse (one of my least favorite places). The couple went to an area Ponderosa and Unfortunately for them, chose the WRONG place to sit. Sitting at a table near them was a rather large, loud, and unruly bunch. She even commented that it made a Shaffer gathering seem tame ("Hardy-har-har-har"). As the dinner progressed, the neighboring party kept throwing biscuits at each other. Diane's husband commented that if one happened to hit him he would go to the other table and throw it at the adult(?) at the table along with a few epithets (there's your .50 word for the day). Soon after, one of the flying biscuits ricocheted off one of the children and came within inches of hitting Tony... did not hit him. Seconds later, a three year old got hold of a lemon and threw that. Not sure how close that got. I'm not sure why no one complained about the crowd, I guess it has been a while since I have eaten at a Ponderosa, but see little has changed.

Which brings me to my second tale of this post. It seems that my father was shopping in my FPOE. He was looking for a bottle of shampoo which my mother had run out of in her beauty salon. Dad, bless him, has a real problem tracking things down. If he does not know exactly what he is looking for and where it is at... forget it. He eventually used his cell phone to call and say he could not find it. Why not ask an associate you ask? AHHA, HE DID. Apparently, he picked the wrong associate because they were "TOO BUSY" (direct quote) to assist him. WHH000AAAAHHH... WAIT A MINUTE!!!! It is a good thing I was not with him because the first thing I would have done is gently tell this associate that he would help me or I would go to another associate to see if they were too busy. I

know your boss and I am sure that he would be willing to help me. I have been thinking about doing some investigating by going to the store one Wednesday evening to see who was working in the Health and Beauty Department and see if they are too busy. It could be that the associate was busy, but that is certainly no way to treat ANY customer aside from the fact that they are in there at least once a week and drive 12 miles to get there. Dad did eventually find the shampoo after Mom described the bottle to him over the phone. It's been a while since [taylhis'](#) last WM post... thought I would contribute.

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## Walmart Saves The Day

What?!? Believe it or not, the title of my post does not have the slightest hint of sarcasm! Walmart really DID save the day for us yesterday! It almost makes me sorry for my many rants against Walmart and their shady practices designed to put small companies out of business... almost sorry, but not quite there.

It all started when we decided to take the kids over to Fort Wayne, Indiana, which is about an hour away. We pulled into a stall at the Sonic drive-thru for a light lunch and some slushies (Sonic has awesome slushies and drinks), when we realized we had forgotten my husband's wallet, which left us without money or credit cards. Luckily, we had picked up the mail before we left the house and brought it in the car with us. And luckily<sup>2</sup>, we had gotten a commission check in the mail. So we braved the 'big city' Walmart customer service line on the Saturday after Thanksgiving to see if they would take pity on us and cash the check even without my husband's ID. We were gifted with even more luck when they accepted my

driver's license to cash my husband's check, and we were able to eat lunch. Except now it had gotten really late and we were all really hungry, so we decided to skip Sonic and go to the Golden Corral that was in the Walmart outlot instead. If you braved my posts about our vacation diary, then you know how much we like Golden Corral. And I'd say that the one in Fort Wayne is of the best quality out of any of the others we've been to. After lunch, we took the kids to a McDonald's Playland, but it had only one little tunnel and one small slide; prompting our 4-year-old to proclaim, "Dad, this is *boring!*" But our 2-year-old loved it, and soon there were more kids to play with and everybody had lots of fun – including mom and dad since there was also a foosball table. When we left the McDonald's, we noticed there was a Burger King across the street (when isn't there?), and that Burger King had a 3-story play area! Oh, well, we had fun where we went and we can remember the BK for next time. We quenched our thirst with drinks from Sonic, and there was a cool looking car wash next door, so we treated the kids to a car wash also -they love watching the soap, brushes, and water cascading off the car. The second we pulled out of the wash –*ding ding* – our low fuel bell rang – uhoh. My husband and I just looked at each other because it wasn't like we had unlimited money with us. In fact, we had spent the last of the check money at the car wash. Thank goodness gas prices are decent these days because with the change we were able to scrape together from my wallet and the car, we had enough to get us gas to get home... whew! Perhaps it can even be considered a blessing in disguise. When you compare the variety of shopping Fort Wayne offers to our hometown choice of Super Walmart and... well, just the Super Walmart, unleashing us in a larger city with all those shopping varieties could have been disastrous to our bank account!

And by the way, the Walmart customer service line wasn't too bad, all things considered. Most of the line consisted of a



family who had 6 kids and one on the way -wow. And I thought I had a lot of kids!

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## Who Wants To Open The Door On Black Friday?

ALEXANDRIA, Va. (CNNMoney.com) – Wal-Mart – expected to benefit this holiday season from its deep discounting in a tough economy – had its Black Friday marred when an employee was trampled to death as thousands of people rushed through the doors at the opening of the store in Valley Stream, N.Y.

Police said the man, identified as 34-year-old Jdimytai Damour, was a temporary employee who lived in New York City's borough of Queens.

In addition, police officials said a pregnant woman was taken to a local hospital, but was expected to be released Friday.

Video footage showed as many as a dozen people knocked to the floor in the stampede of people trying to get into the Wal-Mart store, according to Nassau County Police detective Lt. Michael Fleming. The employee was "stepped on by hundreds of people" as other workers attempted to fight their way through the crowd, Fleming said.

"We expected a large crowd this morning and added additional internal security, additional third party security, additional store associates and we worked closely with the Nassau County Police," said Hank Mullany, Wal-Mart's vice president for the Northeast, in a statement. "Despite all of our precautions, this unfortunate event occurred."

"Our thoughts and prayers go out to the families of those impacted," he added, saying the company is cooperating with authorities in their investigation. ([Full story](#))

Around the nation, shoppers descended upon Wal-Mart ([WMT](#), [Fortune 500](#)) en masse in hopes of scoring Black Friday discounts. From New Jersey to Dallas, there were reports of hundreds of shoppers lining up before stores opened, looking for \$2 DVDs and flat-panel TVs priced just under \$400.

At the Fairfax, Va., location, the scene was social. Hundreds queued up before doors opened at 5 a.m., with some having arrived the night before in order to be among the first to shop.

"We skipped Thanksgiving dinner," said 30-year-old Arash Habiezadeh.

Wal-Mart, which operates more than 4,100 U.S. stores and 3,100 international locations, is expected to be a big winner this holiday season as its discounts resonate with budget-conscious shoppers. The company has been aggressively courting customers by lowering its prices and introducing holiday-gift sections in stores.

"Even with the economy, you've got to go with the deals," said Robert Balboni of Centreville, Va., while loading his shopping cart with a 42-inch flat panel TV, a portable DVD player and a Philips 2GB MP3 player.

Wal-Mart has already shown signs of benefiting from the economic slowdown. Same-store sales, or sales at retail stores open at least a year, gained 2.4% in October, beating the company's own forecast.

Overall, the U.S. retail sector is expected to endure one of its worst holiday seasons in years. Sales are projected to climb just 2.2%, according to the National Retail Federation, making it the weakest sales gain in six years.

Unfortunately, the holiday temp working at a Wal-Mart store near New York City drew the short straw and found out first hand what a stampede feels like. He obviously stood in the wrong place as the thousands of shoppers stormed the store at 5AM on Friday morning. I worked at a Wal-Mart store for 6 years and only once had the pleasure of witnessing the mad rush enter the store in search of items at ridiculously low prices. What got me was the fact that once the employee was down, the herd did not stop but kept on going. When the store decided to shut down for rest of the day to investigate, shoppers were indifferent. Some had been standing in line since Thursday morning. All this for a \$9.00 Incredible Hulk DVD?

While I worked at a Wal-Mart, I had a very good friend who actually volunteered to unlock the door to release the hounds. Most brave on her part. Now, the last I knew, she is the Manager of the Automotive Department.

I learned of the tragedy on Friday when I ran into another person whom I worked with. She had just heard it on the news. There was also a pregnant woman who was knocked down and taken to be examined; however, she and the baby were uninjured. Perhaps [taylhis](#) was right in not venturing out into the battlefield?

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## Birthday Wishes To The Best

Since he so kindly listed several of us in a post proclaiming us as THE BEST, I thought it only fitting to return the favor. I'm sure I have said most of this in previous entries, but it bears repeating. He is just the best director, co-actor, playwright (well the only one I have known personally...

but he is a darn fine one), source of encouragement, and most of all, friend that anyone could ever ask for. It is really astonishing that I have known him for only about two years but it seems like forever (and I mean that in the best possible sense). I met him at auditions for our theatre's production of *Grease* and I remember the first thing he said to me. "I know you from somewhere." I was working at Wal-Mart at the time. "That's it."

During the course of the show's run, he made a point of asking if I was going to audition for the next show, *The Odd Couple*. I really was not sure because I had not done a non-musical show in years. It really did not take long to decide after I spoke with my other source of encouragement that very night about it. She told me that if I did not she would hunt me down and kick my posterior (not that word but I try to run a family-friendly blog here). Anyway, I was cast in the role of Vinnie to my great satisfaction and I was told by the actor who played Felix that I stole some of his thunder. And my involvement with the theatre only increased.

Chris has just been so great to work with through his excellent direction and professionalism. I have been privileged to be cast in two shows that he has written himself: *The Clinic* and *Idol Night at the Karaoke Place* (the second one... which I know some people get tired of hearing me go on about as well as allowing our Liswathistani friend contribute to this blog for time to time). As well as his direction and roles in *School House Rock* which was memorable for several things not the least for it being my first lead part ever. I know it sounds silly but every time I have been in a show and Chris and his wife are not involved, it is like there is something missing (something I guess I need to get away from).

Much more important is his role as a great husband, father, and friend. His family has always come first and he is not afraid to share time together with his family and his friends

on our weekly game nights. After all, he is a big kid at heart himself. So... Happy Birthday, my friend and may you have many more.  
.. whatever age you may be.

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## The Hitcher

Hubby and I watched this movie last night. Plot inconsistencies aside – it is a horror movie after all, so we weren't expecting much – it was actually better than I thought. I really enjoyed how they let the main characters keep slipping away from the Hitcher, the bad guy, only to be back in danger... but I kept wondering, ok they're safe now, but the movie can't be over, so how are they going to get back in The Hitcher's clutches? The answers to these questions are an entertaining combination of extremely stupid and horrible decision making on the part of our "heroes" and also some pretty good plot maneuvers on the part of the script. There was also a lot of police involved in this movie, which, for a horror movie, is pretty rare. Usually once the main characters encounter the police, they are safe, but without spoiling TOO much for you, this film is different from the norm. Like I said, it was better than I expected. Not super-great, but I was never bored or grossed-out, both of which I can't say during my recent viewing of Saw IV – now that was an awful movie. I think part of it is the pregnancy, but I just couldn't handle the gore. It never bothered me before, but I always did find it annoying when they use lots of gore just for shock value. Now it's both annoying AND so gross I can't even watch it. And what was with the casting of Saw IV? They chose 2 actors who look exactly alike! Even if I was making a serious attempt to follow the plot of the film, which I wasn't anyway since I constantly had to divert my eyes and ears from

all the gore, I wouldn't have been able to follow the movie because of the 2 identical actors they cast who were not supposed to be the same character but looked like it! Anyway, back to The Hitcher – I liked it better than Gone Baby Gone, but then again, it's a totally different kind of movie. If it weren't for some plot unbelievabilities and some of the STUPIDEST decisions I've ever seen main characters make, the movie would have been better. In review, if you like horror / suspense movies, see The Hitcher. By the way, I'm talking about the newer version, don't know anything about the older version, maybe I should give it a try. If you like pointless gore fests, I still wouldn't recommend Saw IV – I wouldn't recommend that movie to my worst enemy. If you want to sit through a terrible movie, try The Night Listener – at least it has Robin Williams!

On an unrelated note, for those of you who have read my Walmart rant, during my weekly visit today, the *"magic price increase of the day"* was yogurt – up from \$.44 per container to \$.46 each. By the way, have you noticed that computer keyboards do not have a cents sign? If I'm mistaken, let me know, I have actually gone to use them before!

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## **The Price is WRONG, Bit... TAKE TWO, ENTER WALMART**

I thought this would be a perfect title to use for my venting session about many people's favorite place to shop, Walmart. But since I just used the title the other day, this will have to be take two on the title.

I have a love-hate relationship with Walmart. It's a lot more

hate than love at this point, but I try to be an optimist, view the cup as half full, that kind of thing. I used to love the place. That was when I had lots of other shopping choices. Also I wasn't stuck there at least once a week for hours on end with crabby kids because I had fewer kids then, and for some reason, they used to like shopping there. But now that Walmart has put many of the other stores in my area out of business, and there aren't very many other choices for local shoppers to make, Walmart is beginning to engage in a little bit of price gouging. Let me back up for a minute... what I loved most about Walmart when I first started shopping there were their low, low prices. This is no longer the case! I go to Walmart about twice a week. I try to go just once, but that plan never works in my favor – we either run out of something, I forget something, or something comes up, like an impromptu get-together or Pampered Chef party. But anyway, so I'm there twice a week, at least. And EVERY time I go, they raise the price on at least one of my "staple" items! Even if it's only 7 cents or so, it's still a big deal to me, because over years, it really adds up! And, in the case of the toilet paper I buy, it used to cost \$1. The price went up to \$1.24 **in one visit!** I'm no math wiz, but I think that is almost a 25% price increase **in one visit!** Also, it's difficult to compare prices at different stores if the prices are constantly changing. But don't be fooled – Walmart knows this. And that's not the only trick they have up their sleeve either. If your Walmart is anything like mine, they are out of stock on things constantly! I think it's a purposeful action so that they can force you into buying a similiar item that costs more just to avoid running out of the item yourself or having to take the time to go to another store – if there are any other stores left, that is. For example, let's say Walmart is out of the Great Value (Walmart's generic brand = same as Heinz but cheaper) brand of ketchup. Are you going to tell your barbecue guests you don't have enough ketchup? Or are you going to make another stop at different store, unloading all your kids from the car just

to run in for ketchup? Or, are you going to choose likely option #3, the one Walmart wants you to choose: you mumbling and swearing under your breath as you pay more for the Heinz ketchup, of which Walmart has so thoughtfully stocked plenty? If I had the time or any fewer kids, I would probably go with option #2 just on a matter of principle, but I just don't have the time nor the energy to take a freaky stand against Walmart and their price gouging ways. In updating this blog I will keep you posted on what has changed by how much – it will be good to help me vent so my family and friends don't have to hear all these gory details constantly. And, because I've rambled forever about Walmart, I will also save my gripes about their oil changes for another post. For now, I think I'm done wasting time droning on and on about Walmart... besides, it's almost Oscar time!